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RETHINKING THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF PERISHING

EDITOR

I. INTRODUCTION

What did Peter mean when he wrote, “The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9)?

What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3)?

In the NT the concept of perishing is often tied to a failure to repent. That is, repentance is required to avoid perishing, whatever that is.

We will first consider the popular understanding of perishing in the NT. Then we will see that the popular understanding does not correspond to the data. The NT uses of *apollumi* show that it mainly refers to physical death and destruction, not to eternal condemnation. Then we consider the practical ramifications of a proper understanding of *apollumi* in the NT.

II. THE POPULAR IMPRESSION: *APOLLUMI* REFERS TO ETERNAL CONDEMNATION MOST OF THE TIME

Scholars as well as laypeople believe that perishing in the NT most often refers to eternal condemnation. Thus there really is no question about what Peter means in 2 Pet 3:9. Unless people repent, they will end up in the lake of fire forever. Likewise in Luke 13:3 the Lord was obviously saying that unless his Jewish listeners repented, they would all likewise be eternally condemned.

Commenting on 2 Pet 3:9, Green writes, “God does not want any man to perish: he wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4).”¹

Similarly, Kelly assumes the understanding of perishing in 2 Pet 3:9 when he writes:

The truth that God desires the **repentance** and conversion of all men was perceived by the post-exilic prophets and later Judaism (e.g. [sic] Ezek. 18:23; 33:11: for rabbinical material, see SB III, 774f.);...in the NT it is set out or implied in John 3:16f.; Rom. 11:32; 1 Tim. 2:4...[Peter] enables the Church to understand its mission as being, in this span between the resurrection and the Second Coming, to proclaim the divine love and lead men to repentance and faith.²

It is not common to find commentators on 2 Pet 3:9 even mentioning the possibility that perishing there refers to premature physical death. Since the only other use of *perish* (*apollumi*) in the epistle clearly refers to premature physical death (2 Pet 3:6), it makes sense that commentators would at least *consider* that *apollumi* might carry the same meaning just three verses later.

However, commentators *do* mention the possibility of perishing referring to physical death in Luke 13:3, 5, even though most end up concluding that eternal condemnation is in view there as well.

Commenting on Luke 13:3, Pate sees perishing as a reference to eternal condemnation, though he recognizes that physical death at the hands of the Romans might possibly be in view: “The reference is to spiritual judgment before God, not necessarily a life shortened by tragedy.”³ On v 5 he likewise adds, “Although it is possible that Jesus

¹Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale NT Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 148.

²J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 363.

³C. Marvin Pate, *Luke* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 284.

anticipates the coming fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 with these words, they more probably refer, once again, to judgment before God.”⁴

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on repentance as a condition for salvation in the NT. My advisor, Zane Hodges, suggested to me at the time that Luke 13:3, 5 might indeed refer to the Jewish Wars and the fall of Jerusalem in which over one million Jews died. I found five commentators who at that time advocated that position.⁵ However, like Pate and many others, the traditional understanding of *apollumi* was so strong that I rejected that view and stuck with the eternal condemnation understanding. Like Pate, I did mention and dismiss the possibility that death at the hands of the Romans might be in view.⁶

In a chapter dealing with Luke’s understanding of the condition of eternal life (entitled, “What Must I Do to Be Saved?”), Marshall cites Luke 13:3, 5 as showing that “alongside faith repentance is an important factor in conversion.”⁷ He too takes it for granted that perishing in Luke 13:3, 5 refers to eternal condemnation.

Matthew Henry joins the chorus with his comments on Luke 13:3-5:

Some lay an emphasis on the word *likewise*, and apply it to the destruction that was coming upon the people of the Jews, and particularly upon Jerusalem, who were destroyed by the Romans at the time of their Passover, and so, like the Galileans, they had *their blood mingled with their sacrifices*; and many of them, both in Jerusalem and in other places, were destroyed by the fall of walls and buildings which were battered down about their ears, as those that died by the fall of the tower of Siloam. But certainly it

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance As a Condition for Salvation in the New Testament,” Unpublished Th.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985, 49, n 1.

⁶ Ibid. See esp. n 3.

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 193.

looks further; except we repent, we shall perish eternally, as they perished out of this world.⁸

Famed pastor and theologian John Piper, discussing perishing in Luke 13:3, 5, says:

“Unless you repent you will all likewise PERISH.” Now what does “perish” mean? Sometimes the word simply means die in the sense that we all will die physically. But that would not fit here since Jesus implies that if we repent, we will not perish. “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” If you DO repent, you won’t perish. So perish is something more than simply die a physical death.

Here’s what I think it means. Since Jesus connects it directly to sin and since he says it can be escaped by repentance, I take it to mean final judgment. He is referring to something beyond death. Those Galileans were taken unawares and experienced a horrible end. Unless you repent, you too will be taken unawares and experience a horrible end—the judgment of God beyond the grave.⁹

Let’s now consider the NT evidence based on usage. It reveals a different picture.

III. THE ACTUAL SITUATION: *APOLLUMI* RARELY REFERS TO ETERNAL CONDEMNATION

The Greek word *apollumi*, which is often translated as *perish*, occurs 92 times in the Greek NT. A study of those uses reveals a much different picture than is commonly thought of what perishing refers to in the NT.

⁸Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, s.v. Luke 13:3-5.

⁹The message is entitled, “Unless You Repent You Will All Likewise Perish.” It is available at the Desiring God website at <http://www.desiring-god.org/resource-library/sermons/unless-you-repent-you-will-all-likewise-perish>. Accessed September 20, 2010.

A. JOHN 3:16 IS NOT A TYPICAL USE OF THE WORD *PERISH*

John 3:16 is a beloved verse. Even many people who haven't been to church in decades know it by heart. Its message is marvelous. However, John 3:16 actually misleads people about the meaning of *perish* (*apollumi*) in the NT, since many assume that the meaning of *apollumi* in John 3:16 is the meaning, or the primary meaning, it has in the entire NT.

It is true that the word *perish* in John 3:16 means *to be eternally condemned*. This is clear both in v 16, where it is contrasted with having eternal life, and in vv 17 and 18, where it is identified as being condemned.

However, it is a major error to assume that because a word is used one way in one place in the NT that it always or typically carries that meaning. There are, admittedly, a few words that always carry the same meaning throughout the NT. We say that these words have *technical meanings*. That is, every time a word with a technical meaning is used, it means exactly the same thing.

There are very few such words and *perish* (*apollumi*) is not one of those rare words. In fact, the meaning that *apollumi* has in John 3:16 is actually quite rare.

Apollumi in the NT most often refers to physical death or to temporal destruction or loss.

B. PHYSICAL DEATH IS THE MOST COMMON MEANING (33 OF 92 = 36%)

By my study 33 of the 92 uses of *apollumi* in the NT refer to physical death, making it the single most common meaning. We can easily see that this word often refers to physical death by looking at some of the passages in which it occurs.

Matthew 8:25. "Lord, save us! *We are perishing.*" The context is that the disciples were in a "boat that was covered with the waves" during "a great tempest." The

disciples feared physical death here, not hell. Without the Lord's intervention they would have soon died.

Acts 5:37. Judas of Galilee "also perished." The word *also* points the reader back to the previous verse where Gamaliel is reported to have said that Theudas "was slain." Clearly the perishing in v 37 is parallel to being killed or slain in v 36. Gamaliel wasn't making any comment on the eternal destiny of either man.

1 Corinthians 10:9-10. During the forty years in the wilderness some "*were destroyed* by serpents" (10:9) and "some of them also complained and *were destroyed* by the destroyer" (10:10). Here are two uses of the Greek word *apollumi* where the destruction in view is clearly physical death. A comparison with Exodus shows that physical death is in view here.

Jude 11. Here the Lord's half-brother speaks of those who "*perished* in the rebellion of Korah." He is alluding to Numbers 16:1-35 and the death of a group of 250 who were descendants of Korah. Again, physical death is in view.

John 11:50. Here Caiaphas makes an unwitting prophecy about the death of Jesus for the nation. He said, "It is expedient for us that one man [= Jesus] should die for the people, and not that the whole nation *should perish*." Clearly the options are one person dying versus the whole nation dying. Caiaphas feared that Rome would kill the nation, or at least most of it, if Jesus was allowed to live. The ironic truth is that by killing Jesus Caiaphas and the others brought on the death of over a million Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the Jewish wars 35 years after Calvary.

John 18:14. John here reminds the readers of the Fourth Gospel that Caiaphas had said "that it was expedient that one man *should die* for the people." It is a bit misleading to translate *apollumi* as *should die* here and yet *perish* in the parallel context in John 11:50, using the same word.

Matthew 2:13. Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt "for Herod will seek the young

child *to destroy* Him.” Again, the word is *apollumi* and it refers to physical death. Herod wished to destroy Jesus in the sense that he wanted to kill Him.

Luke 11:51. The Lord Jesus spoke of the blood of the prophets which was shed “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah *who perished* between the altar and the temple.” Zechariah was stoned in the court of the house of God (2 Chron 24:20-21). The next verse makes it clear that he was killed: “Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son [Zechariah]; and as he died, he said, ‘The Lord look on it, and repay!’” (2 Chron 24:22). The Lord Jesus was speaking of the death of Zechariah and the death of Abel. Their eternal destiny was not being considered.

Luke 13:3, 5. Here is another widely misunderstood passage. Some men came to Jesus and “told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (Luke 13:1). In other words, they were asking Jesus about people from Galilee whom Pilate had killed. It is important to remember the question that leads to Jesus’ response. The question concerns physical death, not eternal condemnation.

Jesus then asked if they thought “that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered these things?” (v 2). Not waiting for their reply, Jesus answers His own question: “I tell you no” (v 3a). Then He goes on to say, “But unless you repent, *you will* all likewise *perish*.”

The word *likewise* here is crucial. The Galileans were killed. Thus Jesus is saying that if the Jews hearing His words did not repent, they would be killed as well. It is crystal clear that *perish* here refers to physical death.

The Lord then tells of 18 people who died when a tower in Siloam fell on them. Again, physical death, not eternal condemnation is in view. This is followed by repeating the words of v 3. Unless the listeners repented, they too would perish, meaning, they too would be killed.

This statement was fulfilled in AD 66-70 when over a million Jews were killed during the Jewish wars.¹⁰

Morris comments:

His *likewise* can scarcely mean that they will be killed in exactly the same way. Perhaps the thought is that the manner of the death of the Galileans gave them no time to repent. Jesus' unrepentant sinners were setting themselves on a course which meant unrepentant death in due course. Or the point may be the execution by the Romans. Unless his hearers repented they would likewise suffer at the hands of the Romans.¹¹

Luke 15:17. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the prodigal, when he realized how bad off he had it in the far country away from his father said to himself, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and *I perish* with hunger!" He is referring to being exceedingly hungry. Possibly his condition was so bad that he realized that eventually he would have literally died if he did not have relief. Or maybe he is simply speaking metaphorically. But clearly in view is that he is in much worse shape here than he would be if he were back with his father.

Luke 17:27, 29. Concerning the deadly effects of the flood in Noah's day the Lord Jesus said, "The day that Noah entered the ark...the flood came and *destroyed* them all." Similarly, concerning the deaths that God brought upon the sin-laden cities of Sodom and Gomorrah He

¹⁰ We should not press Jesus' words to mean that 100% of those listening to him would be killed if they didn't repent. He was speaking to the group before Him as representatives of the nation. He was saying that they had a chance to repent. If they did, and, of course, if this was combined with national faith in Him, then the Kingdom would have come for that generation. However, since that generation rejected His offer of the Kingdom and the reoffers of the Kingdom by the apostles, then the nation was going to be destroyed and there would be widespread death. Of course, the destruction was not total since a remnant had to remain so that when Jesus returns there will be a nation of Israel which indeed will repent and believe in Him.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974, 1988), 242-43.

said, “On the day Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven *and destroyed* them all.” These two uses clearly refer to physical death.

Luke 20:16. Jesus told a parable about a group of wicked men who were tending a man’s vineyard for him. When the time of harvest came, the man sent a servant to get some of the grapes, but the wicked men beat the servant and sent him away with nothing. After this scene was repeated with several servants in succession, the owner sent his beloved son, a clear allusion to Jesus Himself. The wicked men then killed him! Jesus then said, “He will come and *destroy* those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.” The destruction here could look at temporal destruction less than death (the next category), but it is more likely that physical death is in view. Verse 16 likely refers to the Jewish wars and the death of over a million Jews (as well as the destruction of the temple and much of Jerusalem). Of course it also alludes to the birth of the church, the new group to whom the vineyard would be given.

Second Peter 3:6. Referring to the flood Peter says, “The world that then existed [at the time of the flood] *perished*, being flooded with water.” Clearly this refers to the destruction of all life, human and animal, on the face of the earth during the Noahic flood. The issue Peter is addressing is not the eternal destiny of those who died. There were likely people who died in the flood who had been believers for years before it and others who came to faith after it started. But they all *perished*, that is, they all died, in the flood. Compare this with 1 Pet 3:20 where Peter indicates that eight souls (Noah and his three sons and all their spouses) *were saved through water*. That *salvation* referred to escaping death, not to being born again. Likewise, the rest of the people *perished* in the sense that they died.

Second Peter 3:9 uses *apollumi* in the same way. However, since this verse is so widely understood as

referring to eternal condemnation, I have reserved an entire section below to discuss this verse.

We could look at all of the remaining places in which *apollumi* looks at physical death,¹² but since they follow the same pattern we've already seen, let's consider the second leading category, temporal loss or temporal destruction.

C. TEMPORAL LOSS OR DESTRUCTION IS ANOTHER VERY COMMON MEANING (23 OF 92 = 25%)

Of the 92 uses of *apollumi* in the NT, twenty-three refer to temporal loss or destruction. Now there is some overlap between this category and the category I call losing the life or being lost in a temporal sense.

John 6:12. After feeding 5,000 men plus their families with a few fish and loaves, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is *lost*." This too is the word *apollumi*. It doesn't refer to lie after death, but to being wasted here and now.

Matthew 9:17 (and Mark 2:22 and Luke 5:37). If new wine is put in old wineskins, the wineskins break "and are ruined." That is, the wineskins are destroyed. The opposite which the Lord states in this same verse is that if you put new wine in new wineskins, "both are preserved."

Luke 21:18. "But not a hair of your head *shall be lost*." The Lord is promising the disciples and all who suffer for Him that He will protect them, not in the sense that they wouldn't be put to death, for some would, but in the sense that they would have ultimate restoration of all for which they suffer. Not one hair would be lost in service for Christ for which there would not be reward in the life to come.

Romans 14:15. In this weaker brother/stronger brother discussion Paul warns the stronger brother, "*Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*" The sense of *apollumi* here is *ruin, injure, hurt, or damage*.

¹² See also Matt 12:14; 21:41; 22:7; 26:52; 27:20; Mark 3:6; 4:38; 9:22; 11:18; 12:9; Luke 6:9; 8:24; 13:33; 19:47; Jas 4:12; and Jude 5.

1 *Corinthians 15:18*. Here is an unusual usage. Paul says that if Christ is not risen from the dead, “Then also those who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ *have perished*.” Here *apollumi* refers not to physical death, but to a loss of physical existence.¹³ With no resurrection, believers who have died have permanently lost their bodies, never to regain them again. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then believers who have died will not take part physically in Jesus’ coming Kingdom. Of course, that’s because He won’t either, since there won’t be a coming Kingdom if Jesus is not risen. The entire Christian faith is overthrown if Jesus is not raised and if He doesn’t raise those who believe in Him.

It is interesting to see how commentators explain this verse. Several think that Paul is speaking of eternal condemnation, which wouldn’t make sense, for if Christ is not risen then there is no physical existence beyond the grave. Remember that eternal condemnation is a physical existence too. See Rev 20:11-15. The unsaved dead will be raised before they are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment and then cast into the lake of fire.

1 *Peter 1:7*. This is the only use of *apollumi* in Peter’s first epistle (along with two in Second Peter). Peter says that our faith is “much more precious than gold *that perishes*.” Peter means that gold is temporary. Gold will ultimately be destroyed. In the final meltdown after the Millennium, gold and everything in the universe will be burned up (2 Pet 3:10-11).

2 *John 8*. The Apostle John urges his readers to abide in the doctrine of Christ (v 9) so the apostles *do not lose* those things that they worked for, but that they may receive a full reward (at the *Bēma*). *Apollumi* here refers to loss of potential rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

¹³ Hypothetically this could refer to eternal condemnation. However, in NT thought eternal condemnation is physical since all unbelievers will be resurrected before being condemned (Rev 20:11-15). Besides, following Paul’s argument, if Jesus was not raised physically, then there will be no literal Kingdom, no rewards, and no *Bēma*. It is thus unreasonable to conclude that Paul has eternal condemnation in mind here.

If people who are discipled continue with the Lord, then the one who trained them will have a greater reward at the *Bēma* than if those people do not continue with the Lord. In a sense disciplers get a cut of the rewards of the disciples.

Matthew 5:29-30. Jesus says in v 29 that if something we see causes us to sin, then we should stop looking at it, “for it is more profitable for you that one of your members [i.e., your right eye] *perish*, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna].” Leaving aside for a moment the reference to Gehenna,¹⁴ it is clear that *perish* refers to the loss of something precious to us, an eye. Similarly in v 30 the Lord says that if something we do (with the hand referring figuratively to what we do) causes us to sin, then we should stop doing it, “for it is more profitable for you that one of your members [i.e., your right hand] *perish*, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna].” Again, *perish* refers to temporal loss, in this case of a hand.

Other uses of *apollumi* that refer to temporal loss include Matt 10:28; Mark 1:24;¹⁵ 2:22; Luke 4:34;¹⁶ 5:37; 9:56; John 6:27; 10:10; 1 Cor 1:19; 8:11; 2 Cor 4:9; and Heb 1:11.

¹⁴ Clearly the Lord isn’t contradicting what He said in John 3:16 and many other texts (e.g., John 4:14; 5:24; 6:35; 11:26). He likely means one of two things. First, if eternal torment in the lake of fire is meant, then He is saying that if there is something which is keeping a person from believing in Him for eternal life, then he should abandon that thing. Some people cling to drugs and never go to church to hear the saving message and never listen if a person tries to evangelize them. Others are so addicted to video games or pornography or television or the internet that they never go to church or listen to people trying to witness to them. Better to lose those things than go to hell. Second, the word used here is not Hades, but Gehenna. Hades is the normal NT word for hell. Gehenna was a dump outside of Jerusalem where trash was continually burned. This is understood by some, such as Jody Dillow, to be a reference to *temporal judgment*. Thus the Lord might be warning that if something we see or do causes us to sin, it is better to lose that thing than to fall under God’s temporal judgment.

¹⁵ A demon-possessed man in the synagogue in Capernaum said to Jesus, “Did you come to *destroy* us.” What the demons fear is being cast into torment prematurely. They know that one day they will be tormented forever (cf. Matt 8:29). The fear of the demons that possess this man is that they will enter into torment earlier than necessary. Hence this is a form of *temporal judgment* for demons.

¹⁶ Luke 4:34 is parallel to Mark 1:24. See comments in the previous note.

D. LOSING ONE'S LIFE (*PSYCHĒ*) (14 OF 92 = 15%)

The Lord Jesus on a number of occasions taught about *the saving of the psychē*, often translated as *saving the life* or *saving the soul*. Jesus laid out two options: saving your life or losing your life. The word translated *losing* is *apollumi*.

Matthew 16:25. Here, in a passage about discipleship, about following Christ, the Lord Jesus makes this puzzling statement, “Whoever desires to save his life [*psychē*] will lose [*apolesei*, from *apollumi*] it, and whoever loses [*apolesē*, from *apollumi*] his life [*psychē*] for My sake will find it.” This isn’t referring to who gets into Jesus’ Kingdom and who goes to the lake of fire. Jesus is telling Peter and the other apostles and anyone who wishes to follow Him that in order to have fullness of life forever, they must deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Christ on a path that ultimately means they *lose* their fullness of life here and now.

The Lord makes it clear in v 27 that He is speaking about His return and about how much believers will share in His glory at that time. He is alluding to the *Bēma* when He says, “then He will reward each according to his works.” Kingdom entrance is not a reward for work done. However, fullness of life and ruling with Christ is.

Believers who shrinks back from suffering for Christ may well have more money and more possessions and fewer hassles with unbelievers. However, while they seemingly have more, they actually have much less. Life does not consist of possessions or even the absence of conflict. Life is all about pleasing the King of kings. If we please Him, we win, even if we are martyred for our faith.

The same concept appears a number of times in the NT.

Matthew 10:39, 42. Here is the same paradoxical teaching as in Matt 16:24-28, though with less explanation given. “He who finds his life *will lose* it, and *he who loses* his life for My sake will find it.” This is immediately followed in the verses which follow (Matt 10:40-42) with a

discussion of eternal rewards, showing that the issue here is primarily fullness or lack of fullness of life in the life to come. In fact, in v 42 the Lord uses the word *apollumi* to say that the one who gives even just a cup of cold water in His name “*shall by no means lose his reward.*”

Luke 17:33. After commenting on the deadly judgments that fell upon the people of Noah’s day in the flood and the people of Lot’s day with the raining of fire and brimstone upon Sodom (see discussion above in the section on physical death), the Lord Jesus then said, “Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to save his life *will lose* it, and *whoever loses* his life will preserve it” (Luke 17:32-33). Lot’s wife had been warned not to look back at what she had left behind. But she did. And as a result, she perished. That is, she was turned into a pillar of salt. If we longingly cling to the old life, the life that God has told us to leave behind, then we too will be destroyed. Our lives will be forfeited. The Lord’s point here certainly applies to our present lives, both in terms of quality and quantity. And it also has application to our fullness of life in the life to come.

This same teaching is found in Mark 8:35; 9:41; Luke 9:24-25; Luke 17:33; and John 12:25.

E. LOST PEOPLE (12 OF 92 = 13%)

Evangelicals often speak of *lost people* as unregenerate people, as people who do not have eternal life. Yet in the NT lost people are often born-again people who are not in fellowship with God.

We err seriously if we assume that people whom the Bible calls *lost people* are necessarily unregenerate. While there are a few places where *apollumi* in the sense of *lost* might refer to unregenerate people (see the discussion below of Matt 10:6; 15:24; 18:11, 14), those are exceptions.¹⁷

¹⁷ See also the discussion under F below regarding eternal condemnation. There are two uses of the word *lost* in John’s Gospel (John 17:12 and 18:9) that may well refer to unregenerate people.

Luke 15:4, 6. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep the Lord told of a shepherd with 100 sheep who “loses one of them.” The shepherd then will “go after *the one which is lost* until he finds it.” According to the next verse, when he finds it alive he puts it on his shoulders rejoicing and brings it back to the fold. A sheep which has literally become lost is in view in these two uses of *apollumi* in this verse, as well as the one use in v 6, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep *which was lost*.”¹⁸

Of course, symbolically these lost sheep refer to lost people. But if we are not biased by the appearance of *apollumi*, we will see strong evidence that born-again people who stray are in view.

Notice that the sheep who strays and becomes lost was once part of the flock of 100. It did not become part of the flock by being found and returned to the flock. This corresponds to a believer who strays and returns to the Lord, not to an unbeliever who gains eternal life.

Luke 15:8, 9. In the Parable of the Lost Coin, a woman “loses one coin.” Then after she finds it she says, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece *which was lost*.” These two uses once again refer literally to something which was misplaced or lost.

Symbolically the lost coin refers to a born again person who strays and returns as well. Notice that the coin was part of the ten before it was lost. And when the woman finds the coin, it is returned to its original place with the other nine.

Luke 15:24, 32. The father of the prodigal rejoices when his son returns, saying, “Let us eat and be merry; for this my son *was lost* and is found.” He repeats this saying again in a slightly different way at the end of the account to the older brother: “Your brother was dead and is alive again, and *was lost* and is found” (v 32).

¹⁸ Matthew 18:11, though similar to Luke 15:3-7, more likely has a different sense, the same sense found in Matt 10:6 and 15:24 (discussed below under Matt 10:6).

There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus in this parable is speaking of the same kind of lostness as in the first two parables of Luke 15. The lost sheep was literally lost. So was the lost coin. So too was the lost son. He was lost to his father in the sense that his father no longer saw him each day and no longer experienced fellowship with him each day.

The Calvinist has a problem with what the father says in v 32. The prodigal “was dead and is alive again.” If that refers to everlasting life, then it proves eternal security is not true. Only if that refers symbolically to fellowship with God that was lost and regained is eternal security still true.

Likewise, before the son was lost, he did not need to be found. He was with the father and was in fellowship with him before he departed.

Of course, if the three parables concern the Lord Jesus (the shepherd), the Holy Spirit (the woman—the church is the bride of church and the Holy Spirit places believers in the Body of Christ), and God the Father (the father), then being lost is a figure of speech, or an anthropomorphism (since God always knows everything), which expresses the truth that God always is concerned for every believer, even the ones who have strayed and become lost. The one who strays can and does miss out on fellowship with God and with fellow believers during his time in the spiritual far country.

Many think that lost and found in these three parables concerns the eternal destiny of people who are represented by the sheep, the coin, and the son. Actually the issue is the fellowship with God experienced by people.

Matthew 10:6. Jesus commanded the twelve, when He sent them out on a preaching and healing mission: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to *the lost* sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:5-6). It is possible that the Lord means *the unregenerate* sheep of the house of Israel. That would be in keeping with a verse like John 17:12.

However, it is equally possible that the Lord simply means that the nation has strayed, whether they are regenerate or not. That would be in keeping with the many uses of *apollumi* in Luke 15 (as well as in the LXX). There is insufficient evidence contextually to support the view that the Lord here is telling them to go to *the unregenerate* of Israel. More likely he means more generically that they are to go to people who have lost their way and who are like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 15:24 carries the same nuance: “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”¹⁹

Matthew 18:14. Here the Lord says, “It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” In light of the use of *apollumi* three verses earlier in Matt 18:11,²⁰ it seems likely that the same sense is in view. If so, then this is not a statement per se about God’s desire that children be born again, which is certainly true (cf. 1 Tim 2:4), but rather a more general statement that God does not want children to lose their way and to become lost children. We even use that expression *lost children* today to refer to children who are undisciplined and unrestrained and without direction in life.

F. THERE ARE ACTUALLY A SMALL NUMBER OF USES THAT REFER TO ETERNAL CONDEMNATION (10 OF 92 = 11%)

Six of the uses of *apollumi* that refer to eternal condemnation appear in John’s Gospel. We’ve already discussed 3:16. The verse before John 3:16, that is, John 3:15, applies as well. So does John 6:39 where Jesus indicates that it is the will of the Father that He *loses* nothing. In that context losing is the opposite of having eternal life.

So also in John 10:28, none of Jesus’ sheep *will perish*.

¹⁹ Luke 19:10 appears to carry the same broader sense as well: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

²⁰ See n 17 and the discussion of Matt 10:6 for an explanation of *apollumi* in Matt 18:11.

There is one place, John 17:12 (repeated in 18:9), where the Lord uses the word *lost* (see preceding section) in a way that might refer to the unregenerate. As He prays He reminds the Father that none of His disciples is *lost*, except for Judas the betrayer. That sounds like He is using the word *lost* to signify that Judas is unregenerate. But that understanding is not as obvious as it might seem.

We have help understanding what He meant since that same saying is repeated by John in John 18 when Jesus was arrested. After Jesus said, “Let these [His disciples] go their way” (John 18:8), then John added, “that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none’” (John 18:9). The fact that the disciples were not arrested in some sense *fulfilled* what Jesus had said about them not being lost. The point seems to be that Jesus *kept* His disciples (cf. John 17:12) safe from arrest and execution at that time, but He did not keep Judas safe. He let Judas betray Him and He ultimately let Judas go out and hang himself.

John 18:8-9 should cause us to wonder whether what the Lord meant in his high priestly prayer was simply that He kept His disciples close to Him spiritually and that none of them had strayed, except for the betrayer, the son of perdition. While Judas was unregenerate (the title “the son of perdition” suggests that), John 18:8-9 makes us wonder whether *lost* simply refers to the fact that Jesus did not keep Judas as He did the other disciples.

There is a possible explanation that sees *lost* in John 18:9 as referring to unregenerate status. Michaels writes, “The temporary safety of the disciples stands as a sign of what has come to be called their ‘eternal security,’ that is, their assurance of eternal life.”²¹ That is a reasonable suggestion and it might be what John intended by his words in John 18:9. However, it is speculative to be sure.

²¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010). 892.

Thus out of twelve uses in John's Gospel, at most six, or half, refer to eternal condemnation. But the other half, even in the book that most heavily uses the word in reference to eternal condemnation, refer to physical death or loss (John 6:12, 27; 10:10 [?]; 11:50; 12:25; 18:14).

There are approximately 80 other uses of *apollumi* in the NT and only four of those likely refer to eternal condemnation. In First and Second Corinthians Paul three times refers to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:19; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3). It is possible that "those who are perishing" refers to those who are dying under God's judgment and that "those who are being saved" refers not to believers generally but to overcoming believers specifically. However, it appears that "those who are perishing" refers to those who are condemned and on their way to eternal condemnation unless they come to faith. For example, in 2 Cor 4:3 Paul says, "Our gospel is veiled...to those who are perishing." The next verse says that they've been blinded by Satan and that they "do not believe."

In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote about "the coming of the lawless one...with all unrighteous deception among those who perish [or, those who are perishing], because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess 2:9-10). In the Thessalonian epistles salvation refers to being delivered from the Tribulation wrath by means of the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess 5:10). If the perishing is antithetical to the saving here, then perishing here refers not to eternal condemnation per se, but to suffering through the wrath of the Tribulation.

At most 10 of 92 NT uses of *apollumi* refer to eternal condemnation, which is just under 11%. That makes it wrong to assume that eternal condemnation is in view whenever *apollumi* is used in the NT.

IV. WHAT ABOUT SECOND PETER 3:9?

Probably the most famous single verse on repentance and perishing in the NT is 2 Pet 3:9. There Peter says, “The Lord...is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Many people understand Peter to be saying, *God doesn’t want anyone to be eternally condemned but He instead wants all to come to repentance and hence spend eternity in Jesus’ Kingdom.*

A full discussion of this passage is not possible here.²² However, even a brief analysis shows that the common understanding of 2 Pet 3:9 isn’t at all what Peter meant. In fact, that understanding not only totally misses the point of this verse, but it also changes justification by faith alone into justification by repentance alone.

A simple rule of hermeneutics is that you determine the meaning of a word by its use in context. Well, here it is evident what *apollumi* means in context if we just read the words before and after v 9. In v 6 the same word is used to refer to those who died in the Noahic flood (see discussion above). That’s the only other use of this word in Second Peter and it is in the immediate context. (There is also one use of the word in First Peter and it also carries this meaning.)

In addition v 9 is culminating a discussion begun in v 3 about the delay in the Lord’s promised return. Peter is saying in v 9 that the Lord will fulfill His promise, but He is delaying since He is longsuffering toward us. He knows that the return of Christ will result in the deaths of more than half the world’s population during those dreadful seven years. The Lord doesn’t want to kill billions of people on earth.²³ He would rather people repent and live

²² For a fuller discussion see Zane C. Hodges, s.v., “The Second Epistle of Peter,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Volume 2: Romans-Revelation (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1183-86, esp. 1185-86.

²³ The Lord never wanted death at all. He did not create Adam and Eve to die. Death was introduced as a result of the fall. After the fall men lived about 1,000 years and then they died. With the wickedness that led to the flood, life expectancies dropped tenfold, so that people could expect to live

full lives here and now prior to the Kingdom. But when the sins of mankind are filled up, then the Tribulation will begin and billions will indeed die. Even then, however, God will show that He would prefer men repent and avoid premature death (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11).

The verses which follow v 9 discuss not eternal condemnation, but the destruction of the current earth and heavens by fire. Temporal destruction is what is being discussed.

Verse 9 is preceded by a discussion of the first destruction of the earth by flood and followed by a discussion of the second and last destruction of the earth by fire. Both destructions are temporal. Both result in an enormous number of deaths.²⁴

Thus we might paraphrase 2 Pet 3:9 in this way: *God wishes that none should die (or die prematurely) but that all should come to repentance and extend their lives and their experience of His blessings.*

V. PRACTICAL RAMIFICATIONS

A. EVANGELISM IS CLEARER

When we evangelize, the issue of what a person must do to be born again is foremost in the conversation. If the condition is only believing in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life, then the conversation will be simple and easy for the unbeliever to understand (though, not easy to believe since it seems wrong).

just 70, 80, or 90 years, not 700, 800, or 900 years. During the Tribulation probably half of the billions who die will be under 40. Thus many won't even get half of what we now consider a normal lifespan. All of this, I believe, is in the background of the statement, "God wished that none should perish."

²⁴ Of course, in the case of the burning up of the heavens and the earth, the deaths occur before that time, that is, during the Tribulation (and to a lesser extent in the rebellion after the Millennium). However, Peter's point is that the Lord's return will result in multitudes dying and God doesn't want that. God in His mercy is delaying that cataclysmic judgment until the sins on earth are, like they were before flood, so great that He determines the time for judgment can no longer be postponed.

However, if the condition of everlasting life is faith *and repentance*, then the conversation becomes quite complicated. We may say that eternal life is a free gift, but then we go on to say that the way we get that free gift is by believing in Jesus Christ and by turning from our sins and following Christ. This is confusing for the listener. In what sense is it free if I must turn from my sins and follow Christ to receive it? That sounds like it is a good deal, but not a free gift.

If we present verses like Luke 13:3, 5 and 2 Pet 3:9 as evangelistic verses, then our evangelism will be less than clear.

B. ASSURANCE IS POSSIBLE

How can a person be certain that he has everlasting life and will never be eternally condemned? If John 3:16 gives the answer, then one is sure if he believes that Jesus guarantees the eternal destiny of all who simply believe in Him. Works play no role whatsoever in assurance in light of John 3:16. As one friend told me, the Lord said that the one who *believes in Him* has everlasting life, not the one who *behaves in Him*.

But if assurance is sourced in passages like Luke 13:3, 5 and 2 Pet 3:9, then one cannot be sure prior to death of his eternal destiny. As many Calvinists have told me, under Calvinism we cannot be sure that we will persevere to the end. If we fail to persevere, then we will prove we never *really* believed, and we will go to Hades awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment and banishment to the lake of fire.

If the unrepentant go to hell, then none of us can be sure of our eternal destiny. Any of us could fall away and remain that way until death.

C. DISCIPLESHIP IS CLEARER

If a believer grasps that God will judge him here and now if he walks in the spiritual far country, then he

should be highly motivated to walk in the light and to live under God's blessings. The blessings-cursings motif runs all through the OT and NT. The concept of perishing is a crucial aspect of the cursing motif.

If, however, a believer thinks that God will send him to hell if he falls away and fails to repent before death, then he will adopt a works-salvation mentality. His concern will not be temporal judgment, but eternal condemnation. Fear of hell will become a major factor in his daily walk.

For the obsessive-compulsives in churches, this fear of hell can be paralyzing. I get many calls and emails and have many conversations with people who are afraid of either losing eternal life or of proving that they don't really have it.

Certainty of one eternal destiny should produce a profound sense of gratitude and of love for God. That motivation, combined with fear of God's discipline and desire for His blessing, aids a believer in persevering in faith and good works.

D. MOTIVATION FOR GODLY LIVING IS CLEARER

If a person is afraid that he will go to hell if he falls away, then all other motivations pale in comparison. It is hard to be motivated by temporal or even eternal rewards if you are not sure if you will spend eternity in the Kingdom or in the lake of fire. All your energy will be spent in trying to ensure that you make it into the Kingdom and avoid the lake of fire.

If, however, a person is sure of his eternal destiny, fear of hell is not a motivation at all. The person no longer worries about hell since he knows that he has everlasting life. As mentioned above, this opens the door for powerful motivations like gratitude, love of God, desire for blessings, and fear of temporal judgment.

VI. CONCLUSION

The popular understanding of the word *perish* in the NT is that it typically refers to eternal condemnation or hell. While it is recognized that there are a few places where *apollumi* refers to temporal death or destruction, most NT scholars would say that *apollumi* often is used in a spiritual sense to refer to eternal condemnation.

The evidence shows that the opposite is true. *Apollumi* in the NT most often refers to physical death or temporal loss or destruction, not to eternal condemnation. The evidence shows that the latter is actually a relatively rare use of *apollumi*, occurring just under 11% of the time, all in John, 1-2 Corinthians, and 2 Thessalonians.

Practical application of this research shows that clarity on this issue can aid our ministries of evangelism and discipleship. Confusion about the true nature of perishing can hurt our ministries significantly.

CONSENSUS THEOLOGY TAINTS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is rare to find a student of the Bible who is willing to stick to the text and allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves without allowing the murky waters of tradition or consensus to cloud the true meaning of the passage in question.

II. THE CONSENSUS MODEL SHAPES THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS

Many today would listen to the text of Scripture through the history of exegesis and track its interpretation first back through the consensus of the magisterial Reformation tradition, then compare that to the Fathers and then finally back to text in the NT itself, letting its relevance for today speak for itself. Virgil Vaduva (adapting a statement from Michael Crichton's 2003 lecture at California Institute of Technology) sounds a strong warning concerning the consensus approach:

I want to pause here and talk about this notion of consensus, and the rise of what has been called consensus theology. I regard consensus theology as an extremely pernicious development that ought to be stopped cold in its tracks. Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels; it is a way

to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. Whenever you hear that the consensus of theologians agrees on something or other, reach for your wallet, because you're being had.

Let's be clear: the work of theology has nothing whatever to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics. Theology, on the contrary, requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable by reference to the real world. In theology consensus is irrelevant. What is relevant is reproducible results. The greatest theologians in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus.

There is no such thing as consensus theology. If it's consensus, it isn't theology. If it's theology, it isn't consensus. Period.¹

"Consensus theology...ought to be stopped cold in its tracks." "The work of theology has nothing to do with consensus. Consensus is the business of politics." Those words run counter to Evangelical thought today. Vaduva's suggestion that "Theology...requires only one investigator who happens to be right, which means that he or she has results that are verifiable" is so far outside mainstream thought as to be immediately rejected by most theologians. Most believe that if a view is correct, then it is attested to by the majority of Evangelical scholars today, as well as the majority of Reformed scholars over the past five centuries.

Many theologians successfully track an interpretation back to the Reformation and then to the Fathers. However, when they proceed to the NT itself, their validation of their interpretation of a text remains the Fathers'—they quote from them as if they were not sure of how Biblical exegesis relates to the subject at hand. If they had gone back to the text of Scripture itself to judge

¹<http://blog.planetpreterist.com/index.php?itemid=1026>. Accessed September 29, 2010.

the Fathers' interpretation of the passages in question, their work would have been much more valuable to us who prefer Biblical exegesis based on a literal, historical, grammatical, rhetorical interpretation.

The more I study the history of the church and its doctrines, the more I suspect the process by which the church arrived at the conclusions that were then handed down as orthodoxy. Why is it enough to say Luther or Calvin is correct about any doctrine or that the church has always believed thus and so, and not require sound Biblical research to defend the same? It is because of this type of attitudes that what was vague in the early church fathers' writings on any particular subject became creed without any Biblical verification. But one must only take a look at a passage like Isaiah 55 to recoil from thinking that we—or any past generation—have arrived.

As I began reading Thomas Oden's recent book, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, I found myself in strong agreement with his assessment of the results of secularism: "Under the tutelage of these once-confident ideologies still touted by secularizing elites, sex has been reduced to orgasm, persons to bodies, psychology to stimuli, economics to planning mechanisms, and politics to machinery."² As I continued reading, however, I realized that Oden's response to secularism is to forge headlong into the consensus model of doctrine.³

Is this approach valid? Consider the following scenarios covering the options with regards to the consensus of the Church Fathers.

²Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 8.

³Ibid., 162. Oden favorably cites what is called the Vincentian rule: "In the world-wide community of believers every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always and by all."

III. THE EARLY CHURCH IMPOSED GREEK PHILOSOPHY ON THE BIBLE

In the “Introductory” to the first of his Hibbert Lectures, 1888, Edwin Hatch presented the following comparison of the Sermon on the Mount with the Nicene Creed:

The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers.

The contrast is patent. If any one thinks that it is sufficiently explained by saying that one is a sermon [sermon on the mount] and the other a creed, it must be pointed out in reply that the question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation...The presumption is that it was the result of Greek influence.⁴

Sadly, this evaluation captures well the differences between the Scripture and the creeds of the early church.

It appears that throughout church history the philosophers had a much stronger influence on the development of systematics than did the exegetes. The converse should have been true. Systematic theology should have emerged from the process in which the first step is exegesis and the second, Biblical theology. Only after the completion of these two steps should the Biblical data have been organized into a comprehensive, coherent system.

Within the first three centuries following the Apostles, theological errors arose not from evil intentions of the church leaders but from their desire to find answers to everyday pastoral questions and to help people understand the text. Instead of going back to the text (existent, although hard to find) to form their theological views, they turned to the writings of previous generations. Gradually,

⁴ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, Edited by Andrew Martin Fairbairn (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1995), 1-2.

the vagueness of the early Christian (post NT) works gave way to error.

As the use of the Bible faded out, theology—developed by consensus at Church Councils⁵—became increasingly dogmatic and philosophical. By the time of the invention of the printing press, theology—deeply rooted in philosophy—was already “complete.” Orthodoxy had been defined and little room was left for studies of the original text. Theologians focused their studies on the works of someone else who studied the works of someone else who studied the works of someone else (and so on). Their aim was to debate the opinions expressed by their predecessors.⁶

It appears Western theologians-philosophers have always had a dire need for conjecture.⁷ The Western philosopher is never sated in his quest for knowledge; he is possessed of an exploratory bent that spurs him to use the known as a springboard with which he can catapult himself beyond the limits of knowledge. This is our Greek and Roman intellectual heritage.⁸ This is the mentality that makes the West the most innovative society on the

⁵Oden notes that Vincent of Lerins (5th Century AD), for instance, “[had] long been engaged in what we today call an empirical inquiry, a careful sampling process, something like a poll-taking exercise. He was deliberately inquiring of many believers, especially those well-grounded in sanctity, asking this simple question: How does the whole church come to distinguish the truth of Christian faith from falsehood amid conflicted opinions?” (*The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, p. 161). Oden went on, “Again the answer rings clear from all he asks—an answer that has become known as the Vincentian rule: In the world-wide community of believers every care should be taken to hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always and by all” (p. 162). My take is that the Church Councils represent only a partial consensus. Group A forms a consensus that Group B is wrong. If we are Eastern Orthodox (Greek), we would claim a different consensus than if we are not—for example.

⁶There were occasional innovators who worked with portions of the text (e.g., Luther worked in Romans), but their students had a strong tendency to study their teacher’s work rather than follow his example in studying the Word.

⁷Timothy Nichols, an Assistant Professor at Rocky Mountain Seminary, contributed this concept.

⁸We have yet to examine fully our relationship to both Greek and Roman thinking in regard to both content and method, since Plato (through Augustine) still rules theology proper with an iron fist.

face of the globe. (No other culture in the history of the world has produced a truly global empire; the West has managed to produce at least three.⁹)

Applied to theology, this mentality generates a desire to take the known (revelation) or what is thought to be known and use it as grist for extrapolations in an effort to reach out as far as possible into the unknown. The extrapolations then become the received wisdom upon which another generation of extrapolations is based, and so on, out into the void.¹⁰

This exploratory bent is not without dangers. Without proper caution, one may naturally pile up extrapolation upon extrapolation, constructing a theological edifice of mere guesses.

When a theologian starts with Scripture and then begins to extrapolate, his first extrapolation is only loosely tied to Scripture. But if he then extrapolates further (as theologians often do), his second extrapolation is built not on Scripture, but on a prior extrapolation. If he then makes further extrapolations, his thinking becomes far removed from Scripture.¹¹

A theologian, who is prepared to extrapolate from revelation (or worse, prior theological extrapolation) faces some unique difficulties. First of all, he undertakes a task that is well beyond his ability. The Scripture is clear that God and His ways are far above our reason and

⁹ Global empires were maintained by Spain, Great Britain, and Portugal. However, we might also include, the Netherlands during the brief period when it had an American colony, France when it held Canada and Louisiana, the USSR in its heyday, and the USA from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s.

¹⁰ This might be similar to the game called "Telephone" where a few sentences are whispered into the ear of one person and they are to repeat that message to the person on their right and then in turn that person repeats the message to the person on their right and so on. By the time the message has reached the end of the process, the meaning has been lost nearly completely.

¹¹ Think of these like building blocks which are not stacked precisely on top of each other. Each block is shifted left on the one beneath it, overlapping the previous one, until the entire stack topples over because of the lack of support at the base.

imagination.¹² Second, he possesses only partial information. We know *a priori* only what God has chosen to tell us. There are many questions He did not answer, many bits of information He did not give.¹³ Some of these would have been accessible to the original readers (via apostolic preaching that has not been recorded in Scripture); some would not.

Making a theological conjecture is analogous to putting together a one-thousand-piece puzzle, but having fewer than a hundred pieces. In some spots, one can probably guess with a fair degree of accuracy what the picture would look like, but as one begins to extrapolate based on “good” guesses, the emerging image will resemble less and less the picture the puzzle was intended to create. Suppose the puzzle were a picture of an animal no human has ever seen.¹⁴ How accurate could the guesses be? One must conclude that, although a credible theological argument for *some* doctrines can be constructed, using it as a building block for further theological development is unsound.¹⁵

By way of example, the early church fathers recognized God’s sovereignty but strongly affirmed human free will (which they believed to be part of the image of God). They held to the human responsibility for sin and countered deterministic systems. That changed with Augustine, who in his earlier years affirmed the existence of free will, but later modified his view in reaction to Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that humanity was not corrupted by the fall. Believing that to be clearly false, Augustine argued for the opposite: that humanity is a “mass of perdition,” which led him to conclude that the will is not free to choose what is good. As his own experience reinforced that view,

¹² See, for example, Isa 55:8-9; Rom 11:33-35; 1 Cor 2:9.

¹³ John 21:25 and Acts 1:7, for example, clearly show this to be true.

¹⁴ For example, no one alive today has ever seen what Job calls the behemoth or the leviathan.

¹⁵ This does not imply that God has given insufficient information for life and godliness, but only that He has not given enough information to satisfy all theological curiosities.

Augustine began to teach a doctrine of predestination (i.e., that God chooses some individuals to save and leaves the rest in their deserved damnation).¹⁶ Therefore, it matters which consensus one looks at with Augustine: Early (Pre-millennial) or Later (Amillennial).

The Church settled in the middle, accepting the definition (of Vincent of Lerins) of orthodoxy as “that which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” This definition was confirmed at the Synod of Orange (529), where the delegates condemned Pelagianism, averring that humanity is corrupted by the fall and that salvation is, therefore, by God’s initiative. However, the Synod did not affirm Augustine’s predestination doctrine. The position of many since that time has been semi-Pelagianism or semi-Augustinianism.

By the 16th century, the leaders of the Reformation rediscovered Augustine. Both Luther (an Augustinian monk) and Calvin accepted the Augustinian view of election. Later, Calvin proceeded to adopt double predestination, while Lutherans moved away from the Augustinian view. Others took more extreme stances on the issue: On the one hand, Menno Simons (16th century Anabaptist who died in 1561) called this doctrine an “abomination of abominations,” and on the other, Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, went so far as to believe that God causes sin.

Today, Oden, like many others, makes the theologian’s labor into a descriptive one, in which he harvests the consensus of the centuries in order to gain the truth. Oden’s extensive knowledge of history is evident in what he has written—from the study of pastoral care to systematic theology to his current project dealing with the church fathers’ work in Scriptural exegesis and preaching.

I am therefore amazed to see Oden and others quote Luther as the voice of consensus. Luther himself violated the consensus, not only of his day, but of the preceding

¹⁶ Augustine also believed and taught that the elect in some sense will replace the angels who fell.

millennium, prompting a frustrated legate Aleander to rail against him: “Has the Catholic church been dead for a thousand years to be revived only by Martin? Has the whole world gone wrong and Martin only has the eyes to see?”¹⁷ Which consensus? If Luther had harvested the consensus, there would have been no Reformation.

Standing before the Emperor and many other powerful rulers of the Holy Roman Empire at the Diet of Worms, Roman Catholic Johann Eck challenged Luther:

Your plea to be heard from Scripture is the one always made by heretics.¹⁸ You do nothing but renew the errors of Wyclif and Hus. How will the Jews, how will the Turks, exult to hear Christians discussing whether they have been wrong all these years! Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgment above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance, and which now we are forbidden by the pope and the emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate.¹⁹

Luther replied that he would throw his books onto a fire if it were shown, on the basis of God’s Word, that he was wrong. After a night of prayer, Luther, fearing for his life, made his great statement:

¹⁷ Cited by Roland H. Bainton in *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1950, 1977), 166.

¹⁸ Eck is saying that anyone who disagrees with the consensus of the Roman Church is a heretic. To go against the consensus is to be wrong, pure and simple. The appeal to Scripture is automatically misguided if one disagrees with the consensus.

¹⁹ Cited by Bainton in *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, 180.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

The following five centuries have done nothing to blunt the force of Luther's statement.

Ironically, Master Eck would have approved of the methodology of Thomas Oden (and Oden is quoting Luther).

If we make the theological enterprise a descriptive one, as Master Eck and Thomas Oden would have us do, we face a difficulty in deciding which people we are going to describe. What constitutes a "Christian," or perhaps better put in Oden's terms, a "consensual exegete?" Here is a case in point: Oden states, "All consensual exegetes view this [1 Cor 8:6b] as a crucial text for unifying triune reasoning concerning the one God in three Persons." We may infer from this statement that Oden does not consider Unitarians "consensual exegetes." Yet where are his grounds for excluding them, if the theological enterprise is *descriptive*? They also name the name of Christ.

We face one of two problems. We may admit any who claim the name of Christ, only to find that with every community thus admitted to the ranks of "consensual exegetes," the deposit of faith "once for all delivered to all the saints" shrinks more and more. The option does not appeal. We have no choice then but to exclude some who name the name of Christ. But how are we to decide whom to exclude? Ultimately, we have no choice but to use a doctrinal definition of who is, and who is not, a Christian.

However, admission of a doctrinal definition turns theology from a *descriptive* to a *prescriptive* discipline. And in order to stand, that prescription has to derive authority from somewhere. The Church, as we have already seen, is

a dead end. We are left, in the end, with the same basis that Luther had: the text of Scripture.

Sola Scriptura was a Reformation distinctive for a reason: the Reformers knew all too well the results of seeking authority in tradition. It is amazing, and in no small measure frightening, that we could so easily have forgotten that.

IV. ALLOWING CONSENSUS THEOLOGY TO SUPERSEDE SCRIPTURE IS IDOLATRY

Matthew Henry suggests that the most common violation of the first commandment is “giving the glory and honour to any creature which are due to God only... [W]hatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.”²⁰ It was precisely for this reason that *Sola Scriptura* became a Reformation distinctive. The Reformers knew all too well the results of esteeming tradition and the consensus of men above the Word of God.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what Oden’s methodology does. By seeking authority in a consensus of many opinions, he effectively elevates the words of men above the words of God. And this he does in the name of humility. There is no question that Oden’s historical quotes as sources are noble, but by depending on consensus for authority, he inescapably leaves himself blind to the errors of the consensus and without the ability to correct them.

In response to Oden’s historical interpretive approach of Exod 20:3, I would rather utilize exegesis of the Hebrew text based on context (the historical, grammatical, rhetorical interpretation). Exodus 20:3 was a call to monotheism and faithfulness to the Lord. Israel was to

²⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 1: Genesis to Deuteronomy (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co.), 358-59.

have no other gods besides Yahweh. He was not just to be the first among several but the *only* One (cf. 1 Cor 10:31; 1 Tim 2:5; Acts 14:15; Jas 2:19; 1 John 5:20-21). This is not a purely theoretical truth, but the foundation for the Law.

The context of this passage in Exod 20:2 is God's victory over the gods of Egypt. Comparing Exod 19:1 with 40:17 shows a nine-month time period between them, with Exod 13:4 being the starting point of the chronology. In other words, three months before Exod 20:2, the Israelites had clearly seen God's victory over the gods of Egypt.²¹

Moses is the author of Exodus. He is identified as recording the events and instructions of God contained in the account in such places as Exod 17:14; 24:4, 7, 12; and 34:27. Further evidence is contained in Num 33:1-2 and Deut 31:9-11 that he continued throughout his time to record God's instructions and the nation's history. The NT writers also accepted without question the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as attested in John 5:46-47 and 7:19 (by Jesus), Acts 3:22 (by Peter), and Rom 10:5 (by Paul).

Moses wrote to the Israelite nation, which had been redeemed from Egypt and were awaiting God's permission to enter the Promised Land.

Exodus has been accepted as canonical without question, along with the rest of the Pentateuch. Exodus contains primarily historical narrative, though some sections are also considered legal literature within the framework of the historical account of God's dealing with the nation. The book is arranged chronologically as well as logically. The historical accounts are kept in chronological order. The instructions, listing of the laws, description of construction, and erection of the tabernacle are detailed logically as well as historically, reflecting the order of God's instruction and the order of construction.

²¹ How many of the Church Fathers picked this up?

The following is the summary of the book of Exodus: God's preparation of Israel for nationhood²² is accomplished through His deliverance of the nation to Himself, entrance into a national covenant, and their preparation of a tabernacle.²³

V. APPLICATION

This isn't only a potential problem for Catholics, Orthodox, and Reformed people. This can be a problem for Free Grace folks as well.

Free Grace people sometimes have our own traditions and these traditions sometimes blind us to the clear meaning of Scripture. Take the response of some in the Free Grace camp to the writings of Zane Hodges as an example. Some rejected out of hand his view on assurance as being of the essence of saving faith. Others straightaway spurned his deserted island illustration and his suggestion that all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life that can never be lost. Still others in the Free Grace movement rapidly rejected his explanation of the Gospel of John because it contradicted their tradition. These people did not carefully read and consider his Biblical

²² The subject of Exodus is God's preparation of Israel for nationhood. This is seen in the development of the argument more than in any specific statement within the book. In Exodus, God's dealings with the people of Israel move them from being a group of tribes in Egypt (1-11) to an organized people with a ratified constitution (19-24) and with a king in their midst (40). They lack only a land to be a nation, and that will come later. Thus, the subject is not the formation of a nation, but their preparation for nationhood.

²³ The complement is threefold and represents the development of the subject, describing how God prepares them for nationhood. First, He delivers the people from Egyptian bondage and brings them to Himself (1-18). This serves to remove them from the kingdom of Egypt and enables them to become an independent national entity. Further, they are moved from Pharaoh's domain to God's. Then, God provides the people with a constitution, which provides for their national relationship to Him as their Sovereign (19-24). This is finally followed by His instructions and their compliance in preparing a "residence" for their King, the tabernacle (25-40). Thus, all elements necessary for nationhood are in place, except for their occupation of a land. This, promised to the patriarchs, is still to be provided as they await entrance into Canaan.

arguments. If they had, their traditions might have given way to Scripture.

We must beware of our own consensus theology. We need to be careful that just because everyone in our network of churches or seminaries agrees, then they must be right, regardless of what the Scriptures say. We must beware of allowing the theology of anyone, Zane Hodges, Lewis Sperry Chafer, R. B. Thieme, S. Lewis Johnson, John Calvin, or whomever, to take precedence over the teachings of Scripture.

VI. CONCLUSION

Relating consensus to the NT, were not the Jewish leaders locked into opposition to Jesus Christ because they could not think outside their box? Their efforts at preventing the acceptance of a false Messiah prevented them from seeing the true One. Jesus kept showing evidence, but they were too firmly entrenched in their traditions. How do we know whether the consensus to which we appeal is right?

No one should discount the role of history in helping us understand how the earliest interpreters understood the Scriptures. Yet believers today must renew their commitment to the Scripture itself. The real issue must not be whether a doctrine²⁴ is affirmed by every Christian everywhere, nor whether it is officially orthodox according to the

²⁴ In the strictest sense “dogma” and “doctrine” are not synonymous terms, therefore a word is in order to clearly capture these fundamental concepts. The term *dogma*, strictly speaking, is derived from the Greek *dokein* (to seem, to be recognized as). In the NT it became attached to the findings of an ecclesiastical body such as in Heb 6:4 (“dogmata”). Therefore, dogma technically refers to the study of confessional statements (Eastern Orthodox Church dogmatics end with the second Council of Nicea in AD 787 [admitting no further refinement or clarification]; Roman Church dogmatics end with Vatican II [1963-65]; Lutheran Church dogmatics end with Formula of Concord [1580]; Reformed Church dogmatics end with the Synod of Dordt [1619] and the Westminster Confessions [1649]). The term, *doctrine* (*didaskalia*, 1 Tim 4:16), is almost universally translated *teaching* in the NT. Doctrine in the broader sense of the term is that which is taught, held, put forth as true, or supported by a teacher, a school or group. In this

historical creeds, nor whether it is unofficially orthodox according to the fashions of contemporary Christian thought. This approach might be characterized thus: “Jesus loves me; this I know, for the early church fathers/church councils/creeds tell me so.” The only real issue is whether a doctrine or belief is Biblical. There is no more sound approach to the formation of our beliefs. It is time we rescued Christian theology from the theologians and put it back in the hands of Biblical exegetes and Biblical theologians.

sense doctrine denotes teaching as distinguished from dogma, which denotes only such teaching, as is part of the confession of the church.

HEBREWS 12:14: A TEST CASE FOR THE RUN-FOR-THE-PRIZE VIEW

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gabriela “Gaby” Andersen-Schiess represented Switzerland in the women’s marathon at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. Only 400 meters remained in her race as she stumbled into the stadium. Her right leg seized and, with a twisted torso and limp left arm, she staggered. Some cheered for her; others pled for officials to pull her from the race. She refused medical attention, because that would disqualify her. Continuing perspiration proved that heat stroke had not begun, so medical personnel let her hobble forward for an agonizing five minutes and forty-four seconds. Eventually, she fell across the finish line. She was fine again within two hours.

Why did she endure such agony? Did she fear losing her native-born Swiss citizenship for failure to finish? Would she face a firing squad for quitting? Would she owe a fine for an incomplete race? No, she finished for a sense of national and personal accomplishment.

Through the use of *we* and *us*, Heb 12:1-4 urges believers to join the author in completing the Christian race:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was

set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

What is at stake in this race? Context argues that eternal reward is the issue. Unfortunately, many understand Hebrews to restrict the possession of everlasting life to those who finish the race, that is, to those who persevere in faith and good works to the end. Under that view the author is threatening his audience with eternal condemnation: Run for your lives, because you will perish eternally if you do not finish the race. The opposite is actually true. The author of Hebrews actually assures his readers, whom he calls “holy brethren” (3:1; cf. 10:19) and “beloved” (6:9), of their possession of life that can never be lost (Heb 10:10, 14). While he does warn them, the warning about not finishing the race concerns missing out on becoming Christ’s partners (*metochoi*) in the life to come, not being in His Kingdom. Not all people in the Kingdom will be partners in Christ. That privilege is earned by enduring to the end of the race.

II. TWO WAYS TO VIEW HEBREWS: RUN FOR YOUR ETERNAL LIVES VERSUS RUN TO BECOME CHRIST’S PARTNERS

Schreiner and Caneday, co-authors of *The Race Set Before Us*,¹ construe Hebrews as *running for one’s life* to prevent going to the lake of fire. They view everlasting life as the *prize* for which believers must run. They

¹Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

acknowledge that people often characterize their view as salvation by works, a charge that, in my opinion, is valid.

Throughout this book [*The Race Set Before Us*] we have maintained that we must run to win the prize of eschatological salvation. Those who give up in the race will not inherit the kingdom of God [that is, they will not enter God's kingdom]. Some object to the thesis we advance by claiming that it smacks of works-righteousness.²

The authors admit that their view sounds like obtaining eternal life through righteous human works. They attempt to deflect the works salvation charge by claiming fidelity to the argument of Hebrews:

We reply that *our conception of the race is no different from that of the author of Hebrews*, who exhorts the readers not to “throw away your confidence” since “it will be richly rewarded” (Heb 10:35). The author then says, “You need to persevere in order that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He promised” (Heb 10:36). What is the reward and the promise that is placed before the readers here? The reward is given when Jesus comes to those who live by faith and do not shrink back from their confession (Heb 10:38-39). Hebrews 10:39 clarifies that *the reward is eternal life*: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved” (NIV)...Thus the author summons the readers to belief unto final salvation. If they quit the race at this juncture, they will not be saved.³

The false syllogism below shows their attempt to evade the charge that eternal life comes through works:

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 312ff., emphasis added. Space prohibits rebutting their premises in Hebrews 10. However, cf. Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews, Part 4: The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39,” *BibSac* 145 (October-December 1988): 410-19.

Major Premise: The author of Hebrews did not advocate works salvation.

Minor Premise: *The Race* is faithful to the argument of Hebrews.

Conclusion: *The Race* does not advocate works salvation.

The minor premise is false, thus producing a false conclusion. Schreiner and Caneday misconstrue Hebrews' warnings to eternally secure believers that faithful living is required to receive eternal rewards. They misinterpret it as if it made faithful living a prerequisite to receiving eternal life. The charge of works salvation is a valid complaint against their book.

The Race attaches foreign meanings to rewards language (as if avoiding the lake of fire were a reward). Consider as a test case Heb 12:14: *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*. Schreiner and Caneday's understand it this way:

Nor is growing in grace optional.⁴ The author of Hebrews says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14 NIV). Holiness [in lifestyle, e.g., growing in grace]⁵ is necessary to see God, that is, to experience [that is, to obtain]⁶ eternal life.⁷

That citation has the earmarks of a salvation by works righteousness. At another juncture, Schreiner and

⁴Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 73.

⁵The authors of *The Race* consistently argue that no one who lacks a holy and committed lifestyle will be saved eternally. They do not speak of positional sanctification, but of progressive sanctification.

⁶Schreiner and Caneday do not use *experience* to contrast growing Christians versus stagnated Christians. Rather, they use *experience* to differentiate recipients of eternal life from non-recipients. They view believers experiencing (acquiring) eternal life only after physical life ends. By contrast, no unbeliever will ever experience (acquire) it.

⁷Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 73.

Caneday reinforce the initial impression of salvation by works righteousness:

We are justified in portraying the journey of faith as a marathon race, for the writer of Hebrews thinks of the Christian life as a race in which perseverance is needed. Indeed, in the succeeding verses (Heb 12:3-11) the writer teaches that the Christian life is comparable to the discipline that children receive from their fathers. Such discipline and training is not pleasant but produces the righteousness and holiness without which “no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). Since the writer portrays the Christian life as a race needing gutsy endurance and a training ground in which discipline is meted out, we are correct in saying that obtaining the eschatological prize takes ardent effort. There is no call to passivity here! In order to run the race and fight the fight of faith, we must “strengthen feeble arms and weak knees (Heb 12:12). The race will not be won without the most rigorous training, nor will we complete it without a fierce resolve to shed all that hinders us.”⁸

The co-authors of *The Race* fixate on their idea that eschatological salvation (eternal life) is received only after death and that “obtaining the eschatological prize [eternal life] requires ardent effort.” Schreiner and Caneday fail to note that God’s parental discipline in Hebrews 12 conflicts with their position.

How so? Consider Heb 12:7: *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?* Fathering a son (human procreation) precedes the father’s disciplining that son, as regenerating a son precedes God’s chastening that son. There is symmetry.

Further, Heb 12:5, 7, 8, and 11 each use the noun *chastening* (*paidia*), while Heb 12:6, 7, and 10 each use the cognate verb *chasten* (*paideuō*). Two common words for

⁸Ibid., 313.

child are *pais* and *paidion*. The fact that these words all come from the same root is important. *Chasten* (*paideuō*) and *chastening* (*paidia*) really refer to *child-training*, in other words, *family-discipline*. Through regeneration one enters God's family, and then the Lord uses family-discipline as needed. Schreiner and Caneday fail to recognize that family discipline comes after sonship.

God's Father-to-son relationship with the readers of Hebrews has parallels with human familial relationships. Thus, Heb 12:7 reinforces what 2:11 and 3:1 say:

For both He who sanctifies [Ho hagiāzōn] and those who are sanctified [hoi hagiāzomenoi] are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (2:11, author's translation⁹).

Therefore, holy [hagioi] brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus (3:1 NKJV).¹⁰

Both the words *sanctifies* and *sanctified* in 2:11 come from the Greek verb *hagiāzō* (to sanctify). The word *holy* in 3:1 is from the cognate noun *hagios*. Setting someone apart to God is common to all three uses. Jesus Christ is the Sanctifier: "He who sanctifies." Believers are the sanctified: "those who are sanctified" and "holy [brethren]."

Both passages refer to brethren. Hebrews 2:11 clarifies what the author means by calling his readers *brethren*. Both the Sanctifier (Christ) and the sanctified ones (believers) are of one Father. So believers are Christ's brethren by implication.

Hebrews 3:1 also contains an important clue for 2:11: the timing of regeneration and the timing of positional

⁹The NKJV adds *being* to its translation of the second use of *hagiāzō* in Heb 2:11: *those who are being sanctified*. It views this as progressive sanctification, not positional. Though grammatically possible, context weighs against this view. Believers are God's children, because Christ, the Sanctifier, has positionally sanctified them. Progressive sanctification neither renders people into God's children nor into Christ's brethren. My translation of the second use of *hagiāzō* in 2:11 is *those who are sanctified*.

¹⁰ Emphasis added.

sanctification. The author of Hebrews addresses the readers as *holy* (i.e., sanctified) *brethren*. They were saints and brethren before he wrote.

Furthermore, Heb 13:22 calls the book of Hebrews a *word of exhortation* to brethren. Yet, if the co-authors of *The Race* were right, *brethren* would be an inappropriate way to refer to believers. Yet, Hebrews calls the readers saints and brethren. Schreiner and Caneday's interpretation of Heb 12:14 actually flies in the face of the book.

III. A TEST CASE FOR THE RUN-FOR-YOUR-LIVES VIEW: HEBREWS 12:14

Many verses in Hebrews disprove the run-for-eternal-life view, but a few passages have been suggested as support for that view. Hebrews 12:14 is one such verse.¹¹ It is a good test case.

A. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 12:14

Two topics require attention before embarking on more controversial issues. What is the requirement for seeing the Lord? Is it peace plus holiness or holiness alone? And, what type of holiness is requisite? Is it positional or experiential?

What is required to see the Lord? Before considering points where scholars often disagree, consider a pertinent, but non-controversial, issue of Greek grammar. To what word (or words) does *which* refer? *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without **which** no one will see the Lord.*

English seems to allow options. The first apparent option is: *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without **which** [peace and holiness] no one will see the*

¹¹ Many writers would suggest Heb 6:4-8 and 10:26-31 as support for the run-for-eternal-life view, but much has also been written against that interpretation of those passages. Therefore, it is wise to give attention to Heb 12:14, which has been, until now, somewhat of a sleeper text in the current debate until now.

Lord.”¹² The second option (supported by the Greek) is: “Pursue *peace* with all people, and *holiness*, without *which* [holiness] no one will see the Lord.”

Peace is feminine in Greek; *holiness* is masculine, as is *which*. Therefore, *holiness* (not *peace*) is the stated requirement for seeing the Lord.¹³ As the one necessary precondition, the focal point must be to understand both *holiness* and *seeing the Lord* in the context. Peace, though important, does not receive the same level of emphasis as *holiness* here.

Is positional or experiential holiness required? Some Christians limit the requirement of holiness in Heb 12:14 to positional holiness (often called positional sanctification), the idea that each believer is a saint (*hagios*).¹⁴ If this interpretation were correct, the verse would merely say that all saints will see the Lord, while unbelievers will never do so. The time of this seeing would be in the eschatological future.

Context does not present positional sanctification as sufficient. Unholiness (sin) hinders one from seeing the Lord.¹⁵ Why is not positional sanctification enough?

¹² Joseph Augustus Seiss, *Lectures on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 360, treats both the feminine noun *peace* (*eirēnē*) and the masculine noun *holiness* (*hagiasmos*) as antecedents of the masculine form of *which*. Rather, the Greek text requires that holiness be the only antecedent of *which*.

¹³ Relative pronouns in Greek take different genders depending on the word or words to which they refer. If the relative pronoun (*which*) had been intended to refer both to the feminine noun (*peace*) and to the masculine noun (*holiness*), then the author would have used the neuter form. Greek uses neuter for multi-word antecedent, such as *peace and holiness*. The fact that the author used the masculine form of the relative pronoun points to *holiness* as the antecedent.

¹⁴ The NT often calls believers *saints*. The words *saint* (*hagios*) and *sanctify* (*hagiazō*) come from the same root. Paul even calls the Corinthians saints in a positional sense (1 Cor 1:2; 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13), though their conduct was not saintly. Does Heb 12:14 require *positional sanctification* or *experiential sanctification* (positional sanctification would be an underlying precondition of experiential sanctification)?

¹⁵ Experiential unholiness is a removable and temporary hindrance, as further exposition shows.

The verb, *diōkō* (to pursue) has two objects in v 14: *peace* and *holiness*. The readers are to pursue peace with all.¹⁶ Peace with fellow believers is the priority, but Hebrews would encourage living peaceably with outsiders as well. They are to pursue an uncontentious and unprovocative lifestyle. This is peace at the human level. This is not positional reconciliation, but experiential.

If the peace to be pursued is a peaceable lifestyle, certainly the holiness to be pursued also deals with how one lives. Furthermore, how can a saint (by position) pursue becoming a saint (which is already true of him)? By illustration, is it logical for an American citizen to pursue becoming an American citizen? Is it sensible for saints in Hebrews to pursue becoming saints? The author of Heb 13:22 addresses his entire readership as *brethren*. In turn, Hebrews 2:11 equates brethren and saints: The sanctifier (Christ) and sanctified ones (saints) are of One Father, so the sanctifier calls saints brethren. Saints are Christ's brethren, because God the Father is Father to both Christ and to the saints. What sense would it make for the author (who calls his readers *saints*) to urge them to pursue becoming *saints*? None whatsoever. Context requires holiness in Heb 12:14 to be experiential.

B. RESOLVING CONTROVERSIES IN HEBREWS 12:14

The greatest controversies in this passage are: “when will the Lord be seen?” and “by whom will the Lord be seen?” Important aspects of these vital issues have received scant attention.

When will the Lord be seen? Thomas Hewitt notes that most commentators assume that the time when the Lord will be seen is at the Second Advent. He sets forth an alternative to the default view:

¹⁶ The adjective all (*pas*) is slightly ambiguous, because no noun accompanies it. The options are pursuing peace with *all people*, both believers and unbelievers, or pursuing peace with *all believers*.

The difficulty here, however, is the limitation of the vision [by commentators] to that definite revelation of God, which is the result of Christ's Second Advent, whereas it may also mean an emblematic representation of an innermost vision through intimate personal fellowship with Christ.¹⁷

Hewitt does not expand his case for *seeing the Lord* as “intimate personal fellowship with Christ,” versus a reference to physically seeing Him at a future eschatological event.¹⁸

Hebrews sometimes uses either verb for seeing (*blepō* or *horaō*) in figurative ways:¹⁹

But we see [blepomen, from blepō] Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels...(2:9a).

Hebrews was written more than thirty years after Jesus died and rose. Its author never heard or saw Jesus with physical eyesight.²⁰ Even so, the author includes himself in seeing, by saying *we see Jesus*. This is not seeing with eyes, but intimate personal fellowship with the Lord. Heb 12:14 expresses the desire that readers will walk in fellowship with the Lord.

So we see [blepomen, from blepō] that they [Israel in Moses' day] could not enter in... (3:19).

¹⁷ Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [first series], ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 197.

¹⁸ Hewitt regards the Second Advent as Jesus' next encounter with planet Earth. Actually, the Rapture is the next such event, but my restatement is generic: a future eschatological event.

¹⁹ A few more uses in the book seem figurative, but this is a sufficient sample.

²⁰ Note Heb 2:3: *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began (1) to be spoken by the Lord, and (2) was confirmed to us (3) by those who heard Him?* (emphasis added). Note that the verse does not put the three underlined phrases in chronological order. First, the Lord spoke (1). Second, He was heard by certain people, including His disciples, the apostles (3). Third, the apostles confirmed that word to others, including the author (2). The use of the first person plural (*us*) clarifies that the author received his message through the apostles. He did not hear Jesus personally.

In this passage *see* figuratively means *to understand* or *to know*.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see [blepete, from blepō] the Day approaching (10:25).

Once again, the readers should recognize that judgment day was near for Jerusalem, when Roman armies would surround it in their time. They were to know that God would not deliver Jerusalem from the siege of AD 70.²¹ It is a matter of knowing, not seeing.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see [idein, from horaō] death...(11:5).

By definition, when a person dies, he does not see. One does not literally see his own death. Once death ends eyesight, by what means will a person view his death? The passage affirms that Enoch was spared from experiencing death. *See* is used figuratively for *experiencing*.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen [idontes, from horaō] them afar off...(11:13).

The promises refer to God fulfilling His unconditional covenants with Israel during the Millennium. Certainly, OT saints could not see the Millennial Kingdom with literal eyes. The idea is that they knew the certainty that God would fulfill His promises to them personally. The only way God could keep the promise was through resurrection and the granting of everlasting life.²² They saw the future fulfillment through the eyes of faith.

²¹ Editor's note: Another possibility is the Day (*hēmera*) here refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:13; 4:3; 5:5).

²² For example, note Gen 13:14-15: "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants [seed] forever.'" God did not merely promise the land to Abram's seed forever, but to Abram also. Apart from resurrection and the granting of everlasting life, it would be a hollow promise. Hebrews 11:17-19 comments upon Genesis 22, saying that

By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing [horōn, from horaō] Him who is invisible (11:27).

Moses' endurance developed from him *seeing* the invisible God. The expression refers to Moses' certainty that the God who spoke to Him is real, though invisible. Moses saw Him who cannot be seen (not a *seeing* with the eyes).

Thus, Heb 2:9; 3:19; 10:25; 11:5, 13, 27 all use *see* in a figurative sense; these people saw truth with the eyes of faith, not with literal eyes. The time frame for this figurative seeing is before death, while the person is living. Remember that Hewitt maintains that commentators straitjacket *will see the Lord* by uncritically assuming reference to an eschatologically future event.²³ Yet, an in-time interpretation of the phrase *will see the Lord* (in this life) is quite possible. Hewitt observes:

The difficulty here, however, is the limitation of the vision [by commentators] to that definite revelation of God, which is the result of Christ's Second Advent, whereas it may also mean an emblematic representation of an innermost vision through intimate personal fellowship with Christ.²⁴

Hewitt decries how interpreters only imagine one time when the Lord will be seen: the eschatological future. He

Abraham believed in resurrection. This is eminently reasonable, since Gen 15:13-16 says the fulfillment of the promises would be at least 400 years future, long after Abram's death: "Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'" Abram knew that resurrection was crucial to God's keeping His promise.

²³ We previously considered Hewitt's observation. See n 17.

²⁴ Hewitt, *Hebrews*, 197. Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 324; Donald Guthrie, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [second series], ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 257.

opens our eyes (so to speak) to the possibility of seeing the Lord now in the sense of *intimate personal fellowship with Christ*. Paraphrasing the verse may illustrate that the future tense need not talk about the eschatological future:

Without holiness, no one will have fellowship with the Lord.

Fellowship with the Lord requires walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and confessing one's sins (1 John 1:9). "Without holiness, no one will have fellowship with the Lord." The future tense often refers to events of the near future on earth. Hewitt says that interpreters should not limit seeing to physical sight. Neither should they limit the future tense to the time of the eschatological future.

Zane Hodges was an interpreter who did not come under the critique of Thomas Hewitt. Hodges did not limit the passage to the eschatological future:

Since no sin can stand in God's presence, Christians must—and will be—sinless when they see the Lord (cf. 1 John 3:3). That realization offers motivation for pursuing holiness here and now. But the author may also have had in mind the thought that *one's perception of God even now is conditioned by his real measure of holiness* (cf. Matt. 5:8).²⁵

Course notes for Hodges's class in Hebrews show that he did not limit seeing to physical sight when entering the Lord's presence. Observe his second point:

Its importance [i.e., the importance of holiness] is attested by the fact that those who see God must have it:

All Christians will have it at the moment
when Christ comes: 1 John 3:2.

²⁵ Zane C. Hodges, s.v. "Hebrews" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 810, emphasis added.

But the ancient world made much of the
 “vision” of God.
 Such spiritual *seeing* required purity.²⁶

Hodges refers to *the vision of God* as *spiritual sight* and regards it as an important part of the believer’s Christian walk while on earth.

Holiness will be necessary when we come into His presence at the *Bēma* (after this life) and it is prerequisite to having fellowship with the Lord (during this life). However, no one-to-one correspondence exists between these two issues. All believers, even those who fail to see the Lord in this life, will see Him in the next.

For however long a believer allows himself to slide into unholiness (sin), he precludes having fellowship with the Lord. However, even the believer who lives in long-term carnality will be cleansed by the Lord and will see Him in eternity. Furthermore, 1 John 1:9 offers cleansing to the believer aware of sin in his life, so that he can see the Lord in this life. In other words, during a believer’s lifetime, sin can prevent him from seeing the Lord with spiritual sight, but cannot prevent seeing Him in eternity.

This is crucial. Interpreters who say that living an unholy lifestyle absolutely precludes one from ever seeing the Lord simply do not *see* what this passage asserts. They have not *seen* their way past the artificial limitation which Thomas Hewitt highlights.

The first of two main questions is *when will the Lord be seen?* Now that it is answered, the second question deserves attention.

By whom will the Lord be seen? Assumptions cloud understanding of texts. Most read Heb 12:14 as if *you* appeared in the second clause. It does not, but the following is how people understand the verse:

²⁶ Zane C. Hodges, “Class Notes: Greek 225: The Epistle to the Hebrews,” Spring Semester 1986, 231. That was the last time he taught the course at Dallas Theological Seminary before retiring.

[You] pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which **you** will not see the Lord.

In other words, most interpret this as if Hebrews' exclusive point were to tell the readers how to live so that they themselves would see the Lord. Brashly stated, *Straighten up, so that you will see the Lord*. Rather, within the flow of Hebrews, it should be, *Pursue holiness, so that others (as well as you) will see the Lord [i.e., will have fellowship with Him]*.

William Lane insightfully speaks of Hebrews wanting others to be influenced by believers' holiness,

They are to participate in the process of being made holy by cultivating a life-style that is pleasing to God. When the preacher [the writer of Hebrews] instructs his friends to "pursue the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" he is urging them to reflect the essential quality of the Father so that *a pagan society will recognize in them the family likeness!*²⁷

Lane is on the right track, but his statement requires refinement. He recognizes that personal holiness affects others. Yes, it can even influence unbelievers, something the author of Hebrews would not deny. However, the effect on outsiders is not the focal point of Hebrews. The focus is upon fellow believers in the congregation who are vulnerable to dropping out. Consider the following:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12-13).

By way of illustration, assume that the congregation to which Hebrews is written has fifty members. The word *you* would address all fifty, but *any of you* would refer to a smaller number who had serious spiritual problems that,

²⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 167, emphasis added.

left unchecked, would lead to defecting from the Lord. The author wants believers to minister to each other, especially to those who might fall away.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:24-25).

Once again, the focus is upon ministering to other believers within the congregation:

Pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright (Heb 12:14-16).

Hebrews 12 urges those in the congregation to minister to their fellow believers. Lane properly notes that personal holiness is not only for the good of the individual, but also for those who know him. It is not incidental that the writer said *no one*, rather than *you will not*. *Pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*.

Interestingly, John MacArthur expresses the same view as Lane. Unfortunately, he also characterizes it as ministry to unbelievers outside, rather than to fellow believers in the congregation. However, he is right in seeing the effect of holiness upon others:

The most difficult part of the verse is to interpret *without which no one will see the Lord*. I believe the reference is to unbelievers who observe our pursuit of peace and holiness, without which they would not be drawn to accept Christ themselves. The passage does not read “without which you will not see the Lord,” but *without which no one will see the Lord*. In other words, when unbelievers see a Christian’s

peacefulness and holiness, they are attracted to the Lord. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). And He prayed to His Father that “they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me” (John 17:21). Our love for each other is a testimony to the Father and to the Son. It is a means of drawing people to Christ, apart from whom *no one will see the Lord*. As we run the race, leaving a straight path, showing love to men by peacemaking, and showing love to God by holiness, people will see the Lord.²⁸

Other than insisting that Hebrews focuses on holiness as a way to minister to unbelievers, he is on the right track. Otherwise, this is a fine quote.

MacArthur rightly says that people will see the Lord during this life (when unbelievers respond to holiness in a Christian’s life by believing in Christ). Thus, MacArthur agrees with the timing of people’s seeing the Lord (as during their lifetime on earth) and that people other than the ones manifesting holiness are the ones who will come to see the Lord.

IV. CONCLUSION

The combined answer to the questions “When will people see the Lord?” and “Who is it that will see the Lord?” is that holiness in the life of one believer can draw other believers to a closer walk with the Lord (e.g., spiritual vision of the Lord) in time. Holiness in the lives of believers may even attract unbelievers to Christ.

Eric Liddell refused to run his best event (the 100 meter race) at the 1924 Paris Olympics because it was on a Sunday. He did not understand liberty and did not

²⁸ John F. MacArthur, s.v. “Hebrews” in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 405-406, emphasis his.

know that the Church is not under Israel's rules, but he conducted his life to please the Lord. Since he could not run the 100 meter race, he was allowed to run the 400 meter race (not his best event). As he ran, he held a piece of paper with 1 Sam 2:30, "Those who honour me I will honour" (KJV). Not only did he win, but set a world record. Eric Liddell's courage and desire to please the Lord with holiness motivated many believers to seek a closer walk with the Lord. This powerful message caused the movie *Chariots of Fire* to become a major hit.

How we live our lives can help other believers see the Lord more clearly. Therefore, may each of us pursue holiness, in part, to help other believers see the Lord!

INHERITANCE IN HEBREWS REQUIRES OBEDIENCE

RENÉ A. LÓPEZ

I. INTRODUCTION

Each year at the same time, the State Fair of Texas comes to Dallas. To many this is like a temporary heaven on earth. Good food, clean fun, and a great family time are available to those who have a ticket to get in. Often individuals and organizations will purchase a block of tickets to give away to others for free. Those who receive a free ticket are aware that even though the ticket cost them nothing, the giver has paid the cost.

There are many things to do once a person enters the fair: games, animal shows, rides, food, etc. All these activities are available to any ticket holder, though some of them are not covered by the entry ticket and must be purchased. Let's say a man named Joe has received a free ticket to the fair. He is assured entry to the fair and to participation in many of the activities in the fair. But whether or not Joe is able to participate in activities not covered by his free ticket is up to him. If he wants food, beverage, souvenirs, etc., he must purchase those things himself. Therefore, Joe must have earned his own money in order to participate in extra activities not covered by the free ticket.¹

Eternal life is like a free ticket to enter the Fair. Eternal life is available to those who believe in Jesus for it. Although the ticket to receive eternal life is free, it cost Jesus His life. One is guaranteed free entrance into the Kingdom by simple faith in Christ. However, the amount

¹This illustration is drawn from *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 256-57.

that a Christian is able to enjoy once in the Kingdom will depend on the amount of work done while on earth prior to entrance. In other words, although Kingdom entrance comes as a free gift to all who simply believe in Jesus for eternal life, *inheritance* in the Kingdom to rule with Christ and receive other blessings depends on perseverance in obedience now. This seems to be how the writer of Hebrews uses the concept of inheritance.

The terms *klēronomos*, *klēronomeō*, or *klēronomia* appear nine times in the Book of Hebrews.² Unlike other passages (e.g., Mark 10:17; Acts 20:32 and 26:18), Hebrews predicates obedience as a condition to qualify as an “heir” or to “inherit.”³ This paper will examine five areas related to this use of inheritance: Jesus’ obedience as the pattern for inheriting, imitate the faithful in order to inherit, eternal inheritance based on obedience, examples of inheriting blessings, and losing one’s inheritance does not mean losing eternal life.

²Hebrews 1:2, 4; 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:7-8; 12:17.

³The majority of commentators do not agree with my view of inheritance in Hebrews as a future reward to rule in the Kingdom based on present obedience. Most of them believe inheritance in Hebrews refers to the final phase of “salvation.” Only those who prove the genuineness of their faith by persevering in obedience will attain “final salvation.” See, for example, Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 46; Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1983), 79-80; Marcus Dods, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 4 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897–1910; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 258; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC, ed. A. Plummer, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 16-18; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 65, 220-21, 290-94. This, however, does not mean the majority of commentators are correct. Sound exegesis and careful analysis must be the final arbiter.

II. JESUS' OBEDIENCE AS THE PATTERN FOR INHERITING

In Heb 1:2, 4, and 14, Jesus, as God's Son, was "appointed heir of all things...having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." One would think that Christ by simple ontological status (as God) would be the heir of all things. However these verses do not convey this sense. In Heb 1:2, the writer uses the verb *ethēke*, which means to "put or place in a particular location."⁴ This echoes a Davidic enthronement Psalm (2:6-9) where God the Father "appointed [the Messiah] heir of all things" (*klēronomon pantōn*) by granting Him the right to rule over the nations of the earth.⁵ In v 4 the verb *klēronomeō* signifies an active taking of a possession and the granting of a new status (of exaltation)⁶ indicated by Christ's new name (*onoma*).⁷ To *inherit* the *name* of *son* refers to an enthronement ceremony that occurred at Jesus' resurrection by which He would be heir of all (see Matt 28:18 [cf. John 20:28-31]; Acts 2:24, 32, 36; 13:33; cf. Ps 2:7-8).⁸

⁴Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1003.

⁵Kent, *Hebrews*, 36. See also 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps 89:26-27; and Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, "The Warning Passages in Hebrews—Part 1: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5–2:5," *BibSac* 148 (January–March 1988), 83-84.

⁶Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 106.

⁷Robert Govett concurs with this (*Christ Superior to Angels, Moses, Aaron: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: James Nisbet, 1884; repr., Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1981], 10).

⁸Oberholtzer says, "Hebrews 1:4 alludes to this point of adoption by using the perfect tense for the Son's inheritance (*keklēronomēken*) of a more excellent name, the title 'Son.' The official title of 'Son' was bestowed after Christ's resurrection, ascension, and positioning at the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3). This is surely the occasion to which the writer referred in 5:5-6, which, by quoting both Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4, associates the high priesthood with this event. It should be clarified that though Christ received His royal dignity through the title 'Son' on the day

Hence Erich Gräßer suggests that the Son's inheritance of all was based on earning at His resurrection a better name than was attained in the ceremonial enthronement act (vv 5-14).⁹

It is important to note the pattern which runs through the rest of the book that the Son *inherited* the right to rule (1:6-9) because He "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (1:9a). That is why the author of Hebrews states that Christ inherited a better name, the Son (vv 4- 5) and earned the right to rule the earth (vv 6-9; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:6-9; 8:4-6).¹⁰ Homer A. Kent, Jr. correctly captured the meaning of the participle *genomenos* in v 4:

Having become (*genomenos*) so much better indicates that it is the incarnate Christ in view, for in His preexistent deity there was no development involved. Our author is about to explain, however, that by incarnation Christ became for a time lower than the angels (2:9). Nevertheless, His subsequent exaltation elevated Him to the highest place, far above the angelic beings. The word *inherited* also confirms the view that the exaltation following His earthly task is what the author means (cf. Phil 2:9).¹¹

of His enthronement, He has not yet received His millennial kingdom over which He will rule (Heb 2:8). The final fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant will be in the person of Jesus Christ as King" ("Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews," 85).

⁹ Erich Gräßer said, "Die Inklusion *keklēronomēken onoma* er hat einen Namem geerbt V4 und die Ausgestaltung dieser Belehnung in Form eines feierlichen Inthronisationsaktes V5–14 entscheiden die Datumsfrage: Durch die *Erhöhung* wurde der Sohn zum Erben des Alls eingesetzt" (*An Die Hebräer*, EKKNT, ed. Nobert Brox et al. [Zürich: Bezinger, 1990], 58).

¹⁰ In Ps 8:4–8 the words "all things under his feet" refers to all things on earth. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith That Endures: The Book of Hebrews Applied to the Real Issues of Life* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), 39-40, 47-48.

¹¹ Kent, *Hebrews*, 39. Westcott views the "heirship of 'the Son'" as being realized by the *incarnate Son* (v 4) in His humanity (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Macmillan Publishers, 1889; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980], 8).

In other words, Jesus earned the right to rule because He obeyed, loving righteousness and hating iniquity. Dillow also notes that Jesus inherited (by His earthly work) the superior name “Son” by persevering in obedience:

He achieved this inheritance by perseverance in suffering (Heb. 2:10; Phil. 2:9-11). Similarly, His companions (Heb. 1:9; Gk. *metochoi*) will “inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14) in the same way.¹²

Believers can share in that future glory (i.e., inheritance salvation) only by remaining faithful to the end.¹³ If they do, they will obtain an amazing privilege, ruling with the Son of God in His Kingdom.¹⁴

¹² Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 82. See other passages denoting obedience required to inherit a position as a “companion” or “partaker” (*metochos*) to rule: Heb 3:1, 14; 12:8; cf. 6:12; 10:35-36; 12:17). G. H. Lang also understands inheriting salvation in Hebrews as a future possession for the faithful (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers* [London: The Paternoster Press, 1951], 43-44). See also Govett, *Hebrews*, 28.

¹³ Oberholtzer also observes that OT “salvation” commonly refers to the “Lord’s deliverance of His people from their enemies or trouble. Because of the extensive use of references from the Psalms in Hebrews, the meaning of *sōtēria* in v 14 requires this OT concept” (“Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews,” 92). The Psalms usually refer to salvation as God’s delivering Israel from their enemies to enjoy His blessings (e.g., Ps 3:2, 8; 17:13; 34:19; 37:39; 44:4-8; 69:29-33; 118:14-25; 140:6-8; 144:9-11). Hence Oberholtzer concludes, “Therefore the meaning of salvation in Hebrews 1:14 must be related to deliverance from the enemies of God in His kingdom rule as defined by the six Psalms quoted in Hebrews 1:5-13...As ‘companions’ (v. 9), the readers will have a role in this deliverance or *sōtēria* [salvation] over the Lord’s enemies and will participate in the millennial kingdom” (“Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews,” 92). The seven places where the term *salvation* appears in Hebrews (Heb 1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7) show it is not used as a synonym for eternal life, or for what a person receives upon faith in Christ for justification (cf. John 3:16-18; 5:24; 6:40-47; Rom 3:21-4:25). That is, since the writer of Hebrews predicates receiving “eternal salvation” based on obedience (5:8-9) and inheriting salvation by seeking after righteousness and hating iniquity (1:4-14), the term *salvation* means more than merely being justified (i.e., receiving “eternal life”).

¹⁴ Oberholtzer says, “The term *metochous* is best understood as referring to those who will be partners of Christ the King in His earthly millennial rule...*Metochoi* is used in Hebrews as a direct reference to Christians (3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8)” (“Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews,” 89-90). Zane C. Hodges also interprets Jesus’ joy conditioned on practicing righteousness that is also available to those who desire to become His *metochoi* (“Hebrews,”

Interestingly, all the concepts present in Heb 1:4–2:5 regarding “rule,” “salvation,” “obedience,” “rewards,” “angels,” “future glory,” and “future resurrection” also appear in other NT passages that refer to future rewards dispensed at Jesus’ return with His angels. Hence, those who will inherit *salvation* (or *deliverance*) are those who will inherit the right to rule (based on present suffering now), which will mean they have finally been delivered from their enemies (cf. 1:13–2:5; cf. Matt 16:25–27; Mark 8:35–38; Luke 9:23–26; cf. Rev 2:25–27).

Only after Christ’s resurrection was He *given* (*edothē*) “all authority...in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). Only after Jesus’ resurrection did God the Father place Him at His right hand, and made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:31–36). Jesus (as the second Adam, *not* as God) was “given” authority and “was made” Lord and Christ. He received all this because of His obedience and sacrifice. Thus, just as Christ’s authority to rule came after persevering in obedience until death and was received upon His resurrection, those believers who likewise persevere in obedience will, after their resurrections, receive power to rule with Him (see 2 Cor 5:9–10; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25–27).

The writer’s illustration of Jesus’ inheritance clearly sets the pattern for how the readers should interpret the term *inheritance* in the rest of the book of Hebrews. As Jesus earned the right to receive a name and the right to rule because of His faithfulness, believers who follow Him will have to persevere likewise in faithfulness if they desire to partake in this inheritance with Him as His partners (*metochoi*), according to Heb 1:9; 3:1, 14.

III. IMITATE THE FAITHFUL IN ORDER TO INHERIT

In Heb 6:12, the author calls all believers to “not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” This concept is fully developed in Hebrews 11. This inheritance based on obedience has many promises associated with it, including rest, ruling with Christ, special blessings, a special measure of joy, and special fellowship (cf. 7:6; 8:6; 11:13, 17, 33).

Yet these promises derive from the singular “promise” (vv 13-14, 17)—God’s promise to bless Abraham in Gen 22:17 (cf. 12:2) by multiplying his seed, which ultimately envisaged future dominion over all nations (see Heb 11:13, 17, 33). Until Abraham obeyed God by offering Isaac (Gen 22:1-16), in whom the promise of receiving a progeny depended, God did not guarantee Abraham that the Messiah would come through Isaac (Gen 12:3; 22:18; cf. Gal 3:16; Heb 6:18–7:28).¹⁵ Abraham inherited the promises through faith and obedience as indicated in Gen 22:1-16 and Heb 11:17, 33.¹⁶ This inheritance is not soteriological but is a reward, based on perseverance, which includes, among other things, ruling with Christ in His Kingdom.

¹⁵ Akin to this author’s view is that of F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 153, 155. Although Abraham was justified in Gen 15:6, this did not guarantee that God would bless him with a progeny if he did not obey. Theoretically, if Abraham did not obey God, the Lord could have found someone else by whom He would bring about a nation by which Messiah would come. Obviously, since God is sovereign and knows all things, past, present, and future, He is able to promise confidently that Abraham would be that man by whom He would bless all the nations as early as Genesis 12 (cf. 15:7-21; 17:1-27). The tension of the unconditional and conditional promise is resolved by viewing it from the divine angle without discarding the exegetical and grammatical fact that a condition was indeed involved in further blessings, as Gen 22:1-18 illustrates.

¹⁶ Guthrie said, “*Abraham, having patiently endured* clearly refers to the Isaac trial, as a result of which he *obtained the promise*. There is an echo back to verse 12. Abraham is an example *par excellence* of one who gained his inheritance by faith and patience. Even if the readers could think of no other example, Abraham would admirably illustrate the writer’s meaning” (*Hebrews*, 150, italics original).

Thus Abraham becomes (Heb 6:13-15) another example of what the writer desires the Hebrew readers to follow.¹⁷ Immediately before he mentions Abraham in Hebrews 6, the writer emphasizes the need for faithful obedience until the end in order to inherit the promises:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb 6:11-12).

Works of obedience were clearly the condition, not the evidence, necessary to inherit these promises for which the readers should strive. These Hebrews were in danger of forfeiting their inheritance by returning to Judaism's "dead works" of the law (see Heb 3:1-14; 6:1; 9:14; 10:25; 11). To inherit the promises they had to continue to the end of their lives in faithful obedience to God.

IV. ETERNAL INHERITANCE BASED ON OBEDIENCE

Hebrews 9:15 states that believers who participate in the "new covenant" are the recipients "who are called" to "receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Although this verse does not state immediately how the recipients will obtain the eternal inheritance, it is verified in the previous verse and elsewhere in Hebrews.

J. Paul Tanner notes how the previous verse (v 14) clarifies contextually that the believer's faithful service defines this inheritance:

The author has just mentioned "serving the living God" in v 14 (which looks at our priestly service now enhanced by a cleansed conscience). The idea of the tabernacle-house (suggesting priestly service) was expressed in 3:6 as a conditional

¹⁷ This is seen through the explanatory conjunction *gar* ("for") in v 13 that illustrates vividly how this looks through Abraham's epic act of obedience.

matter. Proper “priestly service” is a prerequisite for this inheritance.¹⁸

Furthermore, Tanner also notes correctly that the entire book of Hebrews uses inheritance as a “conditional matter”:

A study of the word group related to *inheritance* (*klēronomias*, used eight times: 1:2, 14; 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:7, 8; 12:17) suggests that the *inheritance* is a conditional matter related to faithfulness. This is highlighted in 6:12 where the author tells his audience that they could not be sluggish if they hoped to *inherit the promises* but must have faith and patience. Thus faith and patience (i.e., patient endurance) are prerequisites for inheritance (cf. 10:36).

The appropriation by faith of Christ’s sacrifice grants us eternal redemption. In addition to this, believers can also have eternal inheritance, provided they exercise faith, endure the trials and difficulties of their earthly pilgrimage, and faithfully render their priestly service. Obtaining this eternal inheritance is at the heart of what it means to “enter His rest” (cf. 4:1-11).¹⁹

Dillow also suggests, “It is by ‘faith and patience’ (Heb. 6:12) and ‘holding firm to the end’ (Heb. 3:14) that we ‘inherit what has been promised.’”²⁰ He believes that though in Hebrews the promise appears to refer to justification by faith, the author’s warning (9:14) seems to point one back to 4:1 where the promise of rest remains in view.²¹ These Hebrew readers had to remain obedient to the end of their lives in order to enter this rest, the rest of being Christ’s partners in His Kingdom. Zane C. Hodges also concludes:

¹⁸ J. Paul Tanner, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, vol. 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1067.

¹⁹ Ibid. Also see Hodges, “Hebrews,” 788.

²⁰ Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 83. (See also Lang, *Hebrews*, 148.)

²¹ Ibid.

The author was here perhaps countering the appeal of the sectarians, or others, to the “guilt feelings” of those Jewish Christians who must often have been charged with deserting their ancestral faith. But the blood of Christ ought to quiet their consciences permanently and lead them to pursue the “eternal inheritance” which the New-Covenant relationship brought them. Of course the writer meant here as elsewhere that it is only “through faith and patience” that his readers could “inherit what has been promised” (6:12); but if they would rest their consciences at the Cross, they could pursue this heirship undistractedly.²²

Evidence in the immediate and overall context of the book argues for interpreting “eternal inheritance” as something believers attain by obedience. Those who are called “to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” are the ones called “to rule in the future eternal land promise” specified throughout the entire epistle (cf. 1:2–2:8; 3:1–4:12; 9:12–16; 11; 12–13).²³

V. EXAMPLES OF INHERITING BLESSINGS

In Heb 11:7–8, the writer illustrates how faith and obedience worked together to move two OT saints, Noah and Abraham, to act faithfully and thereby receive an inheritance. This inheritance is defined as the land of promise and “the city...whose builder and maker is God” in vv 9–10 (cf. Heb 11:15). Hence Walter Kaiser stresses that the inheritance of Heb 11:15 refers to a “firm possession of the land as Heb 11:9 most assuredly asserts.”²⁴

²² Hodges, “Hebrews,” 802.

²³ Referring also to this eternal promise as the land promise is Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 169.

²⁴ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 169. Noting the land promise as well, Dillow sees the meaning of Heb 11:7–9, 13 as the

Noah acted in obedience by preparing “an ark for salvation” that physically saved his family from drowning in the flood. Thus he inherited a new world after the flood subsided. He is an example of how such obedience will allow faithful believers to receive an inheritance in the new world to come. The idea of inheritance as a reward to rule in the new world is what the Hebrew writer illustrated already through Christ at the beginning of the book (cf. 1:2-14). It appears that Noah was already a believer. Hence the phrase “heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” does not refer to his becoming a believer. Tanner also acknowledges this point and more:

This does not mean that his obedience gained him a righteous standing with God. Like Abraham, God’s righteousness could be secured only by faith (Gen 15:6). Genesis 6:9 bears witness that Noah was already a righteous man before he ever built the ark, and (like Enoch) he walked with God. So Noah already had the “righteousness according to faith.” But his faithful obedience in building the ark enabled him to also become an “heir,” that is, an inheritor. This same Greek word (*klēronomos*) was used in Heb 1:2 of Christ, the heir of all things. Furthermore use of this term (and related verbal form) in 6:12, 17 reminds us that Christians become heirs with Christ as a result of a life of enduring faith (cf. Titus 3:7). The idea of becoming an “heir” complements what the author had said about rewards in v 6 [i.e., Heb 11:6].²⁵

Lang also concludes,

inheritance indicated in Heb 9:15: “It appears to have a similar meaning in Heb 11:9, 13 when it is used of the land promises to the patriarchs. They too were to remain faithful to the end of life, and in so doing, they entered into the rest and will one day possess the land. The inheritance should take the meaning it takes elsewhere in Hebrews—ownership of the millennial land of Canaan, the future reign of the servant kings, joint rulership with Messiah in the heavenly country, the millennial land of Palestine” (*Reign of the Servant Kings*, 83).

²⁵Tanner, “Hebrews,” 1080.

This was not the imputed righteousness, but his own personal right practice. God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (Gen. 18:25). But so to act, so to walk with God, against the universal opposition, was proof of FAITH, faith further displayed by building the ark.²⁶

As Noah's faith manifested itself in obedience, so Abraham's faith did likewise, and he was rewarded with the "promise of the inheritance," not as an incentive to obey, but because he did obey.²⁷

Hodges captures the intent of the writer of Hebrews in using Abraham's faithfulness as an illustration to motivate his readers to obedience:

That the readers should look forward to "the world to come" and treat their present experience as a pilgrimage is a lesson enforced by the life of **Abraham**. This great patriarch lived **like a stranger** in a land **he would later receive as his inheritance**. So also would the readers inherit if they, like this forefather, kept **looking forward to the city with foundations**, a reference to the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21:2, 9-27).²⁸

To receive this inheritance (*klēronomia*) requires more than simply believing in Jesus Christ. Faithfulness is also necessary. By illustrating the obedience of Noah and Abraham, the writer wanted to emphasize a point to encourage the readers to act faithfully and not abandon their faith. Life deals everyone hard blows. It is at these times that we must look upon these faithful examples

²⁶ Lang, *Hebrews*, 213.

²⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 290, 292. Noah actually inherited the new world after the wicked were removed. Abraham, because of his faithful expectation of what lay ahead, will one day receive a world to come whose city is not made with human hands (Heb 11:10). Likewise, the readers of Hebrews would, if they remained faithful, receive the inheritance of "the world to come" (*tēn oikoumenēn tēn mellousan*, Heb 2:5). See Hodges, "Hebrews," 808.

²⁸ Hodges, "Hebrews," 808.

recorded for us and not lose heart, but persevere in order to inherit the promises in the world to come.

VI. LOSING INHERITANCE DOES NOT MEAN LOSING ETERNAL LIFE

Hebrews 12:16-17 presents the account in Gen 27:34-41 where Esau lost his “blessing” of firstborn inheritance rights to his brother Jacob:

...lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

To attain this inheritance Esau had to remain faithful and not be persuaded by any temptation. Just because Esau lost his inheritance does not mean he lost eternal life (i.e., justification). The idea that one could lose eternal life goes against the whole tenor of Scripture (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40-47; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Rom 3:21–4:25; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Rev 22:17), and against the message of the epistle. Nor does it fit the analogy of father and son used by the writer.

Abraham knew of the coming Seed, as his Savior, which is what he believed in order to be justified (see Gen 12:3; 15:6; 22:18; cf. John 8:56; Gal 3:16). So, it would be absurd to think that Esau, his grandson, did not know of this message. Whether Esau believed or rejected this message is not directly stated in Scripture. Yet it is highly probable that he believed this message, since throughout the epistle the writer consistently illustrates believers, not unbelievers, as those who could lose their inheritance by persistent disobedience.

Perhaps the writer wanted to illustrate that Esau’s organic relationship as a son was analogous to his justification status. If this was the case, Esau did not lose his

relationship as Isaac's son but only his father's blessing. This seems to be what the writer wanted to illustrate through this passage. That is, that he did not receive his blessings because of disobedience. As Erich Sauer concludes,

Hebrews does not speak about the birthright of Esau in order to show the glories of the church but in order to give a warning...Doubtless, birthright is not identical with sonship. Esau remained Isaac's son even after he had rejected his birthright. In fact, he received, in spite of his failure, a kind of secondary blessing (Gen. 27:38, 40b)...But nevertheless he suffered an immense loss."²⁹

This inheritance is conditioned on faithful perseverance to the end as evidenced in the entire book of Hebrews.

We should all heed the writer's advice in being careful *not to forfeit our future inheritance* called "rest" elsewhere (cf. Heb 4:1, 8-10; cf. Deut 3:18-20; 12:9-11)³⁰ and *not* follow Esau.

²⁹ Erich Sauer, *In the Arena of Faith: A Call to a Consecrated Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 152-53. Concurring with Sauer, Dillow notes, "Esau forfeited his inheritance, but he was still Isaac's son. He did not forfeit his relationship to his father. Furthermore, at the end of his life Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau regarding their future (Heb. 11:20)...A Christian can deny his inheritance rights. This should not come as a surprise because the inheritance in the OT could be forfeited through disobedience. This fact surely informed the New Testament writers! While this is not the same as losing one's justification, the consequences for eternity are serious" (*Reign of the Servant Kings*, 69). Esau's one-time example of forfeiting his birthright should not be pressed to imply the Hebrews could lose their future rewards by ceasing to follow Christ once, since the entire letter lays emphasis on remaining faithful to the end of one's life by not abandoning the church.

³⁰ See Hodges, "Hebrews," 788; Tanner, "Hebrews," 1090.

VII. CONCLUSION

After looking at each occurrence of the terms *klēronomos*, *klēronomeō*, and *klēronomia* in the book of Hebrews, it appears that they refer to believers who may or may not obtain future blessings associated with being Christ's partners in the life to come. The warning passages do not warn of the forfeiture of justification, which is impossible, but rather of the loss of the inheritance of ruling with Christ. J. Dwight Pentecost says it this way:

These exhortations are coupled with warnings about what they would forfeit if they did not continue to walk by faith in patient endurance—not the loss of salvation, but the loss of blessings [termed “inheritance”] that flow from that salvation.³¹

In Hebrews, to inherit Kingdom promises requires obedience. Therefore let us persevere in faithful obedience so that we may be privileged to rule with Christ in His Kingdom and to be partakers with Him of blessings unimaginable!

³¹ Pentecost, *Faith That Endures*, viii.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS BEEN REVEALED TO MEN: ROMANS 3:21-31

ZANE C. HODGES¹

I. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AVAILABLE BY FAITH: ROMANS 3:21-22a

3:21-22a. But now God's righteousness apart from the law has been manifested, borne witness to by the law and the prophets, that is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, *which is* for all and *is* upon all who believe.

The initial word in the Greek of the new unit (*nuni* = **now**) is emphatic. [The English word **but** translates the *second* word: *de*.] The emphasis serves to call attention to the new consideration that, despite human *unrighteousness*, God has another kind of **righteousness** that is available to mankind. This *righteousness* is testified to (**borne witness to**) **by the law and the prophets**, the very same Scriptural witnesses that Paul has just cited as utterly condemning man for his sinfulness (3:10-20).

In the major section starting at 1:18, Paul began by declaring the wrath of God to be revealed (*apokaluptetai*) from heaven. The material up to 3:20, in effect, has justified that wrath. Now, however, something else is declared to be "revealed" (*pephanerōtai*), but *this* manifestation is not one of *wrath*, but rather of *righteousness*. Furthermore, this revelation is not to be discerned from human experience,

¹When he went to be with the Lord in November of 2008, Hodges had completed a commentary on Romans through the middle of Chap. 14. GES has completed the commentary and is in the final stages of editing it. Our goal is to have it in print by the April 2011 GES Annual Conference. This article is pulled directly from that commentary.

as was the case with wrath (cf. 1:19-32). Instead it is a matter that God has communicated in His inspired word, namely, *the law and the prophets*. Unlike the revelation of wrath that can be deduced from visible phenomena, mankind *must be told* about this new kind of *righteousness*.

As a result, God's righteousness about which Paul is now speaking is a matter of **faith**. Hence, after mentioning this *righteousness*, Paul goes on immediately to define it more precisely: **that is [= *de*], God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ**. No human mind would or could have imagined such a righteousness had it not been disclosed in Scripture.

Thus justification by faith is not at all a human idea, but a divine idea! The history of the interpretation of Romans, right up to our modern day, shows all too clearly how foreign this concept is to the heart and mind of man. Were it not in Scripture, it would have to be dismissed as a mere fantasy. Indeed many commentators have dismissed it that way, not in so many words, but by redefining Paul's concept so as to make it congenial to human thought. Those writers, for example, who take 2:13 as if it somehow represented a factual reality, exemplify this very tendency. It is striking, therefore, that God chose for the exposition of this truth a convert whose unsaved mentality was its direct opposite, the relentless Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus!

But not only is this righteousness one that comes *through faith in Jesus Christ*, it is also one whose potential scope is universal so that it is **for all**. The Greek of this phrase is *eis pantas*, which of course in this context means *for all*, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. It has the same reference as the phrase "all the world" in 3:19. This is, in fact, a righteousness offered by the same God with whom "there is no partiality" (cf. 2:11). The *all* in *for all* is likewise identical with the "all" who "have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (3:23).

Regrettably, the standard modern critical editions of the Greek NT of Rom 3:22 drop the immediately following

words, *kai epi pantas* (**and upon all**), due to their omission by the old Egyptian manuscripts. But this is a mere error of homoioteleuton in which the scribe's eye has slipped from the first *pantas* to the second *pantas*, omitting the words in between. It is one of the most common of all scribal blunders. The words *and upon all* are attested by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and are printed in *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*.²

But although *God's righteousness* is intended for *all* (without distinction) it is actually bestowed *upon all who believe*. The phrase *who believe* is an articular participle construction in Greek (*tous pisteuontas*) that is read most naturally with this last *pantas* only (the one immediately preceding it). Thus Paul is saying that this *righteousness*, which is intended for *all*, is actually bestowed on *believers*, i.e., on those *who believe*.

The last words of v 22, "For there is no difference," relate primarily to the following verse and will be discussed there.

II. JESUS CHRIST IS THE MERCY SEAT FOR ALL MEN: ROMANS 3:22b-26

3:22b-23. For there is no difference. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Paul has just stated (v 22a) the universal scope of this righteousness of God by declaring it available to any, and to all "who believe." This universality is founded on an equally universal fact. Indeed, **there is no difference** between Jew and Gentile inasmuch as **all** (whether Jew or Gentile) **have sinned**. It should be noted that Paul in no way qualifies this reality by any phrase like "a great

²Hodges and Farstad were the co-editors for this Greek text: Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, editors, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

deal” or “too much.” From Paul’s point of view, the mere fact of sin is sufficient to condemn all mankind.³

Paul had already made this clear when he described the final judgment. He had stated that on that occasion “as many as have *sinned* without the law shall also perish without the law” and that “as many as have *sinned* under the law shall be judged by means of the law” (2:12; italics added). It is *sinner*s who must fear this eschatological event. But, in fact, that is what everyone is, *for all have sinned!*

It follows inevitably from this simple fact that all *also fall short*⁴ of the glory of God. The sense of the phrase *the glory of God* must not be separated from Paul’s thought in the immediate context. Obviously part of God’s glory is the absolute perfection of His righteousness. To sin is to flagrantly miss the lofty moral standard of that glorious righteousness. But by implication, if one is granted *God’s* righteousness, one is raised thereby to a level consistent with His glory. Man’s plight is hopeless unless or until he can receive a righteousness compatible with *the glory of God!*

3:24. so that men are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—

Paul’s statement in v 23 is followed immediately by a participial construction in Greek that is grammatically subordinate to the verbs of that verse. The circumstantial

³Hodges did not believe in original sin as it is commonly taught. That can be seen in a careful reading of his words here. He does not understand *all...have sinned* as a reference to Adam’s sin imputed to every man. He sees it as a reference to the fact that all living human beings, both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned in their personal experience. In Hodges’s view Adam’s sin was not imputed to all. Rather, in his view Adam’s sin was passed from father to child as an inherited compulsion to sin (what many call “the old sin nature”). See his discussion of Rom 5:12-21 for further details.

⁴The verb translated *fall short* (*husterountai*) is a present tense, unlike the earlier verb, translated as *have sinned* (*hēmarton*), which is a past tense (aorist). All have sinned in the past, and all presently continue to *fall short of the glory of God*.

participle *dikaïoumenoi* (**being justified**) connects grammatically to *hēmarton kai husterountai* (“have sinned and fall short”), in v 23. This poses a challenge for the translator. The participle is most naturally construed as one of manner, stating *the way in which* justification comes to all. But this of course is not the same as saying that such justification does come to each and every sinner. As Paul has already stated, it comes to those “who believe.” But the flexible character of the participle in Greek would not have suggested to the Greek hearer/reader that justification comes to every sinner. A translator must to some extent paraphrase here.

Thus the words ***so that men are*** have been added in the translation for the sake of clarity. The meaning simply is that, in view of universal sin, justification comes only in this way. Since “all have sinned,” all must find justification in the fashion now described. In particular, sinful men must be **justified freely by His grace**. “God’s righteousness,” therefore, that comes “through faith in Jesus Christ” (v 22), does not involve any form of synergism with “the works of the law” (cf. v 20), as though these could be “elevated” by the exercise of faith. On the contrary, “God’s righteousness” comes *freely* and it comes only *by His grace*. Paul therefore begins his discussion of the doctrine of justification by sharply defining its means in contrast to the ineffectual nature of “the works of the law,” by means of which there can be *no* justification (v 20)!

This is actually possible, in fact, **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. Here then for the first time in Romans, Paul refers directly⁵ to the death of our Lord. [He *has*, of course, alluded to it in 1:4 by his reference

⁵ By *directly* Hodges means something like *transparently* or *obviously*. The knowledgeable reader, which the believers in Rome were, knew that *redemption* referred to the work of Jesus when He died on the cross for our sins, though neither the cross nor the death of Jesus is mentioned specifically in v 24 or even in the verses which follow. Paul does refer to the blood of Christ in v 25, another reference that the discerning reader grasps as relating to substitutionary atonement.

to the resurrection.] In this initial reference to Christ's death Paul employs the term *redemption*, a word especially connected in Greco-Roman society with the ransoming of prisoners of war or the manumission of slaves. The implication here is that *Christ Jesus* has bought us out of some form of servitude. Paul will make this concept clearer as he proceeds.

It should also be noted that *the redemption* Paul speaks of is *in Christ Jesus*. As the Apostle will now go on to show, this *redemption* is not simply procured by *Christ Jesus*, but is actually found *in Him*.

3:25. whom God has set forth as a Mercy Seat, through faith, by means of His blood, to serve as proof of His righteousness in passing over, in the forbearance of God, the sins previously committed,

It is, in fact, the very Person of Jesus Christ that **God has set forth as a Mercy Seat**. The "mercy seat" under the Old Covenant was the golden covering over the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred box-type object that stood in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Tabernacle and in the later Solomonic Temple. [It was lost when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.] The sacrificial blood of the Day of Atonement was sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev 16:1-17); and it was there, above this covering and between the cherubim that were on either end of the Ark, that God could meet with Moses or with the Jewish High Priest (cf. Exod 25:21-22; Lev 16:2). Here Christ Jesus is identified as the divinely appointed *Mercy Seat* where God and man can meet.

The exact meaning of the Greek word *hilastērion*, translated here by *Mercy Seat*, has been much discussed. Some meaning like "propitiation" (NKJV, NASB, HCSB) or "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV) is usual. But the primary use of the word in the Greek OT (LXX) as the name for

the mercy seat renders it quite likely that this word had that sense for Paul here.⁶

But Jesus Christ is a *Mercy Seat*, of course, only in a metaphorical sense. (In the language of typology we might say that the OT "mercy seat" was a type for which Christ is the Antitype.) Thus He is a *Mercy Seat*...only **by faith**. The Greek words for *by faith* (*dia pisteōs*) stand immediately after the word for *Mercy Seat* (*hilastērion*) and are quite naturally taken with it as an expression of "the means through which" (*dia*) Jesus Christ functions as a *Mercy Seat*. His role is to be a "meeting place" between God and man *whenever* man exercises faith in God's Son. Thus the truth of John 14:6 finds expression here: "No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The NT, of course, knows nothing of any other way to God except through the Person named Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 4:12). The so-called doctrine of "implicit faith" is nowhere taught in the Bible and is a product of the finite human mind. A person cannot believe in Jesus Christ without knowing His name, and thus one cannot encounter the true and living God except in Him. But God has publicly **set Him forth** as His appointed *Mercy Seat*. Precisely for this reason, His name needs to be proclaimed to every kindred, tribe and tongue, just as Paul had undertaken to do so far as God enabled him to do it. The human idea that salvation is possible, at least in some cases, without this proclamation is an enormous theological error.

The next words, **by means of His blood**, render the Greek phrase *en to autou haimati*. The grammar would permit them to be connected with the words for *through faith*, so that we might read the two phrases together as *through faith in His blood*. But this reading is very improbable. Paul nowhere else speaks of "faith *in* His blood" and there is no good reason to think he does so here. [As most commentators point out.] Rather, since the OT mercy seat was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement, it

⁶For a good discussion of *hilastērion*, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 231-36.

is extremely likely that here Paul has chosen this expression as part of his metaphor about Jesus as God's *Mercy Seat*. Our Lord has become a *Mercy Seat*, where God and man can meet, precisely *by means of* the shedding of *His blood* for the world's sins.

No doubt Paul had thought deeply about the way the Temple ritual manifested God's saving work in Christ (whether or not he wrote Hebrews!). Indeed even the words **set forth** (*proetheto*) suggest that in all likelihood Paul was thinking of the hidden nature of the Old Covenant mercy seat (cf. Heb 9:7-9), in contrast to the public character of the new *Mercy Seat*. God had publicly displayed Jesus Christ as the way to Him, a fact symbolized by the rending of the veil of the Temple when Christ died (Luke 23:45). A theologian of Paul's depth was likely to have had all these things in mind here.

The concept of Christ Jesus as a *Mercy Seat...by means of His blood* is now elaborated in terms of its evidential value. The words that follow, **to serve as a proof** (lit., "for a proof": *eis endeixin*), are most perspicuous when taken with the whole phrase that began with *whom God set forth*. In other words, God has openly displayed Christ as a *Mercy Seat...by means of His blood* as a demonstration (*proof*) of two great facts in particular. The first of these is now stated. (The second is stated in v 26).

The sacrificial work of Christ on the cross is, first of all, *a proof of God's righteousness in passing over, in the forbearance of God, the sins previously committed*. The idea contained in the words translated *the sins previously committed* (*tōn progegonotōn hamartēmatōn*) can hardly have reference to anything other than to *the sins* that men did before Christ was crucified.⁷ In His dealings

⁷ Some have read their own theology into Paul's words here, suggesting that he means that at the moment of faith the blood of Jesus takes care of one's sins up to that point in his life. Sins committed after that point need to be dealt with by a man-made system of confessing sins to priests, doing works of penance, last rites, communion, etc. As Hodges points out, it is impossible that Paul meant that. He was referring to sins committed prior to Calvary.

with mankind, God had been **passing over** human sin and dealing with mankind in the light of the future work of Christ. Unless God had anticipated the cross of Christ, mankind could have expected Him to exercise definitive justice rather than the grace and forgiveness that He so often extended. But His righteousness in exercising this kind of *forbearance* (or, “clemency”: *anochē*) was not as yet manifested. The public death of His Son was a vindication of God's merciful dealings with sinners in all the preceding ages. Thus it was a **proof of His righteousness** in so conducting Himself with mankind.

3:26. *and* for a proof of His righteousness at the present time, so that He may be righteous and justify the person who has faith in Jesus.

There is no connecting word in Greek between vv 25 and 26. The ***and*** appears in our translation for the sake of smoothness. The Greek, however, does not require the conjunction and Paul slightly changes the construction here. Whereas the words *serve as proof* (v 25) translate the phrase *eis endeixin*, here the words **for a proof** render the phrase *pros endeixin*. Although the expressions are functionally equivalent, the Greek hearer/reader might have caught a subtle shading in which, lacking the conjunction, the latter phrase could be felt as an outcome of the former. Much as we might say, “He did it for (*eis*) this reason with a view to (*pros*)...”

This is to say that God, in the death of Christ, not only offers “proof” of His righteousness in ages past, but that He does so with the specific intent (*pros*) of vindicating **His righteousness at the present time**. In other words the first vindication serves also the goal of the second. If God's “forbearance” in the past is shown to be righteous, *ipso facto* He is shown to be righteous in what He presently does. The cross of Christ is not *two* forms of vindication but rather a *seamless garment* that demonstrates God's righteousness in all of human history. All of mankind's sin, whether past or future at the time of the cross, is

dealt with by the death of Christ. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The result is that God can **be righteous and justify the person who has faith in Jesus**. The English necessarily obscures an obvious Greek word play, since the Greek words for **righteous** (*dikaion*) and **justify** (*dikaionta*) are cognates joined in Paul’s sentence by the simple **and** (*kai*). God, says Paul, is both *righteous and righteous-fier*!⁸ This simple assertion is actually the fundamental core of Pauline theology.

Throughout the centuries of Christian history, thinkers of every persuasion have wrestled with Paul’s basic ideas. [An excellent, up-to-date treatment of this long-running discussion is available now in Stephen Westerholm’s *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Eerdmans, 2004).] But at bottom, Paul believed two very basic things. These were: (1) God, apart from man’s works, justifies the one who believes in Jesus; and (2) the cross is the basis for this justification and shows it to be a fully righteous act.

Here it is important to say that for Paul these are absolute realities totally independent of anything man does before or after faith. There is no basis whatsoever in Paul’s letters to connect human works with justification by faith no matter when these works are performed. Whether done before or after conversion, they remain *works* (i.e., *erga* = “deeds” or “actions”). The distinction drawn by some writers between “works done to attain favor with God” and “works done out of faith or gratitude” is non-existent in the Pauline material. This alleged distinction is a theological fiction.

For Paul, “good works,” whether done under or apart from the Mosaic Law, cannot contribute to our justification. To say that somehow they do contribute would really amount to a denial of the simple fact that God *justifies the person who has faith in Jesus*. In that case God would

⁸ Possibly another way to bring this across in English would be something like *so that He may be righteous and may declare righteous the person who has faith in Jesus*.

be justifying only the person who has faith *plus* works, not a person who just has faith! No matter how this idea is articulated, it contradicts Paul's fundamental idea that justification is "*apart from works*" (v 28; see 4:6!). Furthermore, to say that "our (post-conversion) works" somehow vindicate God's justification is a denial of the adequacy of the cross for that purpose! The famous statement that "we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone" is a Reformation idea, not a Pauline one. *This idea can be found nowhere in Paul.*

To be greatly lamented is the sad fact that, although Reformation soteriology denies good works entrance through the front door, good works are often reintroduced through the back door! The resultant theology is hard to distinguish, except semantically, from Roman Catholic theology. The synergism of faith and works in salvation is differently expressed in Protestant and Catholic theology, but its fundamental character is essentially the same: namely, there is no true justification without good works. Paul knows nothing of this.

Of course, theologians have spilled a tremendous amount of ink trying to show that works have some fundamental role in Pauline soteriology. But in Paul's writings works do not have any connection whatsoever with the truth of justification. For Paul grace and works are opposites. He will later say in this very epistle: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom 11:6). This is perfectly plain, and theologians have wasted their time trying to qualify, revise, or reinterpret Paul's lucid concept. According to Paul, when you mix faith and works, you change the basic nature of both!

Paul concludes the long Greek sentence that began in v 23 with the words *the person who has faith in Jesus* (*ton ek pisteōs Iēsou*; lit. = "the one of [by] faith in Jesus"). Here for the first time since 1:17 we meet Paul's frequent phrase *ek pisteōs* (see also in Rom 3:30; 4:16 [2x]; 5:1; 9:30;

10:6; 14:23 [2x]). All the other instances in Romans (with the exception of 14:23) use the phrase in reference to righteousness or justification coming *by means of* faith. This suggests a second look at its usage in this verse.

In our translation we paraphrase the Greek article (*ton*) with the words *the person who* and the Greek *ek by has*. But the Greek is perhaps more likely to mean something like *the by faith in Jesus person*. In that case the Greek article is a functional ellipsis of the idea “the person who receives this justifying action” (cf. *dikaionta*). Paul’s brevity at this point is due to his intention of explicating this idea very shortly.

It is noteworthy that in this direct reference to *faith in Jesus* (*Iēsou* is an objective genitive) Paul uses only the human name (in v 21 he uses “Jesus Christ”). But for Paul, of course, both the words *Lord* and *Christ* were still titles, the latter one indicating Messiahship. The distinctive feature of NT evangelization was that it called on both Jews and Gentiles to exercise faith in the person named Jesus. (Note precisely this idea in John 20:30-31). After the coming of Christ, it was no longer adequate to believe simply in a Messiah whose identity was unknown. On the contrary, the Christian proclamation was that the Messiah (= Christ) *had now appeared* and that His name was Jesus (hence “Jesus Christ” [v 21] = “Jesus Messiah”). Henceforth justifying faith found its true focus, not in an unnamed promised Messiah, but in Jesus of Nazareth. It is in fact “the name of *Jesus*” that is above every name and to which every knee will someday bow (Phil 2:9-11). Therefore, too, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The *righteousness of God*, therefore, that is now “manifested” (v 21) in the promised Christ, comes by *faith in a man named Jesus*.

III. FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS VINDICATES THE LAW: ROMANS 3:27-31

3:27. So where is boasting? It is excluded. Through what sort of law? Of works? No indeed, but through the law of faith.

The truth stated in vv 21-26 leads to a triumphant declaration by Paul that **boasting** has been **excluded**. This trait (*boasting*) has already been ascribed to the Jews in 2:17-20 and they especially are probably in mind here. (No doubt now that he knows the grace of God, Paul himself is chagrined by his own proud spirit in his unregenerate days.) But if justification is granted only to "the person who has faith in Jesus" then such a person can find no ground for *boasting*.

In fact, *boasting* is actually *excluded* (Greek = "shut out": *exekleisthē*) by the very principle **of faith**. (Here Paul obviously uses the term **law** in the sense of a "controlling principle" or an "operating rule.") The sort of law that excludes human pride is definitely not the principle **of works** which, in fact, invites *boasting* (see Eph 2:8-9). On the contrary, the only "rule" that does excludes human pride is *the law of faith*, that is, the "rule" that men are justified only by "faith in Jesus" in contrast to justification by "the works of the law" (3:20).

An error often found in contemporary discussions is that "works of gratitude to God" are somehow 'immune' to the temptation to boast. But this is contrary to both experience and Scripture. In fact, in the only passage in the Gospels where our Lord explicitly refers to justification (Luke 18:9-14), a Pharisee is represented as *thanking God* for what he conceives to be his numerous religious virtues (Luke 18:11-12)! All experience confirms that even when our theology ascribes our works to God's grace, boasting is *not* excluded! Man is perfectly capable of bragging that his works demonstrate that he is one of God's "elect"! In

essence, the Jews of Paul's day did that, for Paul charges that, "You bear the name of 'Jew,' and you rest in the law and *boast in God*" (Rom 2:17)! Justification by faith, and by faith alone, can block this all too human failing.

No system of theology that *includes* works in its soteriology can also *exclude boasting*!

3:28-29. So we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not in fact also of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles!

Functionally v 27 was somewhat parenthetical. In effect it was a triumphant exclamation by Paul that the truth presented in vv 21-26 had successfully locked out boasting. The **So** (*oun*) that opens v 28⁹ most probably reaches back to the truth of vv 21-26, as its summarizing nature clearly suggests. The bottom line, Paul states, is that **we hold** (*logizometha*) **that a man** (*anthrōpon*, generic = man or woman) **is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.**

In making this concluding statement, Paul here slightly expands the phrase "apart from the law" used in v 21. What that phrase meant there is even clearer when expressed, as it is here, as *apart from the works of the law*, since this refers to any and all acts of obedience to the law's commands. It is not just the law as a system that Paul excludes from Christian soteriology, but also *the deeds*, i.e., *the works of the law* that are excluded. As he will shortly say, "to the person who *works* the compensation is not made on the basis of grace, but on the basis of what is owed" (4:4; italics added). Paul will not allow human deeds (*erga*) any role at all in man's justification.

This principle is in fact a universal one. Since *the works of the law* are irrelevant when *a man is justified by faith*, such justification is available to all mankind, whether they possess the law or not. God is not **the God of the Jews**

⁹ *Oun* is the second word in the Greek sentence (after *logizometha*); but it opens the sentence logically.

only, but also of the Gentiles. The question format which Paul uses here to affirm this truth heightens the rhetorical effect of his declaration. Most emphatically, He is the God of all mankind.

3:30-31. Consequently, there is one God who will justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. So do we annul the law through faith? Far from it! In fact we establish the law.

Alluding to the familiar Jewish declaration (the Shema, Deut 6:4) about the oneness of God, Paul declares that **there is one God** for all humanity who **will justify** any human being by means of **faith**. The slight change of construction from **by faith** (*ek pisteōs*) to **through faith** (*dia tēs pisteōs*) should not be overplayed, since the first phrase is the usual one that Paul employs for this doctrine, regardless of racial distinction. But the addition of the article (*tēs*) in the second phrase is perhaps the key to the nuance involved since articles tended to occur with abstract nouns (like *faith*) when the abstract quality was itself under discussion.

It seems probable that a subtle difference is conveyed (perhaps unconsciously since Paul seems quite fluent in Greek!). We suggest something like this: (1) the *ek* phrase with its anarthrous noun (*pisteōs*) retains its usual force expressing an operating principle (= the “by-faith way”), while (2) the *dia* phrase with the articular noun (*pisteōs*) looks at the abstract term itself (= “through this thing called faith”). If something like this is accurate, then the first phrase, referring to Jews (**the circumcision**), retains its implicit contrast with *ex ergōn nomou* (cf. v 20) as the principle on which justification occurs for them. In reference to the Gentiles (**the uncircumcision**), the thought is more that they are justified *through* the very thing just referred to, i.e., *faith*. (Hence the article, *tēs*, before faith is almost an article of previous reference.)

But does this principle of “faith-type justification” for both Jew and Gentile alike mean that the standards of **the law** are meaningless. This, at least, seems to be the idea involved in Paul’s question (**So do we annul the law by faith?**). The most obvious objection to Paul’s doctrine from a Jewish viewpoint would be that God’s standards are thus ignored and rendered invalid. The verb Paul uses, *katargoumen*, rendered *annul*, suits such an idea well. Paul’s reply (*mē genoito* = **Far from it!**), emphatically disclaims such a result.

On the contrary, Paul claims, **In fact we establish the law**. Paul does not here, or elsewhere in Romans, elaborate this observation. But its meaning for him is fairly obvious. If it is true, as he has affirmed, that “through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20), then the law’s revelatory role in regard to sin is fully respected by the corollary truth that “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him” (3:19). To claim that man can find justification under the law, despite his multiple infractions of the law, would seriously diminish the dignity in which all of the commandments of God ought to be held. By contrast, to insist that the law cannot be a means of justification if it is violated at all is the only way that its full integrity and seriousness can be maintained. Therefore, to uphold it in this way is to *establish the law*.

Finally, it must be said that to take 2:13 as a statement that justification by doing the law is somehow possible (as many have) is to denigrate the importance of a full and unflawed obedience. Under this perspective, human beings often imagine that God will not be “too strict” in assessing their lives and will give them “a passing grade” for a deeply flawed performance. But this diminishes the seriousness of the law and is a concept totally foreign to Paul. Only the abandonment of the law as a means for, or an aid to, justification properly validates the full integrity of God’s righteous standards.

BOOK REVIEWS

Spiritual Maturity: The Road to Wonderland. By Bruce Baker. Larkspur, CO: Grace Acres Press, 2009. 376 pp. Paper, \$27.95.

Prior to each of the seven parts of the book, there appears a fictional story highlighting struggles faced by Christians today, serving to illustrate concepts presented in the book. And prior to each chapter, we find a one to two-page excerpt from a Lewis Carroll work (either *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *Through the Looking-Glass: And What Alice Found There*), presented to connect the reader with the opening of the chapter. The book concludes with a glossary, endnotes (few in number), Scripture index, and an extensive index of terms found within the discussion.

The intent of the book appears to be three-fold: 1) to present to the reader the three kinds of people, in spiritual terms (the natural man [unbeliever], the carnal [immature] Christian, and the mature believer in Christ); 2) to show how to obtain spiritual maturity; and 3) to present what spiritual maturity looks like.

One of the strengths of the book is to recognize there are at least three types of people in the spiritual realm: unbelievers, carnal Christians, and mature believers (though some might posit another type—an apostatized believer). Those in the GES camp will appreciate that approach as it is consistent with a Free Grace understanding of the message of eternal life. However, this seems to be where the association with a consistent Free Grace theology ends. Let's look at some examples.

For example, Baker states as the gospel that “a sinner places his faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross.” Many *JOTGES* readers would object to this presentation, as the issue in the Gospel of John (the one book of the Bible written to show readers how to receive

eternal life) is believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life, not faith in the cross (p. 102). But the author does not seem to be satisfied with the addition of the cross, as he later mentions, “I’m sure the essential facts required for salvation would fit within the pages of an average magazine” (p. 202)! One wonders how long it would take to present the gospel if there are that many “essential facts required for salvation”!

Yet, for *JOTGES* readers, there is further room to be dismayed at the author’s comments on the gospel. For example, Baker states that “before there can be saving faith, an intellectual awareness must take place” (p. 262); then “there must be an acceptance of that body of knowledge as true” (p. 262). In addition, he claims “there must be a trust or reliance upon the knowledge known and regarded as true. This involves an act of the will” (p. 263). However, it seems that a consistent Free Grace advocate would say that if the “intellectual awareness” is that Jesus gives eternal life to anyone who believes Him for it, then saving faith has already occurred at that point; there is no need for two more steps in the equation.

According to the author, “This trust includes the desire for the truths of the gospel, specifically the cleansing from sin it provides, to be personally applied. It is unfortunate but true that many people profess belief in the message of Scripture but, in reality, have no desire for *the essential* element of the gospel—namely, the cleansing from sin—to affect their lives” (p. 263) [emphasis by the author].

This statement is even more disturbing. Now, in addition to a necessary three-step process of saving faith, Baker claims that one must *desire* to be cleansed from sin. Fortunately—or unfortunately, as we will see—the author gives an illustration to help the reader understand what he means.

To illustrate, the author describes someone whose life was a wreck and who, “with tears streaming down his face,” announced “his desire to be saved” (265). However, because the man didn’t want to give up the practice of a

certain sin, the author indicated to him that he could not get cleansing from that sin. Thus, the man apparently left his office without believing in Christ for eternal life! The author's assessment of this situation is: "Intellectually, he accepted as true the message of the gospel, but his will was tied to the fleeting pleasures of the world." He gave "intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel," but he "didn't want" those truths (266).

The ramifications are horrifying! Which sins must one desire to give up before one can receive eternal life—every sin he has ever committed, every sin he has committed within the recent past—and how recent?—or just certain "big" sins, and what might those be? In addition, how much desire does one need to be rid of sin in one's life in order to receive eternal life? Does one actually need to quit doing the sin first, and if so, for how long, before the person can be saved?

This view of the message of eternal life naturally moves the author to discuss individuals who make a "profession" but give "no evidence of new life" (pages 263-66), indicating they probably have not *truly* had a saving experience. The perceptive reader can see that this author has moved into a works-based salvation in the worst case scenario; at the very least, he has removed any kind of assurance that one may hope to attain.

In addition, the author seems to associate repentance with the gospel, as he mentions the Holy Spirit drawing "the lost" "to repentance" (p. 299). Also, on page 329, the Christine character, who appears to represent the author's illustration of one growing toward maturity, prays that another character in the story "would repent and be saved".

This reviewer sees other weaknesses of this book as well. For example, the book seems to lack a specific identity, and it is difficult to peg the intended audience of the book.

Moreover, there is too much rambling detail. (For example, he states in chap. 16 that living by the Spirit

produces love—one of seven ministries to the believer on which he elaborates—then he wanders off into seven pages on love.) Also, the tone of the book varies, as sometimes it is conversational and at other times it carries a teaching / lecture tone.

But aside from the author's view of the gospel, perhaps the greatest flaw of the book is that it does not attain clarity on the very thesis of the book—showing the reader how to attain spiritual maturity. This becomes telling on page 179 where the author states it is possible to know if we have attained maturity, “at least to some extent.” Had this reviewer paid for the book, this is the point at which he would have tried to get a refund.

I have other disagreements with the author's presentation; however, I would be remiss if I did not mention some plusses of the book. The author points out that a relationship with God “thrives best when rigid sets of rules are discarded” (p. 318). In addition, he does not believe in sinless perfectionism in this life (p. 319); he sees the book of Hebrews as written to believers in Christ (pp. 134-36), he believes in eternal security (pp. 136-39), and the book comes with a great index (pp. 343-57).

However, these plusses are not enough to compensate for the theological flaws in *Spiritual Maturity*. Thus, I cannot recommend this book.

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The Naked Gospel: The Truth You May Never Hear in Church. By Andrew Farley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 237 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

This book has a catchy title: *The Naked Gospel*.

The cover itself is odd. Though softback, it has a transparent plastic dust cover (evidently illustrating the naked gospel), which nonetheless is printed on the front only with the title and a subtitle sitting on a leaf. I discarded

the dust jacket and what is left is the table of contents on the cover, as well as printing on the spine and back.

The table of contents is a bit of a disappointment. The chapter titles are far less interesting than the book's title. Here are the seven chapter titles: Obsessive-Christianity Disorder (a play on obsessive compulsive disorder), Religion Is a Headache, Crossing the Line, Burning Matryoshkas, Cheating on Jesus, We Don't Marry Dead People, and Ego Assault.

It takes a long time to figure out what the author is trying to say, other than that it is possible to be obsessed with Christianity and its rules. This book is a very difficult read since there appears to be no discernable outline for the book and no real progression in thought.

Based on a few of the endorsements, it appears that the author is attempting to explain what is called *the exchanged life*. I have read other books that do a better job of presenting and explaining that position. I happen to agree with some aspects of that theology. However, I didn't find much I agreed with in this book.

Here are, as best I can tell, the major points the author is trying to make: Christians are no longer under the Law of Moses (pp. 31-75); Christians are not to confess their sins (pp. 149-55); Christians are already fully forgiven and clean in every sense of the word, including fellowship forgiveness (pp. 204-206); Christians are always in fellowship with God no matter what they do or do not do (pp. 149-55; 204-206); God doesn't want believers to seek eternal rewards (pp. 168-69); the Holy Spirit does not convict believers of sin (p. 163); "the term *convict* is exclusively reserved for unbelievers" (p. 163); "1 John 1:9 is an invitation to become a Christian" (p. 152); and God is never angry with believers (p. 28). Aside from the first point, I consider all of those other points to be wrong, and in some cases very harmful to one's spiritual growth and development.

The author does not present any word studies. He simply makes statements and expects the reader to accept

what he says without any proof. He gives no explanation of passages in this book other than very brief comments as illustrated in his comments on James 2 below.

JOTGES readers would be disappointed in that the author is far from clear on what one must do to be born again. In fact, he clearly rejects faith as mere intellectual assent. About as close as he gets to explaining the condition of the new birth is when he is explaining Jas 2:14-26. He writes: "James's purpose is to contrast mere intellectual agreement with active, saving faith that involves receiving the life of Christ. When Christ stood at the door and knocked [Rev 3:20], did you respond by opening the door, as Rahab did? If so, I think you've met the 'requirement' of this historically controversial faith-works passage" (p. 199). He then continues, "James 2 is not inviting us to introspect and assess our long-term track record of good works; in context, it appears to be contrasting dead faith (intellectual assertion only) with living faith (true conviction followed by *decision*)."

Precisely that this "decision" is the author never states.

Due to its lack of attention to the details of Scripture, as well as many false and misleading statements the author makes, I cannot recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

God in 60 Seconds: One-Minute Answers to Faith Questions. By John Ankerberg and Dillon Burroughs. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2010. 138 pp. Paper, \$6.99.

In the increasing spiritual vacuum which is 21st-century America, attempts to communicate truth to those caught up in the busy-ness of modern society are popular. John Ankerberg, host of the well-known television talk show

bearing his name, and Dillon Burroughs, a staff writer for the show, have collaborated on a handy source of information for seekers or immature believers.

Using a question-answer format throughout, the authors respond to issues in seven different areas: God and Creation, Jesus, the Bible, Salvation and Spiritual Growth, the Afterlife, Other Religions, and Contemporary Issues. The book ends with two added chapterettes, entitled *How to Begin a Personal Relationship with God*, and *Praying for Those Who Do Not Believe*.

Generally speaking, the answers throughout are biblically-focused, and reflect conservative theological positions. The authors often point readers to the Bible, encouraging reading and studying of it. Their answers to questions like “If God, why evil?” and “Why does the resurrection matter?”, however, will leave any astute reader unsatisfied.

Of particular interest to lovers of grace was the discussion of Salvation and Spiritual Growth. Here more emphasis on eternal life, and believing, would have been a major improvement. Like so much evangelistic discussion today, the focus is on this life, instead of the next! Happily, the authors responded to the question “What should I do about my doubts?” by calling readers to “look to God and the promises and information in his Word” (64). Sadly, in the added chapter on how to begin a relationship with God, the authors garbled the gospel badly, beginning with a call to believe, then a call to “accept God’s free gift” (as if this is a separate step to believing), then “Commit to following God’s plan for your life,” and finally “Determine to make Jesus Christ the ultimate Leader and final authority of your life” (131-32). While none of this is something we *don’t* want a person to do, it is damaging to a clear gospel presentation to clutter the simple call to “believe” with other issues.

This book is not sufficiently in-depth to aid a new believer to mature in the faith. However, for a person who is totally uninformed on Christianity and spiritual issues, this book may provide some answers which will point them in the right direction.

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James. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. By Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 280 pp. Cloth, \$24.99.

The Epistle of James has long been a key support for the teaching of Lordship Salvation. For the most part this commentary does not wade into a discussion of what one must do to have everlasting life. The authors clearly indicate that they believe James is teaching that post-conversion works are necessary to be glorified and to make it into Christ's Kingdom (e.g., pp. 129, 131, 132). Yet they steer clear of indicating whether they agree with Calvinism or Arminianism (p. 253).

The authors writing style is very clear and easy to follow. Pastors, Bible teachers, and students of the Bible will find much help in this commentary. *JOTGES* readers will find themselves in disagreement with much of the discussion since they authors follow the commentary tradition on James for the most part and that tradition is decided not consistent with a Free Grace understanding of the letter. However, the observations Blomberg and Kamell make are often outstanding even if those observations do not lead them to the most logical interpretation.

The discussion of Jas 2:14-16 is a case in point. The authors note the repetition of the phrase "what does it profit?" (ti to ophelos) at the start of 2:14 and the end of 2:16, saying, "Just as words without action profited the poor person nothing, so faith without works profits the

'believer' nothing" (p. 131). Were it not for the fact that they put *believer* in quotes and that they indicate he is unregenerate (pp. 129-43), this observation would lead them to the view that James is warning born-again people of the danger of not applying what they believe. Failure to apply one's faith results in a non-profit religion. The issue is not one's eternal destiny, but temporal prosperity of oneself and one's fellow believers.

The authors make this remarkably clear (yet incorrect) statement about salvation in James: "The verb 'save' (*sosai*) in James refers to the entire process that begins with initial faith in Christ and climaxes in heavenly glorification" (p. 129). Note that the authors state the salvation in James is a "process," not something which one gains at a point in time. They also reject the idea that one gains this salvation by faith alone. (Indeed, at one point they define faith as "commit[ing] one's life to Christ" [p. 139] and another time they say that "faith includes works" [p. 131]).

This statement about justification by faith is striking: "Where 'Paul denies the need for pre-conversion works,' James emphasizes the absolute necessity of post-conversion works" (p. 132). The authors also follow the now-popular view that what Paul rejected was not works, *per se*, but works of the law: "Works' here are not the Pauline 'works of the law' such as circumcision, but rather the works of love, such as caring for those who are in need, not showing favoritism, being humble, or being slow to speak" (p. 132).

Zane Hodges is mentioned once by the Blomberg and Kamell. Commenting on his interpretation of Jas 2:17, they write, "Theological presuppositions have dangerously preempted the actual teaching of Scripture here. People believing Hodges at this point could easily fool themselves into thinking they (or others) were saved when in fact they were not." This is one place where the authors fail to represent fairly a view they are discussing. Most likely they did not read Hodges well enough to know

how he understands the word *saved* in James. If they did, they are misrepresenting his view here, which I do not believe.

The authors don't seem to understand that their own words can easily be turned on them. *People reading Blomberg and Kamell at this point could easily fool themselves into thinking that they will make it into Christ's Kingdom if they diligently apply themselves to doing post-conversion works of love.* Though it is not a main point in their book, the authors do promote works salvation from time to time.

I highly recommend this commentary for *JOTGES* readers who are well grounded in the faith. This commentary, in spite of its "theological presuppositions," is well worth owning.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Denton, Texas

The Righteous Shall Live By Faith: Romans. By R. C. Sproul. Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2009. 514 pp. Cloth, \$34.99.

By almost any standard, R. C. Sproul is a prodigious writer, having authored over 60 books. *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith* is part of his own "St. Andrew's Expository Commentary" series, being adaptations of sermons he has preached at St. Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Florida. As any follower of Sproul's ministry would expect, his exposition of Romans is presented from the vantage point of Reformed theology.

Sproul presents his comments in fifty-eight chapters, each an easy-to-digest length of about ten pages. While this sometimes disguises larger breakdowns in Paul's argument, it will be appreciated by those who are looking for shorter sections of study.

Sproul's comments often make for interesting reading, but this is less a commentary of Romans than a presentation of Reformed theology, using the text of Romans as a starting point. Indeed, Sproul's discussion throughout is so colored by his theology that one often searches in vain for any real exposition of the text. For example, there are two chapters covering Romans 7:14-25 (223-40), yet in these 18 pages, only *two paragraphs* interact with the biblical text at all! Instead, Sproul gives us brief discourses on perfectionism, the Spirit-filled life, duality vs. tripartitism, spiritual progression, views of the universe, and John Calvin's and Jonathan Edwards's teaching on the will of man! Instructive as all this is for understanding Sproul's theological framework, it has virtually nothing to do with the text.

When Sproul does interact with Scripture, his comments are generally not exegetical at all, but rather lectures defending Reformed theology. Romans 10:9-10 provides a fitting illustration. Sproul has nothing to say about Paul's use of the term "saved," which is critical to the interpretation here, and to the epistle as a whole. Instead, he equates it with justification, making justification dependent on both professing and believing. In fact, his wording makes faith a *secondary* requirement: "Paul does not say that we will be saved if we confess with our mouth. He *adds a condition*: you must 'believe with your heart'" (351, italics mine)! Students of Romans will be shocked to find that Sproul omits *any mention at all* of Romans 5:9 ("having now been *justified* by His blood, we shall be *saved* from the wrath of God through Him"), a text which is central to the progression of Paul's argument. Finally, in his discussion of 10:14 ("How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"), Sproul fails to see the transparent link between "calling" (10:14) and "confessing" (10:9-10).

In the context of his discussion on 10:9-10, Sproul makes an incredible statement. Responding to his own

rhetorical question, “What are the necessary ingredients of saving faith?”, he writes:

“Luther, following James’ teaching that faith without works is dead (James 2:20), asked, ‘Can a dead faith justify anybody?’ Luther answered emphatically in the negative.”

This is a stunning assertion for one supposedly knowledgeable of church history as Sproul certainly is. It is well-known that Luther was so put off by the very passage to which Sproul refers that he called James a “right strawy epistle” (which Sproul admits on p. 108)! To Luther, who thought the passage was saying what Sproul makes it to say, such teaching was not fit as inspired writ. Sproul not only affirms such a reading, but suggests Luther did, too! In order to support his theology, Sproul is evidently happy to rewrite history!

Throughout, Scripture is not interacted with so much as simply alluded to, then followed with an extended discussion of classical Reformed theology. For example, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:13) is a launching pad for a presentation of the “two loves of God” idea. Those familiar with Reformed theology’s teaching that God chose those who would be justified (and thus those who would not) in eternity past on the basis of His sovereign decree will find little satisfaction in the idea that God “loves” those He creates to endure eternal suffering in hell!

One more example will have to suffice. Sproul, with many Reformed theologians, struggles with the absoluteness of Paul’s statements on justification in Romans 4. His solution is to ignore Paul’s words and cite James 2:14-25 (he includes the entire passage in his text, curiously omitting v 26), followed by a section entitled “Works Prove Faith.” Thus, a text which says exactly the opposite—“to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness”—is used by Sproul to inject works into justification!

In summary, it bears repeating that this is less a commentary on Romans, and more a discourse on Reformed theology using Romans as a launching pad. Interaction with the text is spotty at best, and passages which do not mesh well with Sproul's theology are simply ignored, or "explained" so as to affirm Reformed theology. Those who are looking for exegetical or expositional guidance in the book of Romans should look elsewhere. For an example of Reformed eisegesis, but little else, can I recommend this book.

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Holy Spirit and Salvation: The Sources of Christian Theology. Edited by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Grand Rapids: Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010. 470 pp. Paper, \$49.95.

The fact that there are five pages devoted to "Permissions" (pp. 459-63) tells the reader a lot about this book. If only a small portion of any work is cited, there is no need to obtain permission to include the copyrighted material. However, when larger amounts are used, it is wise to obtain permission (though still not actually necessary under copyright law).

This book is essentially a compilation of quotations. If one were to remove all the quotes, this book might not even cover 100 pages, and it wouldn't be nearly as valuable. It is the combination of the editor's comments and the citations themselves that make this work invaluable.

Block quotes in most books run four to eight lines. In this book block quotes often run forty to seventy lines, taking up one or more entire pages.

This is both its strength and its weakness. It is a great strength for the researcher. Here he can find extensive quotes from many major Christian authors. But it is a

weakness in that the quotes are given in their raw form. Most citations today pull out the most important information, so that in four to eight lines you know essentially what the person was saying in multiple pages. But here you must read long, often ponderous quotes in order to glean what is being said.

The first nine chapters deal with the history of Pneumatological traditions. The last eight chapters concern contemporary theologies of the Spirit and salvation. It seems a bit odd that the first half of the book concerns ancient theologies of the Spirit, but the later chapters concern contemporary theologies of the Spirit *and salvation*. If the title of the book is *Holy Spirit and Salvation*, one would think the first half of the book would cover both those topics as well.

While it takes effort to dig the nuggets out of this work, *JOTGES* readers should find it well worth the effort. Here are a few of the nuggets I found:

Under “The Spirit in ‘Evangelical’ Theologies” (pp. 350-63), the editor cites this amazing statement from Donald Bloesch, “Salvation is not only a gift to be received but also a task to be performed. It not only a privilege to be conferred but also a race to be won, a crown to be gained (1 Cor 9:24; Heb 12:1; 2 Tim 4:8). Lutherans are often better than Calvinists in affirming the paradox of divine agency in the procuring of salvation and human responsibility for the loss of salvation...” (p. 357).

Under “Spiritual Experience,” the editor makes this inciteful statement, “Several leading Latin American liberation theologians speak for many pneumatologists when they call for the primacy of spiritual experience over doctrine and theology” (p. 444). Of course, that same thinking pervades the teaching of *spiritual formation* in American seminaries, including many conservative ones.

This statement is remarkable too: “The Roman Catholic Church more than any other church throughout the centuries has attempted to define its doctrine and spirituality by means of official documents” (p. 292). Kärkkäinen then

gives quotes from papal encyclicals and from the Second Vatican Council, making it clear that what he means is that Roman Catholic doctrine and spirituality is sourced in its tradition, not in the Scriptures directly. Kärkkäinen expresses no difficulties with any of the views about which he writes. As far as the reader can tell, the editor has no axe to grind whatsoever. He is simply content to report what others believe. In a way this makes the book that much more refreshing since the reader is left to decide what is right and what is not. There is no guidance from the editor in this regard.

There is also a citation from the famed Puritan author John Bunyon (*Pilgrim's Progress*) in which Bunyon writes of an extended time of agony over doubts about his eternal destiny which gave way to what appears to be certainty that he would be in the Kingdom. Note these words, "Suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, 'Thy righteousness is in heaven'...I also saw, moreover, that it was not good frame of mind that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever (Heb. 13:8)...Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed...I lived for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ; Oh, methought, Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was before my eye" (pp. 205-206).

This book is filled both with insightful comments by the author as well as excellent quotes from primary sources. While the price of this book is steep, it is one that systematic and historical theologians would greatly prize, and one which many pastors would find worth the cost and effort to read. A pastor should be able to find scores of quotes to use in sermons in this book. I recommend it.

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Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision. By N.T. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009. 279 pp. Cloth, \$25.00.

Whether you have been following the theological battle between those that refer to themselves as New Perspective on Paul and those that are referred to as Old Perspective, Wright's newest work will give you a good taste of what the former means by justification in Paul. *Justification* serves as Wright's final volley, with Piper (and his book *The Future of Justification*) as the primary target, in a match of obscurity. While I would describe the book as a murky and arrogant diatribe ironically intended to make Wright's position clear, the hubris does serve a purpose—the book would be dreadfully boring without the verbal outbursts. He repeatedly wonders whether Piper will ever understand his views even though they have been explained (in his opinion) in numerous ways. At one point, he writes, "It is (to coin a phrase) just as if I'd never said it" (p. 59). Yet, in the end this is a battle between two authors that travel down different paths but arrive at the same misguided end. They both believe that we are justified by faith (Wright would at times define faith as faithfulness) that must be confirmed by the Holy Spirit's work (Piper, 110-11). Both emphatically defend their position as faith alone in Christ alone with the caveat that it must evidence itself in works. Thus, they both believe that works must be present in one's life to receive eternal life.

Wright believes that the Western church has long suffered from "truncated and self-centered readings...and [the church] is not well served by the inward-looking soteriologies that tangle themselves up in a web of detached texts and secondary theories..." (p. 25) He lambastes those that think the Christian life "is all about me and my salvation" (p. 23). While I do agree that the Church could be less self-centered, the NT writers make it clear that *you* and *your* eternal state do matter. Jesus asked Martha,

“Do *you* believe this?” (John 11:26). The Philippian Jailer inquired of Paul and Silas, “What must *I* do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas did not chastise the jailer and tell him that he was asking the wrong question. They responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...” Paul and Jesus were in agreement—one’s eternal salvation was significant and personal.

Wright believes that justification means “membership in God’s true family” (p. 121) and when the phrase *dikaiosynē theou* occurs, he believes that it means “God’s faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham, to the single-plan-through-Israel-for-the-world” (179). He believes this because of the “massive sense it makes of passage after passage, the way in which bits of Romans often omitted from discussion, or even explicitly left on one side as being irrelevant to the main drift of the discourse, suddenly come back into focus with a bang” (p. 179). Without completely rehashing Daniel Wallace’s cogent response on the bible.org website, I will mention several key points. Wright’s exegetical treatment of these passages leaves much to be desired. He only deals with certain passages, which seems to fly in the face of his own reasons for rejecting the “Old Perspective” views. Wright’s sociological explanation, Yahweh’s covenantal faithfulness, of Rom 1:17 does not adequately explain the indictment of Rom 1:18–3:20. Wright also uses Habakkuk 2, referenced by Paul in Rom 1:17, to justify his view of God’s covenantal faithfulness, yet the emphasis in Habakkuk 2 is on the faithfulness of God’s people. Thus, Paul’s point is that only when God’s people live *by faith* can they truly be called *faithful*.

Wright also blasts the Reformers view of justification by stating, “Part of the problem with the ‘old perspective’ on Paul is that it has followed the long medieval tradition” (p. 195). Wright states that he put the Greek and NIV side-by-side and he “discovered that the translators had another principle, considerably higher than the stated one: to make sure that Paul should say what the broadly Protestant and evangelical tradition said he said” and “I

do know that if a church only, or mainly, relies on the NIV, it will, quite simply, never understand what Paul was talking about" (52). Yet, his views on justification began with Ambrosiaster, a late fourth century Church father. He defined *dikaiosynē theou* in Rom 1:17 as "God's fidelity to His promises." Yet, Ambrosiaster had no access to the Greek. He got this by reading from the Latin manuscripts.

Wright's explanation of how someone can gain eternal life and his concept of judgment should be especially interesting to *JOTGES* readers. First, although he thinks "How can I gain eternal life?" is the wrong question (p. 146), he infers many times that one must have good works in order to have final salvation. He explains, "Paul never says that the present moral life of the Christian 'earns' final salvation. It looks toward it, it 'seeks for' it (Romans 2:7)" (p. 237). Yet, Rom 3:9-20 makes it clear that our problem is that we don't seek good. We have all turned away. Wright also makes it clear that the "signs of the Spirit's life must be present: if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, that person doesn't belong to him (Romans 8:9)..." (p. 237). Wright clearly does not differentiate between past (justification) and present (sanctification) salvation in Romans.

Nevertheless, to his credit, Wright does see a danger in assuming every instance of "salvation" refers to eternal salvation (p. 170). Unfortunately he doesn't employ this logic in Phil 2:12-13 where Paul says, "Work out your own salvation..." Wright uses this to say, "Clearly he is not talking about the security of justification by faith. That is given, solid, emphatic, unassailable. He is talking about the journey toward the final judgment, the ultimate resurrection" (p. 152). His logic is that the Spirit will "bring it [final salvation] to completion" (Phil 1:6) in the end. Yet, Phil 1:6 is actually about participating in Paul's ministry (cf. Phil 4:15-17) and Phil 2:12-13 is about being like Christ so that you will be *rescued* from the consequences of not conforming to Christ and instead will receive reward (cf. 1:19; 3:14; 4:17). Wright does acknowledge the

rewards view (p. 186). Nonetheless, he does not agree and often lumps the *Bēma* Seat and the Great White Throne Judgment into one (pp. 184-85).

While I commend N.T. Wright for dealing with the text, the book was admittedly rushed (p. 13), at times wanders aimlessly, is often seasoned with hubris, and rushes blindly through the text. Whether you are a scholar or a lay teacher, if you want to learn more about the New Perspective on Paul and N.T. Wright's views on justification, *Justification* is an important work.

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