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| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Review of A. B. Caneday’s “‘Lest after preaching to others I become disqualified’: Grace and Warning in Paul’s Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23-27)” EDITOR | 3-20 |
| Review of Bryan Fraser’s <i>Winning a Generation Without the Law</i> L. E. BROWN | 21-46 |
| “Keep Yourselves in the Love of God”— A Study of Jude 20-23 SHAWN LEACH | 47-61 |
| Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked GRANT HAWLEY | 63-81 |
| Is There a Hole in Our Gospel? Does the Church Have a Social Commission Too? PHILIPPE R. STERLING | 83-98 |
| Hebrews 12:14: A Test Case for the Run-for-the-Prize View JOHN NIEMELÄ | 99-116 |
| Book Reviews | 117-28 |

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REVIEW OF A. B. CANEDAY'S “LEST AFTER PREACHING TO OTHERS I BECOME DISQUALIFIED’: GRACE AND WARNING IN PAUL’S GOSPEL (1 CORINTHIANS 9:23-27)”¹

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INTRODUCTION

Though published three years ago, I just became aware of this article by reading a blog Caneday posted about me in which he cited this article.

This is a long article, thirty-two pages, including seventy-one footnotes in very small font. I was very interested to see what Caneday had to say about this very important passage. Unfortunately, after reading this article, I came away very much disappointed. After reading it I still do not know much about what he thinks about the passage. Possibly the fault is my own inability to understand. However, I suspect the fault is in the presentation.

¹ A. B. Caneday, “Lest after preaching to others I become disqualified’: Grace and Warning in Paul’s Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23-27),” *Testamentum Imperium, An International Theological Journal*, Vol 1: 2005-2007: 1-32. http://www.preciousheart.net/ti/2007/020_07_Caneday_1_Cor_9_23-27.pdf. Accessed January 25, 2011.

THE OUTLINE SUGGESTS THIS IS A SURVEY ARTICLE

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, there is but one point to the outline: “Competing Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 9:27.” In light of that fact, that might have been a better title for the article. Caneday’s aim, based on the outline, is not to explain the passage, but to explain various interpretations of it.

Caneday suggests three views: the loss of eternal salvation view, the extra-salvation loss view (yes, that is the way he labels it), and the means of salvation view, which is his view. He subdivides the second view into three sub-views: the loss of eternal rewards view, the loss of testimony for the gospel view, and the loss of divine approval of apostleship view.

Caneday’s outline does not accurately reflect what he is trying to do. He tells us his purpose in the introduction:

I seek to demonstrate that if we properly understand the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:27, we will recognize that his [sic] passage functions to cause himself first but also every believer lest we presume that God’s grace, which we proclaim in the gospel, will save us despite failing to bring our own bodies into subjection to the holy requirements of the good news which we preach and believe (p. 2).

Admittedly that is a long and convoluted sentence that fails to state explicitly what Paul wanted to cause himself and his readers to do. However, we might summarize what he is saying as follows: *In 1 Cor 9:27 Paul warns all believers, including himself, that we must persevere in faith and good works to the end of our lives in order to avoid eternal condemnation.*

He then gives a caveat:

We will understand that Paul administers this warning to himself and to us without simultaneously calling upon us to doubt that

God will preserve us, his children, safely to the end but might relinquish his grasp upon us with the result that we will perish in the Last Day. Instead of subverting his own and *our confident assurance* that God, who has begun his work of redeeming grace in us, will preserve us in his grace to the end, Paul's warning is wholly compatible with his affirmations of confidence in God's preserving his own people unto final salvation (pp. 2-3, italics added).

Once again, those sentences are long and hard to follow. Yet his overall point is clear enough: *Though Paul is warning us that we will be eternally condemned if we do not persevere in faith and good works, that warning is not in any way to cause us to question that we will indeed persevere and obtain final salvation.*

Thus the article might have been titled something like *Believers Must Persevere to Avoid Condemnation Yet We Should Be Assured We Will Persevere*, or *Perseverance Needed but Assurance Possible*, or *The Relationship between Perseverance and Assurance of Final Salvation*. Caneday is merely using the various views of the passage as a means to achieve his purpose of exposing the need for, and assurance of, perseverance.

It should be noted that if the warning is an actual warning and not a hypothetical one, then one cannot possibly be assured that he will not be eternally condemned. It is theological doublespeak to say that Paul is warning himself and his readers that they might be eternally condemned, yet this should not cause them to lack assurance that they will obtain final salvation. That is a non sequitur. If the warning is real, then assurance is impossible.

Caneday himself says a few sentences later in the introduction that our obtaining of everlasting life is not certain:

If we do not run faithfully, we will fail to attain unto the prize, the eternal wreath of life everlasting...The gospel requires faithful

endurance from us in order that we might lay hold of salvation in the age to come (p. 3).

Thus whatever he means by “confident assurance,” he doesn't mean *certainty*. Later in the article (p. 28) he compares our assurance that we will not fall away with a rock climber's confidence that he will not fall. No one thinks that a rock climber is certain he will never fall. Falling is part of rock climbing. And falling is certainly a possibility in the Christian life.

EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS BY CANEDAY ARE FEW

There are seventy-two words in the Greek text of 1 Cor 9:23-27, the passage about which Caneday is writing. Yet few of these words receive attention or comment by Caneday.

This is an exegetical journal article. Indeed it is one in which Caneday criticizes others (especially Zane Hodges and me) for their poor exegesis (see pp. 6-15). Concerning the loss of rewards view he says,

Their exegetical comments tend to be brief, laconic,² void of exegetical development, lacking in theological adeptness and even-handedness, but at the same time they tend to be conveyed in an *ipso facto* manner, with an air of authority and finality incommensurate with supporting evidence and argument (p. 10).

One reason why scholars rarely make such statements is that they realize their own writings will then be judged by that standard.

His comments *about the text* are brief, something he criticizes. Indeed, it is hard to find any detailed discussion about the text or the words of the text. Rather, Caneday launches off into theological or practical discussions without having shown that his interpretation is indeed true.

²This is redundant since laconic is a synonym for brief.

(Anyone reading the article will note that his comments in general are verbose. He loves long and convoluted sentences. However, when it comes to comments about words or phrases in the text, he is quite brief.)

Precisely what he means by “void of exegetical development” is not clear. But in his own article there are so few exegetical comments, one wonders how he could consider his article to be characterized by “exegetical development.”

Is his article “lacking in theological adeptness”? Well, I suppose that depends on your point of view. From my perspective his article is filled with doublespeak and internal contradictions. But I urge the reader to read his article carefully to make your own decision.

Is his article “even-handed”? Since only my view receives his scorn and pejorative comments, and since he mentions me by name as being an example of one whose writings are devoid of exegetical development and lacking in theological adeptness, I might not be an unbiased judge. However, only in the one subsection of the paper dealing with the loss of eternal rewards view does he become bombastic. In the rest of the article his tone toward those with whom he disagrees is noticeably irenic. I would say he is far from being “even-handed” in this article, but again, I urge you to judge for yourself.

Does Caneday deliver his conclusions in *an ipso facto manner* without providing evidence to prove his statements? I believe he does that repeatedly throughout this article. But I invite you to read it and decide for yourself.

It strikes me that Caneday has criticized others for things of which he is guilty (Matt 7:3).

There are almost no exegetical comments by the author at all in the first nineteen pages. That is quite striking in an exegetical paper. Since he is evaluating various views in the first nineteen pages, he should make exegetical statements to prove his points. Yet the main exegesis found in the first nineteen pages are the views of others, not of Caneday himself. Caneday dismisses the views with which he disagrees primarily with the wave of the hand

and without any word studies, grammatical studies, contextual consideration, or references to other texts in Paul or the rest of the NT. I did find one place where Caneday makes a few grammatical observations to defend his view of the meaning of *sunkoinōnos autou* (lit. *sharer with it*) in 1 Cor 9:23 (p. 18). Unfortunately, such comments are exceedingly rare in this paper.

Even starting on p. 20 when Caneday begins to defend his own view, there is very little in the way of exegesis. When he begins explaining and defending his own view, what we find are what could rightly be called statements “conveyed in an *ipso facto* manner, with an air of authority and finality incommensurate with supporting evidence and argument.” For example, he writes, “By ‘fellow partaker of the gospel’ (*sunkoinōnos autou*), Paul means a fellow participant in the gospel with those whom he saved through the proclamation of the good news” (p. 20). And what does he believe that means? He concludes that paragraph with this sentence: “This continual need of faithfulness that he might be saved in the Day of Judgment is the burden of his reasoning throughout 1 Corinthians 9” (p. 21). In other words, in 1 Cor 9:23 by *fellow partaker of the gospel* Paul meant that through his work for Christ he hoped to avoid eternal condemnation. The issue for Caneday is not ruling with Christ and eternal rewards, but getting into the Kingdom and avoiding hell.

Now what proof does he cite to prove his understanding that in v 23 Paul was expressing his hope that he might finally receive the benefit of the gospel’s saving power? None. He does not cite other uses of *koinōnos* or *koinōnia* or *koinōneō* in Paul or elsewhere. He does not cite other uses of *sunkoinōnos* or *sunkoinōneō* in Paul or in the NT. He doesn’t discuss whether this entire expression, “fellow partaker of the gospel,” occurs elsewhere.

Why not discuss Phil 1:5 where the very similar expression “I thank God...for your fellowship in the gospel” (*epi tē koinōnia humōn eis to euangelion*) occurs? Of course in Phil 1:5 the issue is the financial participation of the

Philippian church in Paul’s gospel ministry. Or why not discuss Phil 4:15-16 where *koinoneō* (to share or partake) and *euangelion* (gospel) both are used in the statement,

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of *the gospel*, when I departed from Macedonia, no church *shared* with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities (emphasis added).

Nearly identical terminology is used in both Phil 1:5 and 4:15-16 as was used in 1 Cor 9:23, yet this isn’t mentioned by Caneday.

Thus that might suggest (or *does* suggest) that what Paul has in mind in 1 Cor 9:23 is figuratively presenting the gospel as though it were a person and is saying that Paul hopes to share with it in terms of anticipated eternal reward. That vv 24-27 immediately follow v 23 certainly supports that conclusion.

The word *misthos*, reward, is used twice by Paul earlier (in 1 Cor 9:17-18), a point also not mentioned by the author. I would see those as ironic uses, implying that Paul willingly gave up his right for wages from his gospel ministry in Corinth, but he knew there was indeed a future reward he would receive from it.

Here is a semi-exegetical comment I found from Caneday: “Within the ancient athletic arena, a runner was judged *disqualified* (*adokimos*) for breaking the rules of the games, including rules of training (cf. 2 Tim 2:5).” The only exegesis here is putting 2 Tim 2:5 in parenthesis.

But is 2 Tim 2:5 really informing our understanding of 1 Cor 9:24-27? There Paul says, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” The crowning is certainly a link, though Caneday does not point this out. But in what sense is Paul talking about “compet[ing] according to the rules” in 1 Cor 9:24-27? Does Paul mention any rules there? If so, Caneday should explain what the rules are which are

found in 1 Cor 9:24-27. Or if no rules are stated, then how does 2 Tim 2:5 prove his point?

Indeed, is not 2 Tim 2:5 part of a discussion about the fact that one who works is worthy of his pay? The very next verse says, "The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops." Do people get into the Kingdom because they work hard until the end of their lives? That would seem to be Caneday's point, especially if 2 Tim 2:5-6 illustrates what he is talking about.

More importantly, why doesn't Caneday discuss the other seven uses of *adokimos* in the NT? Why no discussion of the seven uses of *dokimos*, the antonym of *adokimos*, in the NT? It would seem that 2 Tim 2:15 is very germane to the exegesis of 1 Cor 9:24-27. There Paul calls upon Timothy to be diligent that he might be an *approved* (*dokimos*) worker for Christ. That sure seems closely related to what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 9:27. But Caneday doesn't mention or discuss 2 Tim 2:15.

A bit later Caneday attempts to prove that salvation is both already and not-yet. To do so he cites three texts in English, Rom 13:11 ("For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed"), Phil 2:12-13 ("Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling...") and 1 Cor 1:8-9 ("[God] will sustain you to the end, to be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, is faithful"). That is proof-texting and only qualifies as exegesis if the passages transparently prove what he is saying. But they do not.

The first of those texts concerns the Rapture. The readers knew their deliverance from this evil age was near since Jesus could return at any moment (Rom 13:11; cf. 1 Thess 5:9-10) The second of those texts concerns successfully handling persecution and trials so as to be rewarded in the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:12-13; cf. Phil 1:6, 10). Caneday fails to mention that Paul had earlier said that the prayers of the Philippians would work out for *his salvation* (Phil 1:19), that is, his successful handling of the

persecution he was undergoing while in prison in Rome. The third passage refers to the *Bēma*, the Judgment Seat of Christ, when believers will be rewarded for work done (1 Cor 1:8-9; cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10).

Maybe I missed them, but I found no word studies in this paper. I found no comparison with other texts in which Paul speaks of approval or disapproval.

I urge the reader to give Caneday’s article a very careful reading. Look for observations from the text of 1 Cor 9:23-27. I believe you will find very few. Look for comparison with other texts using the same words and phrases, both in Paul and elsewhere in the NT. I believe you will find very few.

Compare just about anything written by Zane Hodges, whom he lists as one who makes *ipso facto* claims with no exegetical proof, with this article by Caneday. I am biased. But I find much more in the way of word studies, textual studies, grammatical studies, reference to immediate and greater context, and the like in Hodges than I find in this article.

Indeed, I would not call this an exegetical article. I would call this a theological article which simply uses 1 Cor 9:24-27 as a scaffolding on which Caneday can present his view of perseverance as a condition of everlasting life.

CANEDAY'S REJECTION OF MERIT THEOLOGY FOR REWARDS DOESN'T EXPLAIN AWAY MERIT THEOLOGY FOR EVERLASTING LIFE

I found it ironic that Caneday criticizes the loss of eternal rewards view for having a doctrine of merit. Commenting on a note in *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, Caneday writes,

The note conveys an ostensible tone of authority and finality without any tinge of awareness

concerning the egregious doctrinal miscarriage it propounds: a Protestant doctrine of merit with an implied Protestant doctrine of purgatory (p. 7).

Leaving aside the ridiculous comparison of the loss of eternal rewards view with the Catholic view of purgatory, I was struck by his expression “*a Protestant doctrine of merit*.” The thought in my mind was, “So your view solves the problem of merit for eternal rewards by posing instead merit for everlasting life and participation in Jesus’ Kingdom? How does that help? In fact, isn’t that a direct contradiction of Rom 4:4-5 and Eph 2:8-9?”

I don’t see how Caneday can get away from the idea that a prize (*brabeion*) is pay for work done. He gave no study of the word in the NT. I don’t see how he can get away from the idea that the related word *misthos* (1 Cor 3:8, 14; 9:17-18; see also Rom 4:4; 1 Tim 5:18) refers to wages or pay for work done. He gave no study of *misthos* in the NT either.

Why is his view not guilty of contradicting Rom 4:4-5; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5 and a host of other texts in Paul? I don’t know, because he doesn’t discuss those other texts. He states his view and does not deal with potential objections to his view. I was taught that part of exegesis is considering possible objections to your own view. That he does not do that is surprising.

Possibly he has answers, though I could not find any in this article, nor did I find them in his 2001 book *The Race Set Before Us*.

WHY NO COMPARISON WITH OTHER TEXTS IN PAUL LIKE EPHESIANS 2:8-9?

He wrote, “The gospel requires faithful endurance from us in order that we might lay hold of salvation in the age to come” (p. 3). How does that harmonize that our salvation is “not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast”

(Eph 2:9)? Or how does that not contradict the Lord’s statement, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35)?

Caneday also made this remarkable statement:

What Paul says is urgent not only for him but for all who would have a share in God’s saving power. Lest we assume that salvation is ours regardless of how we behave, the apostle appeals to us with his extended analogy, the athletic imagery of [1 Cor] 9:24-27 (p. 23).

If our salvation (i.e., entrance into the Kingdom) depends on how we behave, then doesn’t that contradict Eph 2:9 and Rom 4:4-5 and Titus 3:5? And doesn’t that contradict what the Lord Jesus taught as recorded in the Gospel of John? Where is *behavior* in John 3:16? Is not everlasting life for *whoever believes in Him*, not *whoever behaves in Him*?

CANEDAY REJECTS ETERNAL SECURITY APART FROM PERSEVERANCE

Caneday criticizes me for my suggestion that one who believes in Jesus is eternally secure regardless of whether he perseveres or not. He writes, “Wilkin embraces a radicalized version of *eternal security* that is void of and disconnected from perseverance in the faith” (p. 11, italics his).

When I was in seminary I was taught that all true believers would persevere in faith and good works till death or the Rapture. However, I was never told that eternal security was contingent upon that perseverance. Rather, I was taught that the perseverance was guaranteed by God and was something the believer would do whether he wanted to or not. The believer could not ultimately thwart the work of God in his life. The believer might fall for a time. But he would come back from the far country because God would cause him to do so.

I never heard Caneday's version of Calvinism, where perseverance is a condition of eternal security and not a result of it. In light of the instruction I received at Dallas Theological Seminary, I'd say that Caneday has a "radicalized view of eternal security." But like Dispensationalism (witness Progressive Dispensationalism), Calvinism is changing.³

Calvinism has been changing in academic circles. Now many Calvinists speak freely of perseverance in good works as a condition of escaping eternal condemnation, of final justification by works before God on the Last Day, and of final salvation as a prize won by the believers who are faithful. Anyone not blinded by modern scholarship would call such statements examples of works salvation. No matter how much Caneday says he doesn't believe in works salvation, his protestations are transparently false.

CONTRADICTIONARY STATEMENTS EXIST IN THIS PAPER

Normally scholars are careful not to contradict themselves within a paper. To do so casts doubts on the validity of their paper.

This paper has at least one outright contradiction, as well as at least one statement which gives strong indication of being contradictory.

The first example concerns a blatant contradiction. Caneday contradicts himself as to whether Paul was or was not expressing concern in 1 Cor 9:23-27 that he might be eternally condemned. In a number of places Caneday says he was concerned. For example, "Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test in the Day of Judgment and the possibility of his being cast into perdition [i.e., the lake of fire]" (p. 6; see also pp. 25-26).

³I wrote my master's thesis at DTS on an exegetical evaluation of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. In it I argued that eternal security (half of Calvinism's fifth point) is guaranteed, but perseverance, while commanded, is not guaranteed.

However, using almost identical language, Caneday also says that Paul was not concerned about his eternal destiny. When discussing whether Paul feared “that he might lose the race in which salvation is the imperishable wreath,” Caneday writes:

Such a view [that Paul doubted that God would be faithful “to preserve his people unto final salvation”] of how promise and warning correlate does not allow one simultaneously to believe the warning, that perseverance is essential for attaining final salvation, and to believe the promise, that God preserves everyone [sic] of his children unto final salvation. Of course, oscillating between such believing and doubting is silly and has no biblical warrant. Nevertheless, such oscillation is precisely what we must affirm, *if we hold that Paul fears that God might reject him as a reprobate in the Day of Judgment* (pp. 28-29, emphasis added).

Note that earlier Caneday says that Paul poses the possibility of his own failure to pass the test on the Day of Judgment and to be cast into perdition. Then here he reverses course and said that it “is silly has no biblical warrant” to “hold that Paul fears that God might reject him as a reprobate in the Day of Judgment.”

A second example concerns what appears to be a contradiction, but which Caneday attempts to explain as a non-contradiction. This example grows directly out of the first. Here Caneday tries to explain how Paul can be afraid to go to hell but not be afraid that he might go to hell. Here is what Caneday writes,

Paul never implies personal *fear that he might perish* but he does imply that he *fears to perish* or that he *fears lest he perish* (p. 28, italics his).

Now in English, there is no discernible difference in meaning between those three statements. Caneday goes on to explain what he means:

There is a vast difference between *fearing to perish* and *fearing that I might perish*, whether in rock climbing or in living the Christian life. *Fearing that I might perish*, in both situations, entails *fright* that destroys and expels confidence and assurance. *Fearing to perish*, when rock climbing or running to obtain final salvation, is the proper kind of fear that cultivates caution and is wholly compatible with confidence and assurance of achieving the goal. *Fear to perish* is the godly response in Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 9:23-27; *fear to perish* is integral to attaining and obtaining the imperishable wreath of salvation (p. 28, italics his).

It is hard for me to discern precisely what Caneday means there. It sounds like theological doublespeak. But at least his illustration concerning the rock climbing gives a hint of what he means, even if I can't see the difference between the three English expressions about fear of perishing. He seems to be saying that a little fear of falling and going to hell is a good thing but that a lot of fear of falling and going to hell is a bad thing. But is there any indication in 1 Cor 9:24-27 that Paul is talking about degrees of fear of hell, or even that he is talking about hell at all? No.

Whether a rock climber has a little or a lot of fear, all rock climbers have a fear of falling. There is no such thing as a rock climber who is certain that he will never fall. (Indeed, I doubt there has ever been a seasoned rock climber who has not fallen many times.)

If rock climbing illustrates Caneday's view, then there is no such thing as a believer in Jesus Christ who is certain that he will never fall. Evidently Caneday himself has a lot of confidence in his own steadfastness and thinks it isn't very likely he will fall. But if he is like the rock climber in his own illustration, then he realizes he might fall and he might perish. No matter how confident he is, he is not certain. After all, if the Apostle Paul was not

certain he would persevere, then how can any believer be sure he will persevere?

ALREADY, BUT NOT YET, IS QUITE CONFUSING IN THIS ARTICLE

As with the book he co-authored, Caneday promotes salvation as something the believer already has and also as something the believer does not yet have.

Now *JOTGES* readers would agree that there are things which the regenerate person does not yet possess, but which all born-again people will one day possess (e.g., glorified bodies, experiential perfection, being in the presence of the Lord Jesus, being in the Kingdom, etc.). However, we do not say, as Caneday does, that we both have everlasting life now and that all believers will win everlasting life on the Last Day if we endure to the end of our lives. While we believe that there is a fullness of eternal life that will only be given to the overcoming believer (e.g., Gal 6:7-9), we do not believe that all believers will receive that fullness. Caneday is not speaking of a fullness of everlasting life that only some believers will have. In fact, he is not even clear what this future everlasting life is. He never speaks of abundant life or of everlasting life experienced more fully.

Here is what he seems to be saying: the true believer already has everlasting life as a gift now and he will later win everlasting life as a prize for working for Christ until the end. The professing believer, on the other hand, doesn’t really have everlasting life as a free gift now, nor will he win it as a prize for perseverance works later. I indicate that he *seems to be saying this*, for Caneday is not clear. He never speaks of professing believers or of true believers. Only once in the article does he say that anyone who has eternal life now will assuredly win it on the last day. Aside from that one reference, one would think he

was saying that the present experience of eternal life does not guarantee winning the prize in the future.

Since Caneday says that Paul was afraid to be eternally condemned, and since he says that he wrote 1 Cor 9:24-27 “lest we assume that salvation is ours regardless of how we behave” (p. 23), he clearly believes that Paul was not sure of his eternal destiny when he wrote 1 Cor 9:24-27. That would mean that the Apostle Paul was unsure that he had everlasting life at that time. Does that make any sense? Are we to believe that he wrote thirteen NT epistles and yet did not know he was born again? It is hard to believe that the man who came to faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus did not know whether he was truly regenerate. When he was healing the sick and raising the dead was he unsure he would get into the Kingdom?

This view seems like another way to be able to preach justification by faith alone, apart from works, and yet at the same time deny justification by faith alone, apart from works. It seems that pastors and theologians will go to great lengths today to come up with a way of getting perseverance in good works into the equation of justification by faith alone, apart from works.

CONCLUSION

In Caneday’s view the Apostle Paul believed that salvation from hell is a prize to be won. The way in which one obtains this prize is by persevering in faith and good works to the end of one’s Christian life.

Caneday views the Christian life as the race of our eternal lives. Eternal life and eternal death are at stake. So run with endurance the race that is set before you so that you might win the prize of eternal salvation from hell.

But what does this mean, practically speaking?

First, no one can be sure he has everlasting life prior to death.

Second, fear of hell should be a regular part of every Christian’s daily experience.

Third, while *already salvation* is by faith alone, *not yet salvation* will be by perseverance in good works done for Christ.

Fourth, when we evangelize people, we are evangelizing ourselves (since we need to be reminded that perseverance is the condition for winning final salvation on the Last Day).

Fifth, it is a major error to tell people that all who simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have everlasting life that can never be lost. That is a radical version of eternal security that may actually lead people to hell, since they will not be taught the necessity of perseverance in good works to gain *final salvation*.

Sixth, we must realize that we are not sure of the eternal destiny of anyone, including our spouse, children, parents, coworkers, fellow church members, pastor, elders, deacons, and missionaries.

Seventh, this makes it hard to decide who to marry, for believers are only to marry other believers. Being unable to know who is born again makes it essentially impossible to marry and at the same time obey Scripture.

I believe that Caneday has good intentions. However, if he has departed from the Word of God on the condition of everlasting life, then he is leading many people astray on the single most important issue in Scripture. Caneday invites readers to correct him when he writes in the conclusion: “We need to be willing to identify kindly others’ blind spots *and be prepared for correction ourselves*, for the work of exegesis and theology is a collaborative endeavor that entails correctives” (p. 30, italics added). I have tried to “identify kindly [Caneday’s] blind spots.” Through the start of my senior year in college I essentially held his

view (mine was simply more strident, since I believed perseverance in sinless perfection was needed to get salvation on the last day). When I was delivered from that view, I experienced a profound sense of gratitude and love toward my Lord and Savior that I haven't gotten over yet. I wish that joy for Caneday as well.

REVIEW OF BRYAN FRASER'S *WINNING A GENERATION WITHOUT THE LAW*¹

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INTRODUCTION

Happy coincidence led me to this book. On January 7, 2011 the Grace Evangelical Society's facebook page linked to a web page entitled, "Take the Gospel Quiz."² Intrigued by the test, I dug further into the website and discovered the test's author, Bryan Fraser, and his book, which serves as the basis for the test. That book is the subject of this review.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Free Grace advocates will find this book profitable. There is plenty here that is agreeable and useful. For example, his statement that the only spiritual transaction available to the unbeliever is to believe in Jesus is refreshing.³ His incisive comment that Christianity has laden the gospel with legal obligations that the unregenerate

¹ Bryan Fraser, *Winning a Generation Without the Law: Essentials of the Gospel for a Postmodern Culture* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2010). This book is 192 pages in length and paperback. It lists for \$14.99.

² <http://gospelwithoutlaw.com/test1/>. Accessed January 7, 2011.

³ Fraser, *Winning*, 83. Editor's note: Of course, unbelievers can also repent (Acts 17:30), and they can please God by giving alms and praying (Acts 10:4, 35; cf. 11:14). Surely what Fraser means by this comment is that the only spiritual transaction *guaranteed to result in the immediate possession of everlasting life* available to the unbeliever is to believe in Jesus.

cannot fulfill is a penetrating indictment of Lordship theology (pp. 84-90).⁴

At times the book frustrates. There is no bibliography, there are no footnotes, interaction with relevant literature is absent, and Biblical citations are scant. Although it reflects deep thought, a clear understanding of the gospel, and careful exegesis of salient Biblical passages, this book was written for the lay reader.

Still, this provocative book offers numerous useful contributions to Free Grace theology. It will be profitable reading for this journal's audience, particularly chapters one ("The Battle of the Past"), four ("The Battle of the Soul"), and eight ("The Battle of the Law").

THEME, THESIS AND PURPOSE

The book's theme is Christianity's long history of failure to understand the distinction between the law and the gospel (p. ix). Fraser's thesis is that Christianity's mistaken insistence on framing society's departure from the law as a rejection of Christ is due to its own failure to understand and declare the gospel to a culture without the law (p. x). His purpose is to persuade the reader that the "model of a visibly activist, culturally dominant Christianity is not practical, necessary or even possible" and to urge Christianity to forsake its use of politics and law to speak to the culture, allowing it to play a role similar to the one it fulfilled in the first century (pp. 34-35).

The book raises a number of issues that should attract the attention of Bible students and practitioners. The theme intersects the interests of Free Grace adherents and Missional Church practitioners.⁵ This review focuses on points of interest to Free Grace proponents.

⁴ Fraser does not mention Lordship Salvation but his critique of the typical evangelistic offer applies equally to the theology of the Lordship Salvation school.

⁵ "Missional Church" refers to a significantly different paradigm to conceptualize "church." At the risk of oversimplification, the primary

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is comprised of a prologue, ten chapters, a conclusion and an appendix. Each chapter examines a battle that has drawn Christianity's attention at the expense of its mission. Fraser believes that the gospel does not need to have these battles waged (pp. 34-35). These battles are:

1. The Battle of the Past
2. The Battle of the Will
3. The Battle of the Flesh
4. The Battle of the Soul
5. The Battle of the Mind
6. The Battle of the Present
7. The Battle of the World
8. The Battle of the Law
9. The Battle of Being Right
10. The Battle of the Future

PROLOGUE

The lengthy Prologue (pp. 15-29) prepares the reader for Fraser's purpose and his perspective on Christianity's proper response to postmodernism. The prologue is an allegorical tale of the author's encounter with Jesus in an offbeat, vaguely New Age deli, The Enchanted Mushroom. In their conversation Jesus tells the author he

distinction between Missional Church and what its adherents call "attractional church" is this: "Whenever the local church does attempt to engage the world in evangelism, it most often employs a 'y'all come' type of outreach. *The church, in effect, throws some type of party and expects the world to come to it*" [my emphasis]. Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), xxiv. In contrast, a Missional Church is wholly organized to deploy all of its resources to carry Christ out to the community rather than attempting to bring the community into church to encounter Christ. Although the distinctive characteristics of the Missional Church are straightforward, those of long affiliation with or who have a major stake in the attractional church paradigm may find the distinction between the two elusive and mistake their "outreach" efforts as fitting the missional category. A helpful rule of thumb is to ask, "Do you expect this effort to increase attendance at your church meeting?" If so, the church is probably not genuinely missional.

is disappointed with what has become of Christianity and gives him the task of delivering a message to the Church.

The allegorical church has allowed postmodernism to dislodge Christianity from its role in the culture because it has been co-opted by the world. Its lampstand has been removed because it has come to rely on the exercise of political power rather than on the Spirit. "Today my people have become more like the wolf pack itself, using its tremendous strength and cunning to surround and take down its prey" (p. 23). "They have made too many unholy alliances with the kings of the land. They invoked my name too often in the pursuit of their own security, comfort and dominance" (p. 26). In the process of exercising political influence the church has "usurped the role of my Spirit. They have taken on themselves the task of conviction" (p. 24). Henceforth these means will be useless in pursuit of the Lord's purposes (p. 23). Christendom will be humbled, having its place of honor and respect stripped away, but in the end it will emerge with a new heart and a new vision for its task (p. 26).

Fraser's point is that Christianity is preoccupied with preserving a culture that has passed beyond recovery. It has failed its God-given task of offering eternal life.⁶ It now sits on a hostile frontier, in a culture so foreign that it must abandon the familiar tools of political influence and declaration of the law previously used to advance the gospel (p. 25).⁷

⁶ Fraser neglects the disciple-making task, reducing Christianity's commission to the sole task of offering the gospel to the world. In the allegory he places the following words on the lips of Jesus: "My people have lost their way. *I sent them into the world to accomplish one task: to testify of me and to proclaim the life that I offer to those who thirst and hunger,*" (p. 24) [my emphasis]. The task of disciple making has been overlooked here. But, in his defense, the larger point is true; in its relationship to the world Christianity in America has deteriorated into an exercise of political power, proclamation of the law to the unsaved, and woeful neglect of the gracious offer of the gospel.

⁷ I assume this is Fraser's meaning when Jesus, in the allegory, states, "they will be forced to abandon their weapons of flesh and blood." If so, then I agree.

Free Grace supporters will endorse his view that it is fruitless to use the law as a means of presenting the gospel in this postmodern culture.⁸ According to Fraser the “bad news” of legal separation from God is theologically correct,⁹ “but it is a poor access point to the gospel for a culture that is without the law” (p. 138).

Missional Church practitioners will embrace his proposition that Christianity should abandon methods of relating to the culture that it has relied on in the past.¹⁰

THE BATTLE OF THE PAST

The first of Christianity’s ten battles is the “battle of the past.” Here Fraser briefly describes the distinguishing marks of postmodernism and discusses Christianity’s ineffective response. “The battle of the past is Christianity’s struggle to restore the 20th century culture that was under the law” (p. 31). His savory observation that the postmodern worldview “has transformed the theological, ethical and philosophical baselines of Western society with the silent efficiency of a stage crew changing sets between acts of a play” captures the unexpected speed with

⁸ Chapter 8, “The Battle of the Law” (pp. 136-46), expands on Fraser’s view on this.

⁹ Many Free Grace proponents (this reviewer included) will disagree with Fraser’s view that the use of the law in an evangelistic setting may be theologically correct even if ineffective in a postmodern culture. See further comments under the heading “Battle of the Law.”

¹⁰ *Missional Church* denotes a loosely organized but increasingly influential movement that seeks to re-examine ecclesiology and to implement practices that are closer to the Biblical text and appropriate to the emerging culture. I have found several volumes to be helpful in understanding this movement. In addition to Cole see also Alan Hirsch and Leonard Sweet, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006); Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Allelon Missional Series) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010). There are a number of areas in which Free Grace adherents and Missional Church practitioners will have common interest.

which postmodernism has dislodged its predecessor (p. 32). In this shift four values have been incorporated into the unexamined lives of postmodern people: pragmatism, pantheism, relativism, and egocentrism (p. 36).

A simple, straightforward definition is offered for each term. Pragmatism signifies the view that a thing is true if it is perceived as practical or desirable (p. 37). Relativism is the belief that right and wrong are “adjustable” rather than being either transcendent or fixed (p. 39). Egocentrism is “that theory of meaning where a document means whatever the reader takes it to mean. The role of the writer is diminished, if not eliminated entirely” (p. 41). Pantheism “is the teaching that God is the universe and the universe is God (p. 38).

Christianity reacted to this cultural shift by attempting to protect its turf. A more appropriate response is to embrace this as an opportunity to lay aside our least effective tools (p. 45).¹¹

These four assumptions are so thoroughly integrated into contemporary, postmodern society.... While the predominant reaction of Christians to this seismic ideological transformation of Western culture is generally negative, I will refrain from calling it so (p. 42).

Fraser offers an interesting insight that Free Grace adherents will want to see developed further. He observes correctly that collectivism, one logical outcome of pantheism, creates an insurmountable existential crisis for postmoderns (p. 39). Postmodernism cannot answer the human heart’s most basic questions: “Does God know me or love me?”¹² This affords a unique opening for God’s gracious message. Free Grace adherents understand that

¹¹ He notes, tartly, that contemporary Christianity is devoting far too much energy to preserving its power and privilege. As a result it has become self-focused, looks to the past, and acts as if it had somehow been inconvenienced (p. 42). I agree with Fraser that the correct response should be for Christianity to forget the past, lay aside useless tools, and forge ahead.

¹² In this regard postmodernism creates the same dilemma that polytheism created for inhabitants of the first century. Absent any doctrine of

neither the Reformed Lordship answer (“maybe”) nor the Arminian Lordship answer (“yes, but”) is accurate or appropriate. Only Free Grace theology allows an unqualified answer of “Absolutely!”

This chapter will also interest practitioners in the Missional Church movement. There is no citation or reference to indicate that Fraser has read the literature, but it is clear that he is familiar with this encouraging development in ecclesiology. Either that, or he has independently arrived at many of the same conclusions:

Today’s new social order offers Christianity the opportunity to define and understand itself more clearly and accurately than it has ever done before...(p. 43).

Christianity will need to abandon its traditional ways of interacting with society because the well-worn paths into its institutions no longer have the ‘welcome’ signs up. It will have to blow the dust off older strategies it neglected while it enjoyed its former favor in the public spotlight (p. 44).

Postmodern thought creates monumental challenges to Christianity’s previously privileged position. This poses the critical question of the hour: Will Christianity fulfill the role that Jesus handed to it in the first century, or will it attempt to recover the role that it took for itself in the 20th century (p. 33)?

This chapter would have been enriched by brief discussion of consumerism’s role in this battle and its contribution to the demise of Christianity’s influence. From my perspective, as a practitioner of church revitalization in troubled congregations, it is almost impossible to overstate the damage consumerism has inflicted on churches, pastors, and the public face of Christianity. Consumerism, strictly speaking, is not unique to postmodernism, but

grace, neither the Roman nor the Greek pantheons were capable of providing the assurance of transcendent, divine love.

neither are the four assumptions in this chapter. Unlike those assumptions, which many Christians would purge from our culture, consumerism is sacrosanct. It is so deeply embedded in church growth literature that few even think to question it. Fortunately, a detailed analysis of the destructive effects of consumerism is one important contribution of the Missional Church movement.

THE BATTLE OF THE WILL

This chapter examines “Christianity’s effort to impose the law on an unwilling society” and its propensity to use political power and the electoral process to impose its will in the public arena (p. 47). Fraser approaches the issue by introducing the Reformed notion of two governmental spheres. God’s “government of creation” is the way that He superintends the entire created order:

Through his government of creation, God creates all peoples in his image, gives them wisdom and understanding through his Spirit, requires them to live justly with one another, hears their prayers, and honors their obedience to the laws of creation (p. 47).¹³

In his brief description of the second government, the government of redemption, Fraser’s sympathy with the Free Grace position, particularly his understanding of the saving message, appears in stark relief. He defines the government of redemption as the means by which God superintends “those who believe in his Son unto eternal life” (p. 47).¹⁴ It is rare to hear someone largely unknown in Free Grace circles declare the saving message without

¹³ It is tempting to evaluate this statement in detail but such a critique would exceed the scope of this review. Since Fraser is writing for a lay audience it would be unfair to criticize this statement as if it represented a comprehensive statement of Fraser’s views on the matter; this schema is a useful (if incomplete) tool for examining contemporary Christianity’s misplaced reliance on political power and the electoral process to impose its will in the public sphere.

¹⁴ This is a clear allusion and almost a direct quote of 1 Tim 1:16.

qualifiers like “true faith” or “genuine faith” and without unbiblical conditions such as commitment, obedience, confession, submission, or any of a number of other prerequisites that properly belong to discipleship, not admission to eternal life.

Fraser finds history replete with examples of Christianity employing tools that belong to the government of creation to advance the government of redemption.¹⁵ Although the relationship between these two governments has been a source of significant debate over the centuries (p. 16), we do know that trouble ensues when Christianity confuses them (pp. 48, 57-59). Perhaps Fraser had the politically conservative wing of American Christianity in mind when he wrote that “much of Christianity’s effort today to exert its influence is driven by the same domineering, imperialistic spirit” that produced the Crusades, European Colonialism, the Inquisition, and numerous other catastrophes.¹⁶

Free Grace adherents should appreciate Fraser’s thoughts on the error of conflating the two governments; those of the Reformed persuasion will likely disagree.¹⁷ He sees in Christianity’s use of the government of creation as a fundamental disregard for the human freedom to choose and as a failure to understand Christianity’s basic mission.¹⁸ “Christ is only welcome in the government of creation by invitation” (p. 51). Going forward Christianity

¹⁵ This would include military power, politics, the electoral process and the courts.

¹⁶ Fraser mentions only the Crusades (p. 49) and alludes to European Colonialism.

¹⁷ Particularly those who are persuaded of the doctrine of “Total Inability.” He observes that when Christianity acquires political power it inevitably exercises it to protect its own interests and comfort (p. 53). He pungently notes “Armies march to war so that the victors can impose their will upon the vanquished. Political parties work to win elections so that they can impose their will upon the minority. Even Christianity, when it finds itself in a position of political advantage, cannot resist the temptation to inflict its will upon the unwilling” (p. 59).

¹⁸ It is Fraser’s view that Christianity should, like its Lord, respect the freedom of human choice, including the freedom to choose poorly (pp. 54-64). He concludes that Christianity wandered from Jesus’ free offer to all who

should adjust to the fact that “the government of creation has no obligation to recognize the government of redemption” (p. 51).

Fraser attributes the political divide between believers over the proper use of the organs of government to their profound failure to understand the mission. “Christianity’s mandate is not to impose God’s law on the government of creation; it is to make disciples” (p. 52). His opponents may argue that in a democracy it is appropriate and even necessary to use political power to create an environment in which evangelism and discipleship may flourish. This overlooks the fact that Christianity flourishes when it is excluded from the halls of power. In the face of severe governmental sanctions Christianity revolutionized the Greco-Roman world during the first several centuries of the Christian era and it has experienced dramatic growth of the underground church in China over the last sixty years.¹⁹

Students of history and political theory will probably be dissatisfied with this chapter. Nonetheless, it serves as a primer on the damage caused when Christianity resorts to the government of creation to accomplish its mission rather than operating within its proper sphere, the government of redemption.

are willing into the exercise of power out of a desire to maintain its privilege and to avoid the unpleasantness of radical change.

¹⁹ Stark observes, “Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.” Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1997), 161. All of this was accomplished several centuries before the Edict of Milan in AD 313.

THE BATTLE OF THE FLESH

The third chapter is a provocative critique of what I have termed *comfortable Christianity*. “The Battle of the Flesh is Christianity’s resistance to lawlessness for the sake of its own comfort and stability” (p. 65). This chapter develops a theme introduced in the previous chapter.²⁰ It likens cultural changes to weight resistance exercises that strengthen and build muscles. Christians who resist cultural changes grow weak in the faith.

It was surprising to read “the undoing of the rich fool who built bigger barns was that he tried to insulate himself from change. And in that, his attitude was inconsistent with life” (p. 66).²¹ This is an unfortunate illustration of Fraser’s point since the parable was addressed to the Pharisees to warn them of the danger posed by their love of money (Luke 16:14).²² A more apt illustration may have been drawn from the conflict over whether Gentiles should be required to adopt aspects of Jewish culture in order to be recognized as equal members with Jews in the Church.

There is merit to Fraser’s view that we should expect God to facilitate His messengers’ movement abroad so His name will be declared throughout the earth (p. 72). Movement is less likely when life is comfortable and stable. Political oppression, environmental disaster, and economic hardship motivate migration, serving the Lord’s purposes. It is shortsighted and self-centered to imagine

²⁰ He states, “our zeal to resist the ‘de-Christianizing’ of society too often arises out of our desire for continuity and stability” (p. 53). To that one may add the desire for ease.

²¹ Although Fraser does not provide the citation, this is a reference to the teaching on Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.

²² Bock reads this as a warning to the disciples that wealth in this life does not translate to wealth in the next. Therefore, disciples of means should take care to be generous with those of lesser means. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 3rd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1361. See also R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Volume II* (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1998), 156 and John Noland, *Luke 9:21-18:34 Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 35B* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 828.

that God is mainly interested in creating governments that allow prosperity, security, and comfort. History shows that this kind of environment entices God's people to become preoccupied with their own comfort. In Fraser's view it is unfortunate that Christianity has marshalled its resources to protect its turf rather than moving forward into unreached corners of postmodern culture.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOUL

This enlightening chapter begins with Christianity's unrealistic demand that the unregenerate must keep the law (p. 76).²³ It ends with a trenchant critique of evangelists who require the natural man to acknowledge the law, something of which he is incapable. He notes that the natural man is not in the position of having rejected spiritual truth after careful consideration. Rather, "he *cannot* [his emphasis] weigh them or even recognize them" (p. 77).

His argument errantly asserts that there are but two spiritual conditions: Spirit-filled or unregenerate (p. 78). Perhaps he intended to write "Spirit-indwelt," but if not then we ask, what of the carnal believer who is indwelt by but not filled with the Spirit? Are there not at least three spiritual categories (unregenerate, Spirit-indwelt, and Spirit-filled)?

Free Grace adherents will particularly appreciate Fraser's pungent evaluation of popular evangelistic techniques:

Christianity's confusion about the spiritual capabilities of the natural man is also evident in its approach to evangelism...The natural man has only one spiritual transaction available to him and required of him: to believe in Jesus

²³ I assume that "law" in this context refers to the Law of Moses.

Christ according to the gift of faith God provides him (p. 83).²⁴

Since the unregenerate man is not capable of grasping the array of legal transactions that often comprise the traditional evangelistic offer, Fraser rightly turns a critical eye on six common mistakes in evangelism (pp. 84-90). The requirements often included within the typical evangelistic presentation are “forms of ‘pre-discipleship’” (p. 83):

1. Recognize you have sinned.
2. Confess your sin to Jesus.
3. Ask forgiveness.
4. Ask Him to help you turn away from your old life, and commit to doing so.
5. Ask the Lord into your life, to be in control and guide you.
6. Determine to follow him [sic], through the direction of His Spirit and the study of His Word.

Helpful discussion is included under each of these points. Fraser observes that imposing such conditions in any presentation of the gospel indicates a seriously deficient understanding of grace and a failure to understand the limits of the natural man’s spiritual discernment (pp. 90-91). They may result in a needless challenge to one’s assurance as they easily lead to the notion that the status of one’s adoption depends on remaining continually faithful (p. 91). Many of them are conditions of discipleship, not of salvation.²⁵

I appreciated his view on the means of salvation: “A person only becomes a Christian through his act of belief”

²⁴ It is not clear what Fraser means by “the gift of faith” in this context. I suspect that he is referring to the Reformed doctrine of the same name. See my comments in the conclusion about Fraser’s use of this and other Reformed doctrines.

²⁵ E.g., he notes that asking God for forgiveness is something available to those who are already regenerate, and that this is an obligation on the believer (p. 87).

(p.89).²⁶ Free Grace adherents will profit by reading and considering Fraser's analysis of the typical gospel presentation.

THE BATTLE OF THE MIND

After the previous strong chapter, this one disappoints. It tackles a subject of considerable contemporary interest but displays a lack of careful exegesis and a weak understanding of anthropology. The subject, Christianity's efforts to answer postmodernism's rational objections to the law, is important in our postmodern environment and should interest anyone engaged in the missionary task.

Fraser expresses concern that apologetics may be a fool's errand today: "My concern is not with postmodernism's shallow contrivance, but rather with Christianity's all too willing readiness to play at this game" (p. 96). In Fraser's view the argument is lost before it begins because:

When [Christianity] submits its confession to the scrutiny of empirical examination, Christianity accepts by default postmodernism's assertion that such an assessment by the rational mind is a legitimate enterprise (p. 96).

He devalues the utility of an apologetic response to postmodern culture (p. 93). Apologetics is valuable when speaking to "genuine seekers" but it is of little or no value in speaking to the unregenerate mind. He reads Peter's

²⁶ Unfortunately, he sees belief as an act of the will rather than a state of the mind. The participial clauses in Rom 4:20-21 indicate that faith is a matter of conviction, not volition. See Fred Chay and John Correia, *The Faith that Saves: The Nature of Faith in the New Testament* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 2008); Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 96; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 214; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38a (Dallas: Word, 2002), 222; Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, Mo: 21st Century, 2005), 95. Lopez's observation speaks directly to the matter when he writes, "Finally Paul defines Abraham's faith as **being fully convinced**" [emphasis his].

instruction (he provides no citation but this is an obvious reference to 1 Pet 3:15) as lacking any justification for addressing skeptics and critics on a rational level (p. 94). His statement that “by their very nature, these interactions can never lead to faith in Christ” (p. 94) neglects ample evidence to the contrary.²⁷

The effort is fruitless, in Fraser’s view, because “Christianity’s efforts to justify the faith to the rational mind use tools that were never intended to perform that task” (p. 96). He relies on an anthropology that is unreformed, even for a book written for the lay audience.

For example, he contends that the physical senses, which are useful in measuring the physical world, are of little value in perceiving spiritual truth; the eyes are particularly useless. “Throughout the Bible, the eyes represent human self-determination and independence, as opposed to submission to God” (p. 96). In his view hearing is the primary means by which one obtains spiritual insight, a thought derived from his understanding of Rom 10:9-10 (p. 97).

I want to extend benefit of the doubt because he writes to a lay audience. But it is hard to understand his neglect of a wealth of Biblical data in which the eyes do play an important role in understanding and believing spiritual truth²⁸ and texts which indicate that hearing is no more reliable in accessing spiritual truth than any other faculty.²⁹ His failure to reference Biblical passages that

²⁷ Lee Strobel comes to mind as one who came to faith as his barriers to faith were dismantled, one by one, through a process of research and evaluation that he honed in his many years as a legal reporter for *The Chicago Tribune*. See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) and Strobel’s bio page at <http://www.leestrobel.com/Bio.php>. Accessed February 2, 2011.

²⁸ Matthew 5:16; 11:4; 13:16; Mark 4:12; 8:18; Luke 9:27; and John 9:39 all show a link between seeing with the eyes and either believing or disbelieving. The problem is not that the eye is unsuited for perceiving items of spiritual significance. Rather, the problem is with the heart that either believes (“sees”) or not (“does not see”). In Matt 13:15 Jesus comments on the interplay between sight, hearing, and an unbelieving heart.

²⁹ Mark 4:12.

speak directly to his point (the natural man's inability to understand spiritual matters) significantly weakens his argument and the value of this chapter.³⁰

THE BATTLE OF THE PRESENT

This chapter opens with a statement of a subject that is neglected in the ensuing pages. "The Battle of the Present is Christianity's effort to exalt the benefits of law in this life by criticising [sic] postmodern culture" (p. 107). What follows is a cogent critique of the "life-is-better-with-Jesus gospel" that characterizes consumer Christianity. The connection between the chapter's subject matter and its contents is not readily apparent.

Fraser is accurate in his assertion that "during the second half of the 20th century, however, Christianity significantly transformed its message into a life-is-better-with-Jesus gospel" that exalts potential side effects above the central truth of eternal life.³¹ He rightly insists, "The central truth of the gospel is that death has been defeated and that all of these other blessings follow in the wake of Christ's victory" (p. 108).

When we present Christ as a cure-all elixir instead of as God's answer to the sting of death, we surrender our most powerful tool for a weaker one. The Holy Spirit empowers the gospel offer of eternal life (p. 109). The offer of a better life with Jesus is spiritually impotent and in fact suffers from several significant shortcomings. Among them is the fact that this defective gospel must convince people that they are unhappy and unfulfilled (p. 109). When the gospel is offered as a life improvement, it must compete with other solutions, many of which may offer genuine benefit (p. 110). Further, it is not an ineluctable

³⁰ E.g., 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:3-4.

³¹ Side effects noted by the author (p. 108) include material and financial blessing, improved physical and psychological health, wholesome relationships and, where the faith becomes widespread, a just and prosperous nation.

truth that one's life in this world will improve when one believes in Jesus (p. 112). Christians face potential discrimination at work, a loss of friends and family relationships and ridicule by the world. Finally, this approach to the gospel offers people what they crave rather than what they actually need (p. 113).

He ends this chapter with a lengthy exposition of the mistake we make in thinking that we always know what we need. Although his points are well taken, they are really not necessary. Enumerating and briefly describing the faults of the life-is-better-with-Jesus gospel made his point.

This chapter should motivate us to evaluate our gospel presentations. Aside from the fact that the material in the chapter seems unrelated to its stated theme, it is relevant, accurate, and worth consideration.

THE BATTLE OF THE WORLD

This chapter addresses those voices within the Christian community that engage the postmodern culture over a variety of issues: "The Battle of the World is Christianity's reactionary application of the law to the postmodern agenda" (p. 122). This battle is joined when Christian organizations resort to the law to discover and declare God's view on any given subject of public interest (p. 123).³²

This is a fruitless task for at least four reasons. First, Christians fail to appreciate the degree to which bias and their own "local horizons" govern what we think are God's opinions (p. 123).³³ Second, the Bible's central teaching on many significant topics often consists of a set of

³² One presumes that by "law" Fraser refers to the Law of Moses and the discipleship teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

³³ He urges the reader to "trace any particular issue back through the history of Christian thought—even ten or twenty years—and you will see how strongly a generation's particular cultural lenses color its views."

contrasting thoughts (p. 123).³⁴ Wrestling with these contrasts is often the process by which the Holy Spirit guides us in our path.³⁵ A third reason why declaring the mind of God on any given public issue is fruitless is because “the government of creation will not allow the government of redemption to impose the grid of the law over its affairs” (p. 124).³⁶

Fourth and finally, attempts to speak for God in the public square are useless because Jesus Himself ignored the battlefields chosen by the world (p. 124). By way of example the author cites the question of paying taxes to Caesar, which was cast in terms intended to force Jesus to declare His political sympathies.³⁷ In similar fashion the postmodern world attempts to force Christians into certain labels, thereby channeling the message into categories of the world’s choosing (p. 125).³⁸ Christianity will only regain its prophetic voice if it ignores the postmodern world’s attempt to neatly categorize the faith (p. 132).

There is an interesting internal contradiction within this chapter that significantly weakens his argument. Fraser calls on Christianity to avoid a “reactionary application of the law to the postmodern agenda” (p. 122) and yet the Biblical examples he cites as worthy of emulation—Samuel (p. 128), Isaiah (pp. 129-30), and Nehemiah (p. 133)—did the very thing Fraser says we should not do.

³⁴ He cites, e.g., that money can be both a blessing and a snare or that God directs our paths but we must choose our steps wisely.

³⁵ Often the Holy Spirit may guide two people to different decisions over the same issue. Therefore we must hold our personal conclusions loosely and allow others to hold views that contrast with ours.

³⁶ According to the author, a Christian has the right of petitioning the government but in advocating for justice “he may not appeal to God’s absolute law without incurring an immediate negative reaction.” This lies at the root of the Church versus State conflict being waged on many fronts today.

³⁷ Matthew 22:15-22.

³⁸ It is interesting to note that in an Author’s Note on page vii Fraser eschews the label “Evangelical” because it has been “abducted by network election reporting, wherein it is increasingly pressed into service to identify a voting bloc rather than a theological position.” I stopped using this term to describe myself quite some time ago.

They spoke God's law to their culture and their society. Saul is the only one who spoke to a foreign culture (the Hellenists and the God fearers), but Fraser fails to show us how Saul managed to bear a redemptive message without resorting to the law.³⁹

THE BATTLE OF THE LAW

By its title this chapter promises to be of great interest to Free Grace people. It opens with a crisp statement of the subject. "The Battle of the Law is Christianity's insistence on presenting the gospel exclusively in terms of a legal reconciliation with God" (p. 136). Free Grace people will find his argument short of theological accuracy, but will find his analysis of the good news/bad news gospel hitting the bulls-eye.

He begins with the observation that the apostles needed to address two groups, Jews and Gentiles. The Gentile worldview was devoid of any concept of legal separation from God. In this regard the postmodern worldview is like the Gentile worldview (p. 137).

Christianity enters an evangelistic encounter with postmodernism from a weak position. The typical gospel presentation that revolves around the bad news of separation from God by sin and the good news about the legal remedy in Jesus (p. 137). By framing the gospel offer in this way we use terms and concepts that fall on deaf ears because they answer a question not being asked and offer a solution to a problem not perceived (p. 139): "A lawless society does not see sin as a problem" (p. 138).

Fraser advocates the idea that our gospel presentation is on solid ground when we speak to the universal human dilemma, death:

It is far preferable to present the good news of
Jesus Christ as the answer to the tragedy of

³⁹ I am not arguing that Paul used the Law in his evangelistic message to those without the Law. I merely point out that Fraser failed to demonstrate his case.

death that is universally recognized and avoid arguing about the problem of sin with those who do not have the law (p. 141).

This avoids the need to win arguments about sin before getting to the main point. It also dovetails nicely with Jesus' words to Nicodemus that all are in danger of perishing, but eternal life is freely available to those who believe.⁴⁰

Fraser's approach dovetails nicely with John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2. The gospel is the good news that Jesus offers eternal life in place of death (p. 142). Unfortunately, Fraser surrenders the high ground by allowing that in some cases the use of the law in evangelism may still be an effective tool.⁴¹

At this point Fraser advances a provocative thought that intersects the contentious "crossless gospel" debate.⁴² He cuts to the heart of the issue by noting the difference between the gift (eternal life) and the legal transaction (the crucifixion) that makes the gift possible (pp. 142-43). "God only requires that a person believe in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life, not that he believe rightly about his own sin" (p. 144). Although he is speaking to the problem of bearing witness in a postmodern society, this also answers the question of how much one needs to know and believe in order to be saved. His answer? "People do not first require a theological overview of redemption, reconciliation and justification in order to believe in Jesus for eternal life" (p. 144).⁴³

⁴⁰ John 3:16-18.

⁴¹ "Where it encounters those under the law, Christianity can certainly appeal to the problem of sin and the separation from God it imposes. But this legal argument is a tool necessarily restricted to those having the law" (p. 146). Fortunately, he attenuates this statement by reminding the reader that this is not the gospel message itself.

⁴² See Thomas L. Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith* (Milwaukee, WI: Grace Gospel Press, 2009); Lou Martuneac, *In Defense of the Gospel: Biblical Answers to Lordship Salvation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2006).

⁴³ It is unclear whether Fraser arrived at this formulation himself or if he is reflecting his understanding of Zane Hodges's writing on this issue. See

This distinction between the gift and the legal basis of the offer is helpful. If one were to ask Fraser “Which Jesus Christ? The Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus of the Mormon Church, or some other Jesus?” I suspect he would reply “whichever Jesus it is that gives eternal life.” His point is that knowledge of the basis of Jesus’ offer is not necessary so there’s no reason to belabor the issue.⁴⁴

Although this chapter is thin on exegesis, it does offer an illustration that illuminates the point. Fraser posits someone of meager financial means in need of an extremely expensive medication in order to be cured. A complete stranger hears of the patient’s plight and purchases the medication. The only thing required of the patient is to assent to the treatment. The cure depends upon knowing neither the cost of the medication nor the identity of the benefactor (p. 143).

In summary, this chapter will reward a careful reading by those in the Free Grace camp. The author accurately identifies the gospel and cuts the Gordian knot tied by those who needlessly fear a “crossless gospel.”⁴⁵

note 44.

⁴⁴ Alternately, Fraser’s use of the full title *Jesus Christ* may signal his agreement with Hodges’s gravely misunderstood article, which makes plain that to believe that Jesus gives eternal life is to believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. See Zane Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 22, no. 42 (Spring 2009), 104-114. Surely Fraser would agree with Hodges assertion that “we are not saved by believing a series of theological propositions, however true and important they may be. We are saved by believing in Jesus” (Hodges, “How to Lead, Part 1,” 107).

⁴⁵ Attempting to define the “minimal content of saving faith” creates an intractable problem for those who presume to write the definition. Fraser’s insight into the distinction between the gift and the legal transaction that makes the gift possible cuts neatly to the heart of the issue by reminding us that we are called to believe the promise, not to understand the transaction that makes the promise possible.

THE BATTLE OF BEING RIGHT

Chapter nine focuses on “Christianity’s preoccupation with exposing the errors of lawlessness” which Fraser identifies with the Lord’s warning in Rev 2:1-7 (p. 147). He finds similarities between contemporary Christianity and the church at Ephesus.

“Ephesus did not leave its first love through a conscious decision on any particular day that could be distinguished from a thousand days preceding it,” but slowly, with the passage of time and through countless struggles over false doctrine, the church became a “culture of opposition” (p. 148). Like many conservative churches in our day, Ephesus eventually became known for the lawlessness it opposed rather than the life-giving message it affirmed.

Fraser’s perspective may receive a cool welcome among those who view apologetics and political activism as important to being salt and light in a corrupt and darkening world. But Fraser is correct: refuting error, while necessary and proper, should never become our primary identity. “Certainly Christianity must always oppose evil and falsehood in its own house if its spiritual life is to be preserved, but that struggle is not the life itself” (p. 149). When a church finds its agenda dominated by refuting error and resisting evil, usurping the celebration and declaration of life in Christ, it has become an Ephesian church. It has lost its first love.

His analysis of why this happens so frequently reveals Fraser’s pastoral experience:

What typically happens to lead Christians into this error is a confrontation with their own ineffectiveness. There could be any one of a hundred reasons for this ineffectiveness, but that point is that they realize they are not transforming the world around them. In fact, they are watching society decline before their eyes and feel powerless to slow the awful momentum. It is precisely in the midst of this attitude that

Christianity is susceptible to making a subtle shift in its mission (p. 154).⁴⁶

This chapter ends with a word of caution and a word of comfort. The caution is to remember that “Christianity’s former designation as society’s lawgiver is passed away and will not be restored...” (p. 156). Christianity must look forward to the future rather than continue battling to resurrect the past. But even the lost battles aren’t ultimately lost; they will be won in another era. “The tragedy in waging the battle of *Being Right* [his emphasis] is not the loss of the battle itself, for some lost battles have their vindication in the final balance of victory” (p. 157). The tragedy is a failure to reclaim our first love once we recognize the world as it is and forsake the desire to be right in the world’s eyes.

THE BATTLE OF THE FUTURE

Fraser says that “The Battle of the Future is Christianity’s expectation that those without the law will come into the visible community of the law” (p. 158). This concluding chapter recognizes that the paradigm that governs how Christianity evangelizes is based on a flawed premise.

Before addressing that issue, the chapter opens with the observation that Jesus had a clear goal in mind but seemed to operate without a fixed strategy. He lived and worked in the moment, ministering and teaching as opportunities were presented. From this Fraser draws an application for those who tend to be focused on the future

⁴⁶ I concur. I serve with an organization that has provided interim pastoral leadership for over one hundred churches across the United States. Invariably churches end up in serious trouble because a series of incremental moves away from the Biblical mission leave them without direction and purpose. We frequently see “mission creep” in official church records. It is common for pastors and leadership boards to subtly redefine “success” to match the results of a failed effort. It is rare to find a pastor or a leadership board that has the courage to face the fact that they have lost touch with the community and become irrelevant in the local culture.

and oriented toward goals and objectives. He counsels us to accept the fact that spontaneous encounters are the venues in which most evangelism is carried out (p. 159).

He illustrates his point by drawing on an analogy between evangelism and fishing. Fishing is based on “blind expectation” (p. 160). The fisherman casts his nets into the water but he cannot see the fish nor can he pick out any particular fish. He then moves into a lengthy discussion about the distinction between fishing and hunting to build his case for an “in the moment” way of living (pp. 160-63). His point is apt, but his case is weakened by a tedious analogy when a brief discussion of Prov 16:9 would have sufficed.

The real value in this chapter arrives with the observation that Christianity is most effective when it “infiltrates the world through the silent, discreet and imperceptible dispersal of individual Christians into the fabric of society” (pp. 163-64). Just as an individual seed grows when sown in isolation, as salt is palatable by the grain or as yeast leavens when kneaded throughout the lump, so evangelism is most effective when believers disperse. The Church is least effective when it mounts coordinated visible campaigns in society (p. 164).

As he develops this thought Fraser reveals an acquaintance with Missional Church literature.⁴⁷ He touches on an important theme when he scores modern Christianity in America for “destinational evangelism” (p. 166). Contrary to Jesus’ model of dispersing into the world, Christians prefer to gather and engage in “attractational” evangelism.⁴⁸

Fraser sees destination evangelism as a serious strategic error in a postmodern culture. Because the church

⁴⁷ The lack of a bibliography or footnotes makes it impossible to declare definitively that Fraser has read the Missional Church literature. If he hasn’t then his thinking is similar to Missional Church thought.

⁴⁸ “Attractational” is a key term in the Missional Church literature. It describes the paradigm that relies on drawing the unchurched to church services or church events where they will be exposed to the gospel. The “attractational church” is the paradigmatic opposite of the Missional Church.

is viewed as a “community of law” by those who inhabit a lawless culture or hold to a lawless worldview, the invitation will fall on deaf ears.⁴⁹ Tinkering with the basic formula to create worship services that will be more appealing to the postmodern cannot solve the problem.⁵⁰ Although Christianity enjoyed a period of success with the attractional model—because the culture temporarily embraced natural law and a binding morality—that period has passed and will not return.

In spite of the ineffective analogy on pp. 160-63, this is an excellent chapter. It achieves its goal of explaining why it is fruitless for Christianity to expect that those without the law will enter a community of law. Those within the Free Grace camp should appreciate his perspective about the wisdom of expecting anyone to embrace a community of law. Those in the Missional Church movement will agree that it is time to discard the destinal model of evangelistic events to embrace the dispersed model of individual Christians living in moment-by-moment reliance on the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Fraser’s purpose in writing was to persuade us that the model of a visibly activist, culturally dominant Christianity is not practical, necessary, or even possible and to urge Christianity to forsake its use of politics and law when it speaks to the culture. If we bear in mind that this is a book for a lay audience rather than a scholarly essay, then he has fulfilled his purpose.

⁴⁹ By “lawless” Fraser means those who reject the notion of transcendent law that applies to all people in all places at all times. It also refers to those who reject absolute moral standards of conduct.

⁵⁰ Although Fraser does not make this point, it is important to note that this is a crucial distinction between the Missional Church and the emerging church. The emerging church is simply another form of the attractional model; the only thing that has changed is the liturgy or the program formulation. The traditional church and the emerging church both rely on their program offerings to attract people to their gatherings, they are simply targeting different groups.

Free Grace adherents will profit by reading this book and will likely recommend it to others. It is unlikely, however, that knowledgeable Free Grace people will endorse the book without a caveat for lay readers.

There are areas in which Fraser attenuates his grace-friendly perspectives with Reformed doctrines. This detracts from the power of his book. For example, he sees the church as a “community of law.” In the introduction he writes, “Christianity has [a mandate] to commend the law to those who have the Holy Spirit...” (p. ix). His use of the doctrines of prevenient grace (p. 130)⁵¹ and the gift of faith (pp. 83, 192) should signal caution. Pastors who recommend this book (and they should) will want to prepare their flock for these discordant notes.

All things considered, I found the book enjoyable if occasionally frustrating, a source of fresh illumination on Free Grace thought, and a book worth recommending.

⁵¹ Editor’s note: While prevenient grace is normally associated with Arminians, not Calvinists, it is likely that Fraser holds that prevenient grace cannot be resisted (the *I* in TULIP stands for *irresistible grace*).

“KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD”— A STUDY OF JUDE 20-23

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I. INTRODUCTION

Jude, one of the shortest letters in the NT, presents believers with a perhaps puzzling prescription for dealing with the threat of false teachers. What should we do when faced with men of influence who, as they arise within the local church body, are simply not what they appear to be? For this malady, the Lord’s half-brother, Jude, is content in offering his audience only the briefest of instructions: “keep yourselves in the love of God” (v 21), “on some have compassion” (v 22), “but others save with fear” (v 23). Yet within these simple admonitions are details which raise important questions: how do I keep myself in God’s love (v 21)? What distinction should I be making among people (v 22)? What is the fire mentioned in v 23 and how could I save anyone from it? Am I personally in danger of this same fire also? And what does Jude mean when he expects me to hate somebody’s garments (v 23)?

The purpose of this article is to examine Jude’s response to a church in turmoil. I will discuss the spiritual condition of his audience, the danger appearing within their own church, and the expected response to such danger as commanded by Jude himself. Lastly I will show how to apply this interpretation to our lives as well.

II. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF JUDE'S AUDIENCE

Jude provides us with numerous details in the first step to understand the spiritual condition of his original audience. As with all letters of the NT, this element is quite important to determine, for if Jude imagines his audience as being unregenerate, then he will naturally include instructions explaining how to receive eternal life.¹ If, however, his audience is perceived to be in possession of eternal life already, then Jude's purpose for writing will be something altogether different.

First, we see that his letter is addressed to "those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ" (v 1). While the general designation "called" (*kleitōs*) could be used simply for service (e.g., Rom 1:1), the designation "sanctified by God the Father" removes the possibility that anyone other than regenerated believers are in view here. This triad (called, sanctified, and preserved) alone brings sufficient evidence to conclude that Jude considered his audience as believers already.²

Second, Jude writes that together they share a "common salvation" (v 3). Continuing in the same verse, we see that this salvation is spiritual and comes from the faith shared by all saints. Jude begins his letter by reminding his audience that he is on *their* side as opposed to the ungodly men he will discuss shortly. Although the noun "salvation" (*sōtēria*) itself does not automatically refer to the possession of eternal life, the fact that Jude does not mention any need for his audience to receive eternal life

¹ For example, in John's Gospel the Apostle specifically mentions his purpose for writing in 20:30-31. See also John 1:12, 3:16, and 5:24 for just a few of the many examples of how he expects his unregenerate audience to receive eternal life.

² This is the first of many triads in Jude's letter. See also vv 2, 8, and 19. In addition, three examples of rebellion are used in vv 5-7 and again in v 11. Jude addresses his audience as "beloved" three times. The formula "faith, hope and love" could possibly be seen in vv 20-21 as well.

allows for us to presume that Jude’s audience already had everlasting life.

Third, as I will soon discuss in more detail, v 20 shows that Jude’s desire is for his audience to “build themselves up” in the faith that is already theirs. Unbelievers do not have faith in Christ, and that is their problem. Jude wants his readers to rely on what they already know, namely, that Jesus Christ is both the Author of eternal life and He will soon be returning physically.

In short, there is no reasonable explanation to view Jude’s audience as being in danger of eternal condemnation. Ample proof exists for his original audience as already being regenerate. This is a very important point to remember as we examine Jude’s instructions for this audience in vv 20-23.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

While Jude had originally planned a correspondence celebrating, and perhaps detailing, his readers’ spiritual salvation, he now has no time for reminiscing (v 3). Already, this particular body of believers, possibly once in Jude’s own care, now faces an enemy from within their very ranks. The problem is significant: ungodly men, without bringing attention to themselves, have arisen from among the brethren and have achieved some form of influence over these believers.³

What is Jude’s charge against these enemies? Though he cites no specific prophecies, Jude first mentions that condemnation (*krima*) for these men has been declared beforehand (v 4). While he does not elaborate as to what this condemnation looks like, he is likely referring to his own

³ Jude and Peter use similar grammar and style in dealing with very similar predicaments. See Brad Doskocil, “The Epistle of Jude,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, vol. 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1241; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2nd Peter*, (Dallas: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2002), 136ff.

judgment, inspired by God, against them.⁴ Jude then lists the various reasons for such a judgment: these men are ungodly; they turn the grace God gives into lewdness; and they deny the Lord Jesus Christ (v 4).⁵ These men sensuously defile their own bodies (vv 8, 10, 19) and wickedly reject all in authority who disagree, including possibly the angels (vv 8-9). They use their tongues for evil, speaking ignorantly, grumbling, complaining and seeking self-advantage (v 16). Without the benefit of the Holy Spirit, they are destroying the unity of Jude's audience (v 19).

Adding to the seriousness of his charge, Jude spends the majority of his short letter either listing the vices of these men or comparing their behavior to past examples of Biblical wickedness. It is worth commenting on which examples Jude has chosen to represent the doom awaiting such men.

The first on Jude's list is an incident involving the Exodus generation as they left their former captors (v 5). Over a million of God's people were saved from the physical bondage of Pharaoh only to die in the wilderness due to unbelief. Curiously, this number includes the prophet and leader Moses himself, as well as his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. Only two from that generation escaped the punishment of dying in the wilderness without stepping foot into the Promised Land.⁶ That Jude, of all possible OT examples of rebellion and unbelief, lists one that includes believers of such high standing, indicates

⁴ For various suggestions regarding which condemnation Jude is referring to here, see Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 346; Bauckham, Jude, 36.

⁵ Compare 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7.

⁶ Numbers 14:26-35. Argument could be made that Jude is referring not to the Israelites themselves but rather to the unbelieving Egyptian army in pursuit, destroyed in Exod 14:28, since the adverbial function "afterwards" (*to deuteris*) isn't specific as to which time the adjective (functioning as an adjective with temporal force) is referring. However, Heb 3:12-19 reminds us that the exiting Israelites *did suffer because of unbelief*. This includes Moses (Num 20:12; Deut 34:4-5).

that disobedience of this magnitude is possible even for believers, including Jude’s own audience.⁷

The examples that follow include the fall of the angels (v 6), the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (v 7), the murderer Cain (v 11), the greedy Balaam (v 11), and the followers of Korah (v 11). The ungodly men are then compared by Jude to unstable clouds, dead trees, destructive waves of the ocean, and shooting stars (vv 12-13). In listing these examples, Jude illustrates both the destruction that comes from such behavior as well as the end result of choosing rebellion. All rebellion leads to judgment. None can escape it. The wandering Israelites lost the privilege of living in the Promised Land and died homeless. The angels lost their privilege of serving God and were banished forever. The deviants of Sodom and Gomorrah literally faced God’s burning vengeance and were destroyed. Cain was banished from his homeland. Balaam was later killed. Korah and his followers were destroyed.

Jude’s point in spending so much of his epistle linking the ungodly men to past examples of rebellion is to illustrate for his readers the seriousness of their predicament and to assure them that all behavior is judged (vv 14-15). This leads to the final section of the letter where only

⁷ See Daskocil, “Jude,” 1241; Moo simply says it was the Israelites, Douglas J. Moo, *2nd Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 285. Davids agrees but states that it referred to “those who did not believe, that is, were not committed to him/did not trust him” and that “the issue is not intellectual belief but trust/commitment,” Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 48. Walls and Anders say it was Israel but that not all were “true believers,” David Walls and Max Anders, *1st & 2nd Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 262. Schreiner, after warning against a works righteousness, says a lack of perseverance means lack of salvation, Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, electronic ed., New American Commentary vol. 37, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007), 447. Kistemaker writes that it referred to physical death for believers Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, New Testament Commentary, ed. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 377.

then does Jude recommend a response from his listeners (vv 20-23). It is this response that will next be examined.

IV. THE EXHORTATION TO KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

In observing Jude's ending exhortation (vv 20-23), the first imperative, "keep" (*tērēsate*), in v 21 is of primary importance. The three participles translated as "building," "praying," and "looking" all modify "keep" as participles of means and answer for us the question, "How are we to keep ourselves in the love of God?"

Aorist imperatives may indicate a sense of urgency. In this particular context, the dangers of the ungodly men (vv 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, and 19) obviously warrant immediate action.⁸

As the New English Translation (NET) points out, vv 20 and 21 can be translated as one sentence (contra the NIV). Unfortunately, by translating *tērēsate* as "maintain," the NET Bible loses the morphological connection between Jude's use of *tēreō* or "keep" in vv 1 and 6 (two times), and v 20. Jude's original audience would have grasped it immediately, for just as he began his letter by reminding them that they are *kept* safe by God the Son (v 1), he concludes by giving them the admonition to *keep* themselves in that same love (v 20).⁹ Sandwiched between is an example of how some angels didn't keep their proper domain (v 6) and thus are now kept for judgment. It is urgent that Jude's audience follow his instructions and keep themselves in God's love. Now this obviously means that if we do not keep His commandments we do not abide

⁸ While the context allows the label of ingressive aorist, stress should be placed on the unlikelihood of Jude expecting such action to cease.

⁹ See Moo, *Jude*, 285. Moo sees four separate commands rather than one imperative delineated with three descriptions. For more on the imperative with three modifying clauses, see Davids, *Jude*, 92; Bauckham, *Jude*, 111; Walls and Anders, *Jude*, 266; J.P. Lange, *The Epistle General of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 30.

(remain) in His love. So while God’s love is always *available*, benefiting from it is not unconditional.¹⁰

A. IN GOD’S LOVE

The expression “keep yourselves in God’s love” is an odd choice since the Lord and all NT writers taught eternal security. Once a person has everlasting life, he has it forever (e.g. John 6:35; 11:26; Rom 8:31-39). Notice how Jude does not instruct his readers to “keep [themselves] born again,” nor to “keep [themselves] justified.”

The issue here is the need for Jude’s audience to remain in the sphere of God’s love. This might refer to one’s position or to one’s experience. The latter must be in view since one cannot lose God’s love in terms of position. However, if a believer strays, he ceases to live in the sphere of God’s love and thus moves into the sphere of God’s wrath.

It is this particular sphere of God’s love, the sphere of His fellowship or friendship, that Jude is addressing. His audience has been presented with a choice: partake of the dangerous fellowship being offered by ungodly men, or remain in the safe fellowship offered by God to all believers.¹¹ Jude obviously expects his readers to choose God’s fellowship, since he has spent the majority of his letter describing how the characteristics of ungodly men warrant the promise of God’s judgment.

So how does one actually keep themselves in this love? Jude provides a three-tiered approach which we will now examine.

¹⁰ M.S. Mills, *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record*, electronic ed. (Dallas: 3E Ministries, 1999), John 15:9–13.

¹¹ Bauckham and Davids both point out the option of taking the “love” in Jude 21 as either a subjective genitive (God’s love for us) or an objective genitive (our love for God) (Bauckham, *Jude*, 1113-15; Davids, *Jude*, 96?). Both agree with seeing keeping in line with John 15:9. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 646.

B. BUILDING, PRAYING, AND LOOKING

Having seen Jude's main concern, that his audience actively keep themselves in God's love until Jesus returns, let us examine the participles Jude uses to elaborate on just how his audience can practically fulfill this command to "keep yourself in God's love." Jude's audience is to be busy "building," "praying," and "looking" as the way for them to sustain their fellowship with the Lord.

The first way they are to keep themselves in the love of God is to be actively "building" themselves up on their "most holy faith." The Louw-Nida lexicon lists *epoikodomeō* ("building") as meaning "to increase the potential of someone or something, with focus upon the process involved."¹² While the Greek word for "faith" (*pistis*) is often used to describe the means by which one receives eternal life, it is also used to refer to a general body of teaching.¹³ In this particular case, the body of teaching would be the commands handed down by the apostles. This body of teaching, or *faith*, is the weapon Jude advises his audience to choose, not for offense but rather for defense. Interestingly, nowhere in Jude's epistle does he advocate for his readers to personally challenge the ungodly men. While the flock is to be protected from enemies both outside the fold and from within, Jude's chief concern does not seem to be a public refutation of the troublemakers. What Jude is teaching his audience first is that they are to shield themselves from both the teachings and behavior of the ungodly men among them. This is done by "building" (*epoikodomeō*) themselves up using the teachings handed down by the apostles. Jude is encouraging them to continue with what they were doing in v 3: contending earnestly for the apostles' doctrine.

¹² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996). 74.

¹³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 820.

The second way they are to keep themselves in the love of God is to continue “praying in the Holy Spirit.” Jesus and His apostles commonly gave this command (Mark 12:36; John 4:23-24; Eph 6:18; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 14:16). The command stands in contrast to those who were acting in a manner without regards to the Spirit (v 19). While the divisive persons were submitting their lives to whatever sensual whim enticed them, Jude points his readers to another way. That is, they should submit themselves, especially their prayers, to the desires of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

The third way Jude’s audience could keep themselves in the love of God was to be anticipating or “looking for the mercy” of Jesus Christ. The prepositional phrase “unto eternal life” (*eis zōēn aiōnion*) is currently being interpreted in several ways. Moo states that the connection between “eternal life” and the rest of the verse is not clear and that while the eternal life could be seen as potentially being experienced *because* they keep themselves in the love of God, syntax makes this option less likely.¹⁵ Bigg suggests that while it may possibly be a reference to the First Book of Enoch and that Christ Himself *is* the eternal life they anticipate seeing, difficulty still lies in determining the syntactical force for *eis*.¹⁶ Schreiner points to the NIV’s translation “...wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” as being the most accurate, and suggests that Jude conceived of eternal life as something given to believers at the end times.¹⁷ Bauckham agrees, describing it as a future offering, the “resurrection life...the gift which Christ will bestow on the faithful Christians at the Parousia.”¹⁸ Davids agrees as well, writing that “this is the type of mercy at the return of Jesus

¹⁴ Daskocil, “Jude,” 1246. For discussion on v 20 being a reference to *glos-solalia*, see Bauckham, *Jude*, 113 and Moo, *Jude*, 285 as they each interact with J. D. G. Dunn’s work *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975).

¹⁵ Moo, *Jude*, 285.

¹⁶ Bigg, *Jude*, 340.

¹⁷ Schreiner, *Jude*, 484.

¹⁸ Bauckham, *Jude*, 114.

out of which he will grant eternal life (the life of the age to come) to his followers.”¹⁹

If such diversity of opinion exists among learned evangelical scholars concerning *when* believers receive eternal life, no wonder we find confusion in both the pulpits and the pews. It is true that a few passages, when mentioning eternal life, refer to it as a possible future reward (e.g., Matt 19:29; Gal 6:7-9). In those cases a richer experience of everlasting life is in view. However, there are scores of examples of eternal life being described as a present possession (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54; 10:28; 17:2; 1 John 3:15; 5:13) obtained upon faith in Christ. Thus, while eternal life can be possessed and enjoyed here and now, it will only be fully experienced and enjoyed in the eschaton (1 John 3:2). As believers, Jude’s audience had the life that is in Jesus Christ. Only they were not yet conformed to His image. This will take place at Christ’s return, and this is the mercy awaiting Jude’s audience (as opposed to the judgment awaiting the ungodly).²⁰ This anticipation for what was to come gave them impetus to carry on with Jude’s commands, thereby keeping themselves in fellowship with Christ.

¹⁹ Davids, *Jude*, 97.

²⁰ While Jude is juxtaposing judgment and mercy in order to contrast the ungodly with his audience, he still leaves room to mention in v 24 the judgment he expects his audience to face upon Christ’s return. The Judgment Seat of Christ or Bema (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10) is the reason for Jude’s audience to take care to remain in the love of God, for Jude wants to have them stand *faultless* and *with exceeding joy* before Christ, something which will not occur if they leave the love of God and engage with their ungodly counterparts. While we cannot lose our eternal life, we may find ourselves lacking in approval if continuing in a lackluster life. For more on the possibility of admonishment at the Bema, see Robert N. Wilkin, *Secure and Sure: Grasping the Promises of God* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), chapter 12; *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), chapter 16; *The Road to Reward: Living Today in the Light of Tomorrow* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003), chapter 5; Zane Hodges, “We Believe in: Rewards,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 4 no. 2 Autumn, 1991 (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1991): 100; Samuel L. Hoyt, “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 1,” and “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 2” *BibSac* vol. 137 no. 545 and vol. 137 no. 546 (January and April 1980).

V. THE EXHORTATION TO HAVE CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Having thus supplied his readers with orders regarding their own welfare, Jude now directs their focus towards the safety of others. How should his audience regard those who are becoming victim to the hazards of the ungodly clique? Jude’s priority with such brethren is both preservation and restoration. A distinction should be seen between the two, at Jude’s own counsel, and a point of discussion will be made concerning why.

A. HAVE COMPASSION ON SOME

The second imperative within the discourse unit of vv 20-23 focuses on the safety of others. Jude expects his audience to “have compassion” (*eleaō*) on some, while “making a distinction” (*dikrinomenoi*).²¹ Just as the readers are the recipients of mercy, so too should they be merciful to others.²² Jude does not give details concerning just how this compassion should be shown. Rather, it is to be seen as an attitude towards others. Likely, Jude is expecting his audience to help others under attack with the same set of instructions they have been given. He is expecting a proactive approach by his readers in response to the trouble being caused by the ungodly men. He wants them to mercifully protect other believers who are under the same attack as they are experiencing.

But what distinction is Jude asking his audience to make? This can be seen by first reminding ourselves of the context of his letter. We know that he is warning his readers of the dangers of certain men (v 4), men who carry an influence that, while unnoticed (v 4), still cause division (vv 8 and 19) and corrupt the local body (v 12). The

²¹ The Critical Text reads *dikrinomenous*, accusative plural, whereas the Majority Text reads *dikrinomenoi*, nominative plural. For details on the possibility of three classes of people rather than two (due to textual variations), see Moo, *Jude*, 286.

²² Doskocil, “Jude,” 1246.

outcome of such a group attacking this church is that two kinds of victims naturally emerge: believers who are currently fighting the pressure to conform, and believers who have conformed to the pressure already. Men who seek to corrupt are viewed as dangerous and the reason for this is simple: it is possible for saints to be corrupted. Jude advises two forms of action to take, one for those who, like his audience, are suffering the assault of the ungodly men, and one for those who have already succumbed to the influence of those Jude has been warning about.

It is this second group that I now address.

B. SAVE OTHERS WITH FEAR

Compassion is not to be limited to simply those who haven't yet been duped. Yet when Jude refers to the rescue of those who have *already* fallen under the influence of the ungodly, he chooses to supply stronger language. He expects this second group to be treated in a much different manner.

It is this second group that his readers should “save with fear,” by pulling them “out of the fire.” That this “fire” (*pur*) is referring to something besides hell is not obvious to all.²³ When referring to hell in v 7, Jude provided the noun, *fire*, with the adjective “eternal” (*aiōnios*) to function as a descriptive genitive. This left little room for doubt as to what Jude meant nor the duration of such torment. Likewise, when describing the future of fallen angels in v 6, he provides the predicative adjective “everlasting” (*aidios*) to the metaphor “chains.” He uses “forever” (*aiōn*) and “eternal” (*aiōnios*) in vv 7 and 21 to specify the duration. The fact that he uses no such modifier here in v 23 suggests that Jude is using a metaphor for something

²³ Walls and Anders see this second group as unsaved and in danger of eternal punishment (Walls and Anders, *Jude*, 267). Evangelicals Moo and Davids see them as Christians in danger of hell (Moo, *Jude*, 288; Davids, *Jude*, 101-103). Schreiner, like Bauckham, sees the danger as hell but only describes this second group as being “in the church” (Schreiner, *Jude*, 488; Bauckham, *Jude*, 115).

besides hell. If Jude is referring to fellow believers who are to be rescued from the fire, as the context implies, it would then be impossible that he is referring to the dangers of eternal damnation. Most likely, Jude is warning against temporal judgment (Luke 9:54; John 15:6; Heb 11:34), the kind which every believer faces when wandering outside the sphere of God’s love.²⁴ It is this temporal judgment that God often uses to bring wayward sheep back into the fold (1 Cor 11:30-32; 1 Tim 5:24; Heb 12:3-11; Jas 1:21, 5:19) and to use for the instruction of others (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Tim 1:9-20). Jude isn’t telling his readers to save this group from hell, but rather to save them from temporal judgment.

Caution or “fear” (*phobos*) is to be used when dealing with those who have, under the influence of ungodly men, caused their “garments” (*chitōn*) to be “defiled” (*spiloō*). If the believer attempting the rescue is not fearful of falling into the fire himself, he is much more susceptible to that fate. Compare Gal 6:1 where Paul limits the ministry of rescue to “you who are spiritual” and adds, “considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Jude is describing the Christian walk in the same way other NT writers often do—using the figure of wearing a particular set of clothes that can be either sparkling white (Matt 17:2; Rev 19:8) or incredibly filthy (Rev 17:4, 18:16). Believers who follow the way of the ungodly thereby corrupt their Christian walk, ruining their spiritual appearance. Admonishing a wayward brother is difficult but warranted (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3; 1 Cor 5:9-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10; Jas 5:19-20) and should be done with the utmost vigilance (1 Cor 10:12; Gal 6:1; 2 Pet 3:17).

²⁴ If the second group included unbelievers, then they would be facing eternal separation from God above all else. But unbelievers can face God’s temporal wrath the same way believers can, and without any modifiers in v 23 to suggest otherwise, the fire being warned about here is temporal. For a discussion on the use of fire with regards to temporal judgment, see Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 155.

VI. APPLYING JUDE'S LETTER TO OUR OWN LIVES

If Jude were certain that the evil men infiltrating his original audience would have no negative impact on the spiritual health of the congregation, he wouldn't have written this letter. We would have no inspired record of Jude's warnings and exhortations regarding such a group. Unfortunately, both Jude and the rest of the NT writers confirm that there is a very real danger accompanying people who use their tongues for evil, especially when such people situate themselves within a local assembly. This was the cause of Jude's letter, and this is the situation involving many church bodies today.

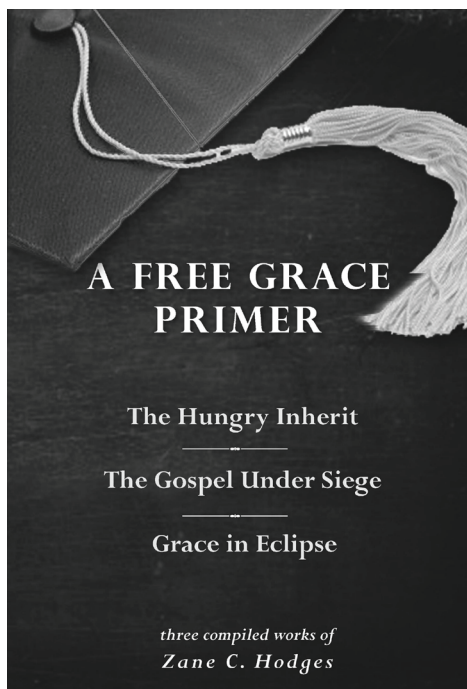
Although Jude spends the majority of his short epistle detailing the likes of the ungodly and the judgment which awaits them, he includes a series of instructions for his audience that carries application into the 21st century. The believers he writes to are exhorted to keep themselves in the love of God by building themselves up on their faith, praying in the Spirit, and looking to the coming mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, they are to turn their attention towards other believers within their midst, making a distinction between those who need compassion and those who require more careful attention. Care should be taken when dealing with this second group lest the rescuers fall into the fire and thereby experience God's temporal judgment.

It is from these specific entreaties that we as believers can apply Jude's letter to our own Christian walk. How healthy is our local church? Is the teaching Scripturally accurate? Are there those in leadership positions who act in or prescribe ungodly ways? Simply put, do any of our leaders potentially match the characteristics of Jude's antagonistic infiltrators?

Our ultimate hope is focused on seeing the risen Christ again and spending our lives forever with Him. This is

both our motivation to endure and our reason for taking our Christian walk seriously, since Christ will come with His Judgment Seat, ready to reward or chastise depending on our obedience.

But we are not to be so concerned about ourselves that we ignore the plight of believers around us. Our hearts should be concerned for others as well, both for those who resist the wiles of the ungodly as well as for those who yield to the flattery of deceptive men. There is a very real danger of God’s temporal judgment looming over His church, and this hazard should provide for us a sense of urgency in dealing with such matters. Our Heavenly Father is a God of love (1 John 4:19) yet a father nonetheless, and He may use temporal chastisement in the hopes of bringing wayward children back into fellowship (Heb 10:31; 12:6, 10). Rather than misunderstanding such warnings as a potential loss of everlasting life (which is impossible), let us hold fast to the Biblical understanding of these warnings: everlasting life lasts forever, and God desires our fellowship and the fellowship of those around us so that we might experience everlasting life more abundantly, as God intends for His children (John 10:10).



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DISPENSATIONALISM AND FREE GRACE: INTIMATELY LINKED PART 1

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INTRODUCTION

About a decade ago I was introduced to Free Grace theology. At that time I understood *discipleship* to mean “being a Christian,” *the kingdom* to often mean “the church,” *reward* to mean “free gift,” *free gift* to mean “conditional gift,” *justified by works* (from James 2) to mean “justified by faith evidenced by works,” and *believe* to mean whatever I wanted it to mean at the time.¹ When I was introduced to Free Grace, I started seeing scholars like Joseph Dillow, Zane Hodges, and Bob Wilkin use the term *kingdom* to mean “kingdom,” *believe* to mean “believe,” *reward* to mean “reward,” etc., and I was dumbfounded. My thought process went something like, “This may provide an answer to the contradictions I was growing uncomfortable with, but do we have to *redefine* everything to make it work?” The irony certainly does not escape me.

It was not long until I realized that the Bible was really a much more simple book than I had imagined, and that it really was written to be understood. A non-literal

¹“Many people understand John 6:47 as though it read: ‘He who what-chamacallits has everlasting life.’ Since they don’t know what whatchamacallit is, they don’t know if they have everlasting life or not.” Robert N. Wilkin, “Beware of Confusion about Faith” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 18, no. 34 (Spring 2005): 3. Wilkin here describes perfectly the confusion I had.

approach to Scripture is largely responsible for the widespread confusion and the resulting reluctance of the layperson to study the Bible without undue dependence upon commentaries. The popularity of paraphrases and dynamic equivalence versions of the Bible such as *The Message* and the *New International Version (NIV)* is largely due to this misconception, and reflects a growing pre-reformational attitude that the unlearned cannot be trusted with the Word of God without a mediator.²

I have found over the last several years that much of the task of a Free Grace teacher is simply to unravel the confusion woven by a long tradition of non-literal interpretation, to help students pay attention to context, and to let words mean what they say. In doing so, I am reminded of dispensational works such as *Prophecy Made Plain* by C. I. Scofield, where the author shows that prophecy is not impossible to understand if we simply pay attention to context and let the principle of literal interpretation rule. Soteriology is no different.

As a pastor, I have introduced many people to Free Grace theology in discipleship settings, and those who have accepted it have *without fail* commented that Free Grace makes the Bible much easier to understand. This

²This perspective is also in evidence in MacArthur's discussion of early dispensationalists: "Many of these men were self-taught in theology and were professionals in secular occupations. Darby and Scofield, for example, were attorneys, and Larkin was a mechanical draftsman. They were laymen whose teachings gained enormous popularity largely through grass roots enthusiasm. Unfortunately some of these early framers of dispensationalism were not as precise or discriminating as they might have been had they had the benefit of a more complete theological education." John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 223. This is the updated edition of *Faith Works*. Contrast this with Gerstner's assessment of Darby: "John Nelson Darby, for example, was a masterfully knowledgeable man, with expertise in languages and an intimate familiarity with the content of the Bible." John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers Inc., 1991), 75. Darby's *capability* as a scholar is not in question, but the fact that he was self taught is likely to have contributed to him having the freedom to systematize the history of the Bible from the perspective of literal interpretation. Thankfully he was not taught in the allegorical method the seminaries of the time were teaching.

has long been recognized as a benefit of dispensationalism as well. This is plainly admitted in Arthur Pink's introduction to his work against dispensationalism:

[Dispensationalism is] a device wherein the wily serpent appears as an angel of light, feigning to "make the Bible a new book" *by simplifying much in it which perplexes the spiritually unlearned* (emphasis added).³

In Pink's understanding, the simplicity and accessibility afforded by dispensationalism is outweighed by the desire to apply every portion of Scripture directly to the church age. Thus, Covenant Theology's unification of Scripture was preferable to him. I have found this to be a common theme (at least to some extent) among many (perhaps all) who have written in defense of Lordship Salvation. This is true even among Lordship Salvation proponents who embrace some form of dispensationalism. This will be demonstrated in the present series of articles.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Dave Anderson's articles in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, "The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism: Parts 1 and 2"⁴ demonstrated conclusively that Augustine's abandonment of premillennialism produced a profound change in his soteriology. Out of an amillennial interpretation of Matt 24:13, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved," Augustine's doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints was born, and perseverance in faithful obedience became a condition for final salvation. Naturally, the reformer John Calvin, who depended

³ Arthur Pink, *A Study of Dispensationalism: And the Ninety-Five Theses Against Dispensationalism*, <http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Dispensationalism/dispensationalism.htm>. Last accessed February, 10, 2011.

⁴ Spring and Fall 2002.

heavily upon Augustine for his doctrine, adopted both amillennialism and Perseverance of the Saints. Calvin's work has obviously had profound impact on many.

Building upon Anderson's conclusions, I will attempt to show that premillennialism is only one of many aspects of dispensationalism that has a significant impact on soteriology, as can be shown by the near universal acceptance of Lordship Salvation among covenant premillennialists. The cause-and-effect relationship between dispensationalism and Free Grace is so clear that dispensationalism is regularly attacked in works on soteriology written from the Lordship Salvation perspective. I will demonstrate in this series of articles that this is a legitimate connection because, unless many essential tenets of normative dispensationalism are abandoned, Lordship Salvation cannot be maintained.

Before proceeding, a definition of normative dispensationalism is necessary. While normative dispensationalists disagree on various things, virtually all would agree upon the following points:

1. Literal, historical, grammatical interpretation should be applied to *all* portions of Scripture.
2. The church and Israel are distinct peoples in God's program for the ages.
3. The Lord Jesus Christ will return bodily to earth and reign on David's throne in Jerusalem for one-thousand years.
4. The underlying purpose of God's dealings with the world is His glory, not merely the salvation of man, thus the Scripture goes far beyond evangelism.

5. The Christian is free from the law⁵ in its entirety for both justification (Gal 2:16) and sanctification (Gal 5:18).⁶

When discussing normative dispensationalism, these descriptions will define my usage.

A study of this nature is especially relevant today because dispensationalism is becoming more and more rare. *The Reformation Study Bible*, largely seen as Covenant Theology's answer to the *Scofield Reference Bible* is gaining popularity. Progressive dispensationalism (a non-dispensational system)⁷ is replacing normative dispensationalism in some historically dispensational seminaries, including Dallas Theological Seminary which produces hundreds of graduates who go on to become pastors every year.

And while there are some non-dispensational Free Grace scholars (R. T. Kendall comes to mind), Free Grace is extremely uncommon among non-dispensationalists⁸ because Free Grace is largely dependent upon the principles of literal interpretation and careful attention to historical context that are fundamental to dispensationalism.

⁵ I recognize that as believers, we have the law of Christ to fulfill (Gal 6:2), but this is a law of liberty (Jas 1:25; 2:12), fulfilled by love (part of the fruit of the spirit which is produced in freedom from law Rom 13:8, Gal 5:18-23), and is in contrast to the law of commandments contained in ordinances which has been abolished through Christ's fulfillment of it on the cross (Eph 2:13-16). Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (Col 3:17).

⁶ For points 1-4 see Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 45-48. For point 5, see *The Ryrie Study Bible: New Testament New American Standard Version* (Chicago: Moody, 1977), notes on Romans 7, pp. 273-74. See also Alva J. McClain, *Law and Grace: A Study of New Testament Concepts as They Relate to the Christian Life*, (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

⁷ Progressive dispensationalism adopts a complementary (non-literal) hermeneutic in certain prophetic passages, asserts that Christ is already reigning on David's throne, and denies the distinction between the church and Israel, all are fundamental aspects of dispensationalism. For more information regarding this stance, see Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, chapter 9.

⁸ MacArthur's statement about this is not far from accurate: "No covenant theologian defends the no-lordship gospel" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 222).

These articles are not intended to be an exhaustive defense of dispensationalism,⁹ but simply to show that Free Grace and consistent, normative dispensationalism are intimately linked. It is my hope that this article will encourage further study by more capable scholars.

In these articles, I will provide a brief survey of the ways dispensationalism has come under attack in the soteriological literature produced by some key proponents of Lordship Salvation,¹⁰ followed by a look at how various non-dispensational approaches to interpretation have yielded Lordship Salvation in these and other authors. Lastly I will argue that Lordship Salvation does not hold up under consistent dispensationalism, and that Free Grace is the natural outcome of a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture.

Before proceeding, I want to be careful to note that I do not believe that every consistent dispensationalist is consistently Free Grace. Many consistent dispensationalists hold to a soft Perseverance of the Saints, stating that every true believer will produce *some* good works. This is usually based on their understanding of Jas 2:14-26. My contention is that Lordship Salvation, an extreme view, cannot hold up under dispensationalism, and that dispensationalism *most naturally* results in consistent Free Grace.

⁹ Whatever the historical argument, surely the burden of proof is upon those who suggest that we should *not* interpret any portion of the Bible literally, respecting the original intention of the authors.

¹⁰ Due to limited space, I will be focusing on the writings of John MacArthur, John Gerstner, and Arthur Pink, but the theme of attacking Free Grace and dispensationalism in the same breath can be seen in the works of John Piper, R.C. Sproul, B.B. Warfield, and many others.

JOHN MACARTHUR AND DISPENSATIONALISM

John MacArthur clearly claims to be a Dispensationalist in both *The Gospel According to Jesus*¹¹ and *The Gospel According to the Apostles*.¹² There is no doubt that he *does* hold to the fundamental distinction between the church and Israel (though he does not always apply this division consistently), and in surveying his works I have never found anything to suggest otherwise. I want to state clearly that I take MacArthur's statements here at face value and do believe Dr. MacArthur to be a dispensationalist of sorts. However, as will be shown, the view he presents in *The Gospel According to Jesus* and elsewhere is not consistent with, and even hostile to, *normative* dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism has come under attack (and suffered much) as a result of the Lordship Salvation controversy, as MacArthur recognizes:

The lordship debate has had a devastating effect on dispensationalism. Because no-lordship theology [a pejorative term for Free Grace] is so closely associated with dispensationalism, many have imagined a cause-and-effect relationship between the two.¹³

¹¹ "Dispensationalism is a fundamentally correct system of understanding God's program through the ages. Its chief element is a recognition that God's plan for Israel is not superseded by or swallowed up in His program for the church. Israel and the church are separate entities, and God will restore national Israel under the earthly rule of Jesus as Messiah. I accept and affirm this tenet because it emerges from a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture (while still recognizing the presence of legitimate metaphor in the Bible). And in that regard, I consider myself a traditional premillennial dispensationalist" (John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised and Expanded Edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], 25).

¹² "It may surprise some readers to know that the issue of dispensationalism is one area where Charles Ryrie, Zane Hodges, and I share some common ground. We are all dispensationalists" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 219).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 221.

One of the most obvious examples of attacks on dispensationalism based on soteriology is Gerstner's book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, especially chapters 11-13.¹⁴ Another is Reginald Kimbro's anti-dispensational work *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism*,¹⁵ which patterns its name after MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Anecdotally, when I was speaking with a friend about Free Grace, I had encouraged her to look into some of Dr. Chafer's works. The following week, she told me that she asked for them at her church library, and that she was told all of Chafer's books had been banned in their church after the publishing of *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

It is difficult to see that the attacks on dispensationalism that followed *The Gospel According to Jesus* were merely an unintended consequence. The words dispensationalism, and dispensationalist, are a common occurrence in the book¹⁶ and there are only two short paragraphs¹⁷ where the words were used in a positive sense. Even in those cases, MacArthur is careful to associate only with one tenet of dispensationalism (the separation of the church and Israel),¹⁸ and these brief paragraphs are sandwiched between an open critique of normative dispensationalism.

¹⁴ John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 209-63.

¹⁵ Reginald Kimbro, *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism* (Toronto: Wittenberg Publications, 1995).

¹⁶ See especially pp. 31-35, 96-97, 176-77, and 247-48.

¹⁷ The first and second paragraphs of p. 31.

¹⁸ See also the following quote from *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, p. 223, "As I have noted, the uniqueness of dispensationalism is that we see a distinction in Scripture between Israel and the church. That *singular* perspective, common to all dispensationalists, sets us apart from nondispensationalists. It is, by the way, the *only element* of traditional dispensationalist teaching that is yielded as a result of literal interpretation of biblical texts [this claim will be addressed in the next installment of this series]. It also is the only tenet virtually all dispensationalists hold in common. That is why I have singled it out as the characteristic that defines dispensationalism. When I speak of 'pure' dispensationalism, *I'm referring to this one common denominator*—the Israel-church distinction" (emphasis added).

In fact, MacArthur repeatedly and directly condemns many of the fundamentals of normative dispensationalism. One quote in particular has gained some attention:

There is a tendency, however, for dispensationalists to get carried away with compartmentalizing truth to the point that they can make unbiblical distinctions. An almost obsessive desire to categorize everything neatly has lead various dispensationalist interpreters to draw hard lines not only between the church and Israel, but also between *salvation and discipleship, the church and the kingdom, Christ's preaching and the apostolic message, faith and repentance, and the age of law and the age of grace* (emphasis added).¹⁹

This quote is particularly relevant because it appears in the first chapter, entitled, “A Look at the Issues”, and is presented as foundational to his argument. Elsewhere, MacArthur criticizes the distinction between “the gospel of the kingdom” and “the gospel of the grace of God” found in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.²⁰ Throughout *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Luke 19:10 is used by MacArthur to suggest that all of Jesus’s teachings were related to the offer of eternal life.²¹ This reveals MacArthur’s soteriological view of history (the view of Covenant Theology), as opposed to the doxological view of dispensationalism.

In his criticism of L. S. Chafer on pp. 31-32, MacArthur also perpetuates the widely debunked myth that dispensationalists teach different means of justification salvation in the various dispensations (by law-keeping in the Age of Law and by grace through faith in the Age of Grace). While there were some statements made by Chafer and Scofield which left some with this impression, those

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Jesus*, 31.

²⁰ Ibid., 96.

²¹ As the Scripture index of *The Gospel According to Jesus* shows, Luke 19:10 appears more than any other verse outside of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the call to discipleship in 14:26-33. See especially pp. 33, 80, 96, and 103, where MacArthur clearly quotes the verse for the purpose of applying an evangelistic purpose to all of Jesus’s teaching.

statements were later revised so that their clear intention was evident. To perpetuate this myth, as is so commonly done, is to intentionally misrepresent their views. Every normative dispensationalist that I am aware of teaches that justification by grace through faith has been God's program since the fall of man.²²

Lastly, MacArthur's criticism of specific writers is reserved exclusively for dispensational scholars such as Chafer, Ryrie, Hodges, Constable, Scofield, Wilkin, and Thieme while quoting from nearly forty non-dispensational (and often quite anti-dispensational) scholars, and only one dispensationalist²³ for support in his disparagement of Free Grace. Many times, the specific works criticized were written in defense of dispensationalism.²⁴ The reasons stated above, along with one major purpose of *The Gospel According to Jesus* being to proclaim a non-dispensational view of Jesus's earthly ministry, has led many (including the present author) to conclude that it is as much an attack on normative dispensationalism as it is an attack on Free Grace.²⁵

In *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, MacArthur is careful to express that it is only "one arm of the dispensationalist movement"²⁶ that promotes the Free Grace

²² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 121-40.

²³ H.A. Ironside. See MacArthur, *Jesus*, 176. It should be noted that Gerstner accuses Ironside of antinomianism (Gerstner's pejorative term for Free Grace) as well and points out statements made where Ironside wrote that a true Christian can persist in the practice of sin until death, which may come early due to such sinful behavior. See Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 216-17. It would be fair to say that Ironside was at least inconsistent in his Lordship Salvation.

²⁴ For example: Clarence Larken, *Dispensational Truth and Rightly Dividing the Word*, Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, E. Schuyler English, et al., *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, L. S. Chafer, *Grace and He That Is Spiritual*.

²⁵ This intention is especially clear in his statement, "Frankly, some mongrel species of dispensationalism [which he has defined as the dispensationalism of Ryrie, Chafer, and others] ought to die, and I will be happy to join the cortege" (MacArthur, *Apostles*, 221).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

message. Later, he openly states that it is the dispensationalism of Chafer that has yielded Free Grace theology:

Who are the defenders of no-lordship dispensationalism? Nearly all of them stand in a tradition that has its roots in the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer. I will show in Appendix 2 that Dr. Chafer is the father of modern no-lordship teaching. Every prominent figure on the no-lordship side descends from Dr. Chafer's spiritual lineage. Though Dr. Chafer did not invent or originate any of the key elements of no-lordship teaching, he codified the system of dispensationalism on which all contemporary no-lordship doctrine is founded. That system is the common link between those who attempt to defend no-lordship doctrine on theological grounds."²⁷

This is precisely the point that I have been making.

In his appendix entitled "What is Dispensationalism", MacArthur is careful to define his dispensationalism as dealing with the separation of the church and Israel only. He states, "*Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation that sees a distinction between God's program for Israel and His dealings with the church.* It's really as simple as that"²⁸ (italics in original). It is, then, only by excluding all other elements of dispensationalism, that MacArthur can call himself a dispensationalist.

More recently, MacArthur has claimed the term "leaky dispensationalist" and has often stated plainly that he is much closer to covenant theologians than he is to most dispensationalists. In an interview with John Piper and Justin Taylor, MacArthur states:

When I wrote [*The Gospel According to Jesus*] I didn't know anybody outside of my circles really, and I didn't know how this book would be received. But Jim Boice agreed to write the foreword, and John Piper wrote an endorsement

²⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁸ Ibid., 219.

that was absolutely stunning to me, because I was really not moving in Reformed circles at that time. I was a leaky dispensationalist. That was my world, and I realized that I was much more one of you than I was one of them.²⁹

In other words, the more MacArthur is entrenched into Lordship Salvation, the more he finds himself siding with non-dispensationalists over and against dispensationalists. This can also be seen in his regular appearances at the Ligonier conference and other anti-dispensational groups. It is strange, then, that MacArthur would state that the connection between the two was simply imagined.³⁰ If the cause-and-effect relationship between dispensationalism and Free Grace is imagined, as MacArthur asserts, why would he have been so adamant about rejecting many aspects of dispensationalism in his books about soteriology? Why would MacArthur find himself more closely allied with anti-dispensationalists? And why would MacArthur adopt terms like “leaky dispensationalist” to define his views? Surely MacArthur recognizes that the connection between dispensationalism and Free Grace is more than coincidental.

JOHN GERSTNER

In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner makes a compelling case that dispensationalism has led to Free Grace Theology, which he has incorrectly labeled *antinomianism*.³¹ Taken as a discussion of the soteriological differences between Covenant Theology and dispensationalism, it is a valuable tool. In it, however, only one brief chapter is devoted to dispensational hermeneutics,

²⁹ John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Stand: A Call for the Endurance of the Saints*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 129.

³⁰ MacArthur, *Apostles*, 221.

³¹ Rightly understood, *antinomianism* is the doctrine that righteous living is not important. Free Grace, on the other hand, teaches the importance of righteous living, while keeping it distinct from justification before God.

and this chapter is adapted from his earlier work.³² While recognizing that Dispensationalists do tend more toward literal interpretation, Gerstner rejects the claim that dispensationalism is primarily a literal approach to Scripture and asserts that the theology is primary for the Dispensationalist, rather than hermeneutics.³³ Gerstner makes the same claim in *A Primer on Dispensationalism*, but in it he admits that this is an unsure conclusion:

It is very difficult to say which is the cart and which is the horse in this case. Is it the literalistic tendency that produces this divided Scripture, or is it the belief in a divided Scripture that drives the dispensationalist to ultra-literalism at some point? I think it is the latter, though that is not easy to prove.³⁴

In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner seems to be more confident, but his argument is based upon an incorrect definition of literal interpretation (that literal interpretation does not recognize figures of speech) and by demonstrating where dispensationalists depart from it. This is nothing more than the burning of a straw man.

Unfortunately, Gerstner commits the error that he is accusing the dispensationalists of committing. In *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Gerstner largely bases his critique of dispensationalism upon its departure from TULIP Calvinism, and fails to address it exegetically.³⁵ The essential flaw is that the force of his argument starts with a soteriology and critiques dispensationalism, which is primarily a system of interpretation,³⁶ upon theologi-

³² John Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982), 2-6.

³³ Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 86-87.

³⁴ Gerstner, *Primer*, 5.

³⁵ See especially, John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing*, 105-147.

³⁶ Ryrie correctly asserts, "If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it in interpreting Scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist." Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 24.

cal ground, rather than upon hermeneutical differences. Gerstner's methodology in starting with soteriology and working backward from there has come under criticism even among those who share his soteriology.³⁷ It is clear that his methodology in this work is fundamentally flawed *as an argument against dispensationalism*. For this reason, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* is more appropriately seen as primarily a theological argument against the soteriology that is born of dispensationalism.

In the next article in this series, I will address Gerstner's argument that theology is primary for the dispensationalist³⁸ rather than literal hermeneutics. But for now it will suffice to show that, for Gerstner, dispensationalism and Free Grace go hand-in-hand.

ARTHUR PINK

Arthur Pink, champion of Reformed Theology, was a dispensationalist early in his writing career. Pink wrote four books on the subject of premillennialism from a dispensational-premillennialist perspective.³⁹ The most well-known of these books is *The Redeemer's Return*, where Pink stresses the importance of Christ's imminent return and a pretribulational rapture.

³⁷ See Richard Mayhue, "Who is Wrong? A Review of John Gerstner's *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*," *The Master's Seminary Journal* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1992): 73-94. While I do not accept Mayhue's argument that dispensationalism and TULIP Calvinism are not incompatible, the article does well to point out the methodological flaws in Gerstner's book.

³⁸ See also Kimbro, *The Gospel According to Dispensationalism*. Kimbro's thesis is that dispensationalism is a system of soteriology first. This work is especially relevant because Kimbro writes from a Historic Premillennial viewpoint, demonstrating that it is more than dispensational eschatology that has an impact on soteriology.

³⁹ Including, *The Redeemer's Return* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Baptist Church Bookstore Publishing, 1970), *The Golden Age: A Treatise on the One Thousand Year Reign of Christ on Earth* (North Kingstown, RI: Historic Baptist Publishing, 1994), *The Antichrist* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2011), and *The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13* (Covington, KY: Kentucky Bible Depot, 1946).

It may surprise some to know, however, that when Arthur Pink was a Dispensationalist, he also embraced Free Grace as is demonstrated in the following statement:

Are you constrained to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” Then the answer, *God’s own answer*, is ready to hand—“*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*” Appropriate the provision which Divine grace has made for lost sinners.⁴⁰

This is only one of many of Pink’s clear statements regarding the free nature of the gift of eternal life.

Pink was not the beneficiary of more recent Free Grace scholarship that has helped to clarify many issues and terms and this is apparent in his use of phrases like “salvation of the soul” to mean “deliverance from the wrath to come,” and describing the believer as one who has “received the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour.”⁴¹ What he means by these phrases, however, is expressly defined in the context, and completely consistent with Free Grace. Simple faith in Christ was the only condition Pink ever presented as necessary for receiving eternal life during his works written as a dispensationalist.

Furthermore, Pink made several astute observations that demonstrate sophistication of understanding in soteriological issues from the Free Grace perspective. For example, Pink speaks of the “present-tense aspect of our salvation”, and further describes the believer’s secure position based upon John 5:24: “Eternal life is something which every believer in Christ already possesses, and for him there is no possibility of future condemnation in the sense of having to endure God’s wrath.”⁴² He goes on to describe the different aspects of salvation:

In the New Testament the word ‘Salvation’ [sic] has a threefold scope—past, present and future, which, respectively, has reference to our

⁴⁰ Pink, *The Redeemer’s Return*, 219. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Pink, *Redeemer*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

deliverance from the penalty, the power, and the presence of sin.⁴³

Pink understood salvation as a broad concept that involves much more than justification before God.

Pink did not write a great deal of material about the Judgment Seat of Christ. He did, however, state its importance and describe the nature of it being to test the works of believers to determine reward. He states: "...the *purpose* of the appearing of believers 'before the Bema of Christ' is not to test their title and fitness for Heaven, but in order that their works may be examined and their service rewarded."⁴⁴ In this discussion, he expounds 2 Cor 5:10 and 1 Cor 3:11-15, showing that they are not related to eternal destiny but to reward. He also references Matt 25:23; 1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 6:10; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; and 22:12, and alludes to the parable of the talents as related to the *Bema*.⁴⁵

Finally, Pink also demonstrated that, for him, grace should be properly understood in light of the special nature of the present dispensation:

Let us settle it once for all that the Dispensation in which we are living is a unique one, that it is fundamentally different from all that have preceded it and from that which is to follow it—the Millennium. This is the Dispensation of Grace, and grace obliterates all distinctions, grace eliminates all questions of merits; grace makes every blessing a Divine and free gift. (...) Again we say, let us settle it once for all that *we* are living in the Dispensation of Grace (John 1:17; Eph. 3: 2) and that every blessing we enjoy is a *gift of Divine clemency*. We are justified by grace (Rom. 3:24). We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8). The Holy Scriptures are termed "The Word of His Grace" (Acts 20:32). The Third Person of the Holy Trinity is denominated "The Spirit of

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 210, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 209-12.

Grace” (Heb. 10:29). God is seated upon a Throne of Grace (Heb. 4:16). And, the Good Hope which is given us is “through grace” (2 Thess. 2:16). It is all of Grace from first to last. It is all of Grace from beginning to end. It was grace that predestinated us before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9), and it will be grace that makes us like Christ at the consummation of our salvation. Thank God for such a “*Blessed Hope*.”⁴⁶

Dispensationalism clearly lead Pink to embrace grace “from first to last.”

When Pink abandoned dispensationalism, however, he also abandoned Free Grace. The once proponent of the simplicity of justification by faith alone now asserts, “Something more than ‘believing’ is necessary to salvation.”⁴⁷ Though he had once used John 5:24 and Acts 16:31 as the basis for the believer’s assurance, he now refers to the one basing his assurance upon these verses as “Mr. Carnal Confidence”⁴⁸ and asserts that:

Thousands are, to use their own words, “resting on John 3:16,” or 5:24, and have not the slightest doubt they will spend eternity with Christ. Nevertheless it is the bounden duty of every real servant of God to tell the great majority of them that they are woefully deluded by Satan.⁴⁹

No longer could assurance be found in looking to Christ and His promises alone. Instead, “...the *attainment* of assurance is by an impartial scrutiny of myself and an honest comparing of myself with the scriptural marks of God’s children.”⁵⁰

It is also interesting to note that, like Augustine, Pink had a fundamental change in his interpretation of Matt 24:13 after abandoning premillennialism. In *The*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178, emphasis in original.

⁴⁷ Arthur Pink, *Studies on Saving Faith*, (Swengel: Reiner Publications, 1974), 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156-63.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 134, emphasis in original.

Redeemer's Return, Matt 24:13 is treated as relating to Tribulation saints being saved out of the Tribulation period through endurance, while in *The Saint's Perseverance*, a work written after his abandonment of premillennialism, Matt 24:13 is treated as expressing the need for believers to persevere until the end of life in order to be saved eschatologically.⁵¹ As Pink ceased to believe in a literal Tribulation period, his interpretation of passages relating to the Tribulation necessarily changed as well.

It is not difficult to see that Pink's abandonment of dispensationalism had a profound impact on his soteriology. Such a dramatic change in approach to Biblical interpretation is bound to have an effect on many areas of theology. Soteriology is just one of those areas, but it is one that is impacted as much as any other. The changes in Pink's soteriology when he fundamentally changed his hermeneutics is a case in point.

CONCLUSION

The debate over Lordship Salvation and the debate over dispensationalism are often treated as one and the same. Yet, in recent years, this connection has only been stressed by those who would see both laid to waste. Dispensationalism stands upon the solid ground of a consistent literal interpretation of Scripture and *so does Free Grace*. It is essential that we in the grace community recognize this connection and understand that as normative dispensationalism is under attack, the foundation upon which Free Grace stands is being attacked as well.

The rise of dispensationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries brought with it a revival of the principles of grace. It is not coincidence that as the allegorizing of men was replaced by the unadulterated clarity of God's Word, the legalism of men was also replaced by the free grace of

⁵¹ Arthur Pink, *The Saint's Perseverance*, (Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 24.

God. The nature of man is invariably legalistic while God is unendingly gracious.

Furthermore, if it can be demonstrated conclusively that Lordship Salvation is dependent upon a non-literal approach to portions of Scripture, the shaky ground upon which Lordship Salvation stands is exposed. At the face of it, this seems like it may be a difficult task, but this is being plainly admitted by many proponents of Lordship Salvation as they eschew Dispensationalism. That this is further evidenced in the application of non-literal hermeneutics among Lordship Salvation proponents in their discussions on soteriology will be demonstrated in the next installment of this series.

IS THERE A HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL? DOES THE CHURCH HAVE A SOCIAL COMMISSION TOO?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social missions are pervasive in today's business environment. We see it in the pink coloring of products indicating a small portion of the profit being given to *Susan G. Komen for the Cure* to help fight breast cancer, Chili's Grill & Bar encouraging its customers to make a donation for *St. Jude Children's Research Hospital*, Ruby Tuesday's *Cookies for a Cause* program, or Panera Bread opening *Panera Cares Community Cafes*. There are consulting firms that help businesses launch social initiatives.¹ Cause-related marketing is good for business. Sometimes the best public relations campaign is to be found doing something good.

Popular television shows incorporate social missions in their story lines and activities. *American Idol* has its "Idol Gives Back" fundraising segment. *The Amazing Race* Fall 2010 had its teams take a day off in Ghana to paint a school. *The Bachelor* Winter 2011 supplied a hot water tank for a school in Africa.

¹ For example, Changing Our World, Inc. is a consulting firm that helps companies identify a social mission and incorporate it in their organization. See <http://www.changingourworld.com/site/PageServer> (accessed November 9, 2010).

Today's Evangelical church has not been left behind on this trend. A new Evangelicalism with a new social commission has emerged.

Believers in Christ are called to do good for people. Paul the Apostle exhorted, "While we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal 6:10). So, when a movement comes along that wants us to do good works, I'm sure we would agree, "Yes, let's do them." But what is being advanced is more than just doing good works. The Christian mission has been redefined and expanded.

Towards the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century many evangelical Christians have taken up contemplative spirituality,² a return to ritual,³ and a social and environmental mission on par with a spiritual mission. Does the church have a spiritual *and* social commission?

II. GENESIS OF THE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL/SOCIAL COMMISSION

The movement among evangelicals to take up a social and spiritual commission for the church began in a significant way at the First International Congress on World Evangelization called by evangelist Billy Graham, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974.⁴ John Stott, in an expanded version of his Lausanne address entitled

²See Philippe R. Sterling, "Christian Leadership and Mentoring: Contemplative Theology's Trojan Horse," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 20 no. 39 (Autumn 2007), 17-35.

³See Philippe R. Sterling, "The Return to Ritual: Should Free Grace Churches Adopt Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Other Emergent Church Practices?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 22 no. 43 (Autumn 2009), 29-43.

⁴See Jacob Thomas, *From Lausanne to Manila: Evangelical Social Thought* (ISPCK, 2003). Thomas traces the development of evangelical thinking about evangelism and social action from the first Lausanne Congress (1974) to the second Manila (1989) and the smaller conferences in between. See also *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Action*, Editor Bruce Nicholls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

Christian Mission in the Modern World, articulated the change from his earlier thinking, which reflected that of most evangelicals of the time, of understanding the Great Commission primarily as being “a preaching, converting and teaching mission”:

Today, however, I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission includes the duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded (Matt 28:20), and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.⁵

The Lausanne Committee held a Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility at Grand Rapids in June 1982. The Lausanne Occasional Paper 21 *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* emerged from this gathering.⁶ Section 4 C on the relationship between Evangelism and social responsibility asserts at one point “social activity not only follows Evangelism as its consequence and aim, and precedes it as a bridge, but also accompanies it as its *partner*. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird.”⁷

David Bosch puts this conception of the church’s mission in a mathematical analogy: “Evangelism + social action = mission.”⁸ This mission is the total task that God

⁵ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23.

⁶ The paper can be found online at <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-21.html>. Accessed January 25, 2011.

⁷ *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, 1982), 23.

⁸ David J. Bosch, “In Search of a New Evangelical Understanding,” in the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism book, *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Action*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 79. See also p. 82.

has set for the salvation of the world. The church's mission becomes one of saving souls and societies.

The Lausanne Committee hosted the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization in Thailand. The theme of the Forum was "A new vision, a new heart, a renewed call." Occasional Paper No. 33 was produced by the Issue Group on Holistic Mission.⁹ In the paper Rene Padilla asks "How is the mission of the church defined? What is included in mission?"¹⁰ He answers, "The mission of the church is multifaceted because it depends on the mission of God, which includes the whole of creation and the totality of human life." He approvingly quotes from the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, "Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together."¹¹ A number of statements summarize the church's mandate such as: "The church must pursue a holistic theology where economic justice is integral to its mission" and "A commitment to promoting health globally is mandatory for Christians and this includes a just distribution of resources." Bob Moffitt writes in the conclusion of Occasional Paper No. 33:

Redemption was completed on the cross, but God has given the church the task of administering the process of restoration until his return... the church is more important to the healing of human brokenness—hunger, sickness, political corruption, and economic injustice—than civil leaders, state governments, economic policy and development, or scientific advance. God

⁹The paper can be found online at http://www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP33_IG4.pdf. Accessed January 25, 2011.

¹⁰"Holistic Mission, Lausanne Occasional paper No. 33," in *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call*, ed. David Claydon, Ed. Vol 1 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 216-20.

¹¹ See the Micah Declaration online at <http://micahnetwork.org/en/integral-mission/micah-declaration>. Accessed January 25, 2011. For a history of the Micah Challenge see Joel Edwards, "Micah Challenge: The Story So Far", in *Micah's Challenge: The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor*, Edited by Maryke Hoek and Justin Thacker (London: Paternoster, 2008), 1-12.

will use these and other modalities to advance His purpose, but the church holds the principle ordination for this supreme assignment.¹²

Participants at Cape Town 2010 renewed the commitment to the visions and goals of the Lausanne Movement among which is the duty of evangelism and social-political involvement. Included in *The Cape Town Commitment—A Declaration of Belief and a Call to Action* was an affirmation of the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission.¹³

Many evangelical churches and organizations have taken up the spiritual/social commission mandate. A few illustrations follow.

III. EXAMPLES OF THE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL/SOCIAL COMMISSION

A. RICK WARREN'S PEACE PLAN

My first realization of the extent of the social/spiritual commission movement among Evangelicals was with the introduction of Rick Warren's peace plan. The dedicated website explains that the vision of the peace plan is to mobilize Christians around the world to address the five giant problems of spiritual emptiness, self-serving leadership, poverty, disease, and illiteracy.¹⁴ The church responds to these five global giants by five expressions making up the acronym peace: Promote reconciliation, Equip servant leaders, Assist the poor, Care for the sick, and Educate the next generation. When the program was first introduced the P stood for Planting churches, but the emphasis shifted to Promote reconciliation. The shift in emphasis reflected the effort to broaden involvement to

¹² *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call*, 277.

¹³ See <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/11544/0/1>. Accessed January 25, 2011.

¹⁴ See <http://thepeaceplan.com/Vision>. Accessed January 25, 2011.

more churches and religious groups worldwide as well as public and private sector organizations.

Warren's peace plan broadens the mission of the church with a global social agenda. It also promotes an ecumenical, interfaith, governmental, and business partnership in the fulfillment of the mission.

B. RICHARD STEARNS' THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

*The Hole in Our Gospel*¹⁵ is the bestselling book by Richard Stearns, the president of World Vision. It won the 2010 Christian Book of the Year award from the Evangelical Christian Publisher's Association. The book recounts Stearns spiritual journey and decision to leave the corporate world and lead World Vision, one of the largest Christian humanitarian organizations. He tries to answer the question, "What does God expect of us?" He provides an answer that he says changed his life and might just change the world. The title of the book suggests that we have missed something essential about the gospel.

Stearns lays out the essential elements of his thesis in the introduction:

The idea behind *The Hole in Our Gospel* is quite simple. It's basically the belief that being a Christian, or follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a *personal* and transforming relationship with God. It also entails a *public* and transforming relationship with the world.¹⁶

The gospel itself was born of God's vision of a changed people, challenging and transforming the prevailing values and practices of our world... He called us to go out, to proclaim the

¹⁵ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

“good news”—to *be* the “good news”—and to change the world.¹⁷

The whole gospel is a vision for ushering in God’s kingdom—now, not in some future time, and here, on earth, not in some distant heaven.¹⁸

For Stearns, the whole gospel is spiritual and social. The mission of believers is to transform the world and usher in the kingdom. He writes in the concluding chapter:

Picture a different world. Imagine one in which two billion Christians embrace this gospel—the whole gospel—each doing a part by placing his or her piece of the puzzle and completing God’s stunning vision of a reclaimed and redeemed world—the kingdom of God among us.¹⁹

C. EVANGELICAL CAMPUS MINISTRIES

Christianity Today posted in 2009 an article entitled *A More Social Gospel*.²⁰ The following quotes from the article illustrate the social works and social service focus of Evangelical campus ministries today.

Cornerstones of evangelistic outreach to college students—concerts and pizza parties—are harder to find these days. One is just as likely to encounter nights spent with the homeless, meetings about human trafficking, and out-reach to gay students.

“There has been a definitive shift in how campus ministries think about connecting with students,” said Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary. “More and more campus leaders are realizing

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 278.

²⁰ C. L. Lopez, “A More Social Gospel,” *Christianity Today* (December 2009), 18. The article can be read online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/december/29.18.html>. Accessed January 31, 2010.

that the gospel is both personal evangelism and justice.”

Scott Bessenecker, associate director of missions for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, said students within the organization’s 850 groups on 562 campuses have focused more on social causes in recent years.²¹

Josh Spavin, an intern with the University of Central Florida’s (UCF) Campus Crusade for Christ chapter, said traditional evangelistic outreach still works, but times have changed with this generation.²²

Spavin said he hopes his chapter will launch an HIV/AIDS outreach with a campus gay and lesbian group.

Ministries with a sincere commitment to social issues can repair the “poor image of campus evangelicals” among peers who associate them with homophobia and political conservatism, said University of Alabama history professor John Turner, who wrote 2008’s *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*.²³

“One way for evangelicals to counter these negative stereotypes and put themselves in a position to talk about Jesus is to engage in meaningful social justice work that even non-evangelicals can appreciate,” said Turner. “There is a danger of losing sight of evangelistic goals.

²¹ James Choung of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has developed a tool called “The Big Story” to share a broader gospel. Christianity Today devoted a major article concerning this: “From Four Laws to Four Circles,” *Christianity Today* (July 2008):30-33. Find this online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/july/11.31.html>. Accessed January 31, 2011.

²² Campus Crusade has a justice study curriculum for its small groups. See http://crupress.campuscrusadeforchrist.com/green/_assets/resources/IJM-Social-Justice-Bible-Studies.pdf. Accessed January 31, 2011.

²³ The subtitle of the book is, *The Renewal of Evangelicism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

But not taking these steps presents an even greater danger to those same goals.”²⁴

D. UNITE AND "GO AND BE"

Last year my church was invited to be part of “Go and Be 2010.” It was a campaign that mobilized 20,000 volunteers from 50 churches all over the Dallas area to forego attending worship services on the first Sunday in May to engage in social service projects.²⁵ Many well-known Evangelical and denominational churches participated.²⁶ “Go and Be 2011” will include the whole month of April. “Go and Be” is a collaborative service effort sponsored by a group called Unite. Concerning its mission it says on its website:

Unite is a diverse network of churches joining forces to engage and transform our communities for God’s glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.²⁷

Concerning its foundational beliefs it says:

Our partner churches are diverse in many ways including denominationally. As such, an important key to effective partnership will be a commitment to set aside differences in practices and doctrines that are secondary to our faith while coming together around those truths that we all hold as the foundation of our Christian faith. To that end, churches who wish to join with Unite should make sure they agree with statements contained in the Lausanne Covenant.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See their website <http://unitethechurch.org>. Accessed January 25, 2011.

²⁶ Some of which were Irving Bible Church, Stonebriar Community Church, Lake Point Church, and Watermark Church.

²⁷ <http://unitethechurch.org>.

²⁸ Ibid.

The reference to the Lausanne Covenant²⁹ brings us back to the genesis of the Evangelical spiritual/social commission movement. Let us proceed with an evaluation of the movement.

IV. EVALUATION OF THE EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL/SOCIAL COMMISSION

A. DISSENTING VOICES AT LAUSANNE'S CONSULTATION

There were dissenting voices at the Lausanne Committee's Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility in 1982. Among them were Harold Lindsell, editor emeritus of *Christianity Today*, and Arthur P. Johnston, professor of World Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Lindsell argued in his response to a paper that the mission of the church is Evangelism and that those major denominations in the USA that allocated time and resources to social action have declined in membership and in intent for Evangelism.³⁰ Their praxis showed that their theory was deficient. He feared the same would happen to Evangelical churches which included social action in their mission. He concluded his response by asking:

May not the notion that changed men change society be the key to the problem? May not evangelism do more good than social action? Does social action belong to the mission of the church as church or to believers who make up the churches?

²⁹ This can be read at <http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>. Accessed January 27, 2011.

³⁰ Harold Lindsell, "Response to 'Evangelism and Social Responsibility—A Biblical Study on Priorities,' by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden," in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Action*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 189-214.

His answer was:

The mission for the members of the churches describes a number of activities that the Church as Church is not called upon to do in the world.

Dr. Johnston presented the paper “The Kingdom in Relation to the Church and the World.”³¹ One of the conclusions of his study was:

The Kingdom of God is not to be identified with the progressive social improvement of mankind in which the task of the Church is to transform earth like unto heaven and to do it now. Citizens of the Kingdom do produce changes in society as the fruit of their redeemed lives. Spiritual revivals and improvements in society may be expected, but there can be no optimistic prospect of the moral and social well-being of mankind before the second coming.³²

In a book he wrote earlier in response to the first Lausanne Congress Dr. Johnston observed how the traditional view of saving individual souls had been challenged by the so-called Social Gospel in earlier decades and in the 1970s by a theology of holistic mission.³³ He cautioned that a shift from a primary emphasis on Evangelism as the mission of the church to a dual commitment to Evangelism and social work could lead to a singular interest in social concern and finally to a this-worldly preoccupation.³⁴ He advocated that in the theology of mission, Evangelism should be retained in its priority and primacy.³⁵ He observed that “Scripture simply supports Evangelism and discipleship as the primary mission of

³¹ Arthur P. Johnston, “The Kingdom in Relation to the Church and the World,” in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Action*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 109-133.

³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³ Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1978), 227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 327.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 329.

the church.”³⁶ His concluding evaluation of the Lausanne Congress was:

Lausanne’s theology could have been strengthened...
in the theology of mission, evangelism should have
retained not only its priority and primacy, but also the
unique status it held...³⁷

B. SUMMARY OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON SOCIAL MISSION

Israel’s king had a spiritual, social and political mission (see 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9; Ps 72). He was the human ruler of a theocratic state. God appointed him to do justice and establish righteousness under the Law. The individuals of the nation were also in their personal lives to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8).

Jesus in establishing His messianic identity at His first coming healed the sick, performed miracles such as the feeding of the five thousand, raised the dead and so forth (see Matt 11:1-6). Still, he did not indiscriminately heal and perform miracles for everyone (see Luke 4:16-30). The establishment of peace and righteousness over all the earth awaits His second coming.

During the church age, a nation’s governing authorities are ministers of God to praise the good and punish the evil (Rom 13:1-7). The church itself does not wield political authority and does not carry the responsibility of establishing righteousness and justice in all the earth. The church is to concern itself with the spiritual mission of going into all the world proclaiming the saving message and making disciples (Mark 16:15; Matt 28:18-20). In the course of fulfilling the spiritual commission, the church and individual believers within reasonable limits are to do whatever good they have the opportunity to do for all

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

people and especially the household of faith (Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 5:3-16; 6:17-19).

Donald Guthrie has done a helpful review of NT teaching on social responsibility.³⁸ His conclusion is “Social relief and social reform are not the gospel, but they flow naturally from it.”³⁹

C. GEORGE W. PETERS AND THE MISSIONARY TASK

My Missions class at Dallas Theological Seminary had as its main text *A Biblical Theology of Missions* by George W. Peters. He maintained that in order to define the mission of the church precisely that there needed to be a clear grasp of the twofold mandate of God to man set forth in the Bible.⁴⁰ The first mandate was given to Adam as representative of the race and included the natural and social aspects of man such as habitat, politics, social and moral order, physical care, etc. The second mandate was given to the apostles as representatives of the church of Jesus Christ and majored in the spiritual liberation and restoration of man although it does not overlook his physical and social welfare. The second mandate involves evangelism, discipleship training, church-planting, church care, and benevolent ministries.

Christians as members of the human race are not exempt from the responsibilities of the first mandate. But this does not constitute their divine calling and mission as the church. Care must be taken not to confuse the two mandates and speak of them on equal terms as the mission of the church. If the mandates are too closely inter-related or blended the gospel suffers and divine priorities

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, “The New Testament Approach to Social Responsibility,” *Vox Evangelica* 8 (1973):40-59. The article can be found online at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol08/social-responsibility_guthrie.pdf. Accessed January 31, 2011.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 166-71. Peters writes from a premillennial perspective. Richard Stearns in *The Hole in our Gospel* seems to have embraced an amillennial or postmillennial eschatology.

are blurred. This was the case with the social gospel and liberalism.

D. A VOICE FROM 1934

As the Preacher observed in Ecclesiastes, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Some critiques of the Old Social Gospel apply to the Evangelical Spiritual/Social gospel. Joseph Harris offers a helpful analysis in a *Bibliotheca Sacra* article in 1934.⁴¹

Harris points out that the fact that the NT Gospel has social implications and effects for the regenerate and unregenerate is evident from the NT itself and from history. But such effects are limited by the nature of sin and the existence and activity of Satan. He counsels:

It is best for the church to stay by the old message of personal salvation and to leave the social fruit of the faith thus produced to work out its own development. Undue emphasis on social service may only hinder...The wise servant of Christ will not place his hopes in the illusive glamour of a “social” gospel, but will patiently accept the revealed fact that God’s time for removing Satanic influence upon the world of men and restraining their sin so as to make millennial conditions possible is the Second Advent of His Son.⁴²

E. SUMMARY

What’s wrong with a more social gospel? It burdens the church with an added mission that can sap most of its resources. It can lead to a loss of focus on the primary mission of evangelism and edification. It ultimately fails for the church will not transform the world and usher in the kingdom. That awaits the coming of the Lord.

⁴¹ Joseph Edwin Harris, “Sin, Satan and the Social Gospel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October 1934), 447-56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 455-56.

The church's primary mission is Evangelism and discipleship. If we try to combine and balance a spiritual and social mission we may end up doing neither well and may eventually minimize the spiritual mission and drift to a primary social mission. The YMCA and Salvation Army are good examples of such a drift.

If we focus on the spiritual mission then social work can be a by-product. For example, Wycliffe Bible Translators has focused on the spiritual mission of Bible translation and has as a by-product made greater literacy possible for the people that received the Bible in their own language.⁴³

Are we commanded, "Go into the world and do social works and bring about social justice"? No! The church does not have the responsibility of transforming the world. The coming of the Kingdom is not dependent on the church's social justice work. The church has a spiritual mission of evangelism and edification (Eph 4:11-16).

V. RECOMMENDATION

As I illustrated in the introduction concerning the social initiatives of businesses, social actions are not unique to the church. There are many non-Christians engaged in social mission serving the needs of the poor, the afflicted, or the homeless. Government and non-profits do this. The church has a unique spiritual mission.

Don't change the mission of the church. The church should focus on the spiritual mission of sharing the saving message and making disciples and let social works simply be a by-product or fruit. The church does not have a spiritual and social commission. It has a spiritual commission.

⁴³ See <http://www.wycliffe.org/go/careers/typesofwork/languagework/literacy.aspx>. Accessed February 26, 2011.



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EVIDENCE FOR A FIRST CENTURY “TENEMENT CHURCH”

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ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF PAUL’S ROMAN AUDIENCE

Scholars have sought to calculate the number of Christians in Rome when Paul wrote.¹ The greetings section of Romans 16 is the basis for such estimates. Paul greets more people by name here than in any other epistle. However, the mention of twenty-six congregants does not immediately suggest a large Christian community. Thus, scholarly estimates of the original audience of the epistle tend to be low—probably too low.

In AD 64, Nero charged Christians with the burning of Rome. In the aftermath, Tacitus reports the condemnation of “a huge crowd” (*multitudo ingens*) of Christians.² If he is right, the church at Rome was no small entity only seven years after Paul’s epistle. This leaves three options:

1. Tacitus may have overstated the numbers.
2. Christianity grew from a small sect in Rome to a large one in less than a decade.
3. Christianity was already sizeable in the capital before Paul’s epistle.

Looking at this another way, the first question is: How large was the church in AD 64? The second is: How large was it in AD 57?

¹ See studies referred to in Robert Jewett, assisted by Roy D. Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 61.

² Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

There is every reason to accept Tacitus' report that the church community in Rome was large by AD 64. Politicians needing a scapegoat do not persecute friends or small, innocuous groups, but attack perceived enemies. Although believers were not revolutionaries (cf. Rom 13:1-7), something must account for Nero blaming them, not others. Two issues may have caught his eye:

1. Christians showed strong convictions in clashes with religious Jews.
2. Christianity was a large sect in Rome and it was also growing rapidly.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ROMAN CHURCH WHEN PAUL WROTE

It would be tempting to estimate the size of the Christian community in Rome at the outset of this discussion. However, an accurate description of the Roman Church is requisite to estimating numbers. For example, if Rom 16:3-15 greets twenty-six rank-and-file members, the minimum number (assuming that those with no named spouse were married) could be as small as seventy-five adults.

Three factors could immediately expand this to a much larger community:

1. Paul may only greet leaders and sponsors of 15 congregations known to him.
2. Each leader (and sponsors) would meet with small congregations weekly.
3. Leaders may meet at different times and places with multiple groups a week.

The number of believers in all the congregations of the churches in Rome could easily have been over 1,000 in AD 57 when Paul wrote. Thus while traditional thinking has yielded a small original audience for Paul's letter (i.e., under 100), the presence of large numbers of Christians in AD 64 suggests the need to be open to

a substantial beachhead existing prior to Paul's AD 57 letter as well. A closer examination of the church in Rome may clarify. Certainly, the number of Christians expanded after Paul's letter, and possibly dramatically, but his epistle was not designed as an evangelistic tool, contrary to what advocates of the so-called Romans Road would say.

Careful analysis of Rom 16:3-15 will offer a glimpse into the Roman church when Paul wrote. The resultant picture of the audience of Romans has several aspects.

Romans 16:3-15 shows that Paul was writing multi-ethnic readers within fifteen distinct congregations. They belonged to various socio-economic groups, including slaves and freedmen who dwelt in tenements. Leaders of several assemblies had associated with Paul during exile from Rome under Claudius. When the Claudian persecution ended, these people (familiar with Paul's teaching) returned to Rome, planting churches friendly to Paul and his teaching. Paul evidences varying degrees of familiarity with these congregations, so other churches (beyond the fifteen) may have already existed. Priscilla³ and Aquila, the first people greeted (Rom 16:3), evidently had an elevated economic and social position which made them ideal candidates to distribute the epistle to the other fourteen named congregations and to others not named as well.

³ Both the MT and CT read *Priska* (or *Prisca*), not *Priscilla*, in Rom 16:3, but elsewhere the NT calls her *Priskilla* (or *Priscilla*; see Acts 18:2, 18, 26; 1 Cor 16:19 [*Priska* in the CT]). Rather than calling her *Prisca* or *Priscilla* in Rom 16:3, the article retains her more familiar name, *Priscilla*.

ROMANS ADDRESSES FIFTEEN NAMED CONGREGATIONS

Paul greets fifteen autonomous groups of believers in Rom 16:3-15. Each use of *aspazomai*⁴ (“greet”) distinguishes an autonomous assembly.⁵ The easiest way to see the groups is by offering a skeletal view of the verses in question, arranged on a congregation-by-congregation basis. Following the list will be a set of arguments favoring this approach.

1. Greet Priscilla and Aquila...and the church that is in their house (*vv* 3–5a).
2. Greet my beloved Epaenetus...(v 5b).
3. Greet Mary...(v 6).
4. Greet Andronicus and Junia...(v 7).
5. Greet Amplias...(v 8).
6. Greet Urbanus...and Stachys...(v 9).
7. Greet Apelles...(v 10a).
8. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus (v 10b).
9. Greet Herodion...(v 11a).
10. Greet those being in the Lord of the *household* of Narcissus (v 11b).
11. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa...(v 12a).
12. Greet the beloved Persis...(v 12b).
13. Greet Rufus...and his mother and mine (v 13).
14. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren with them (v 14).
15. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them (v 15).

⁴ Editor's note: There are actually four additional uses of *aspazomai* in Romans 16, for a total of nineteen. However the last four in Rom 16:21, 22, 23 (2x) are greetings not from Paul, but from his co-workers—Tertius, the scribe who wrote the letter, Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Three other believers with Paul also sent greetings—Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus.

⁵ The fifteen uses are Rom 16:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 (2x), 11 (2x), 12 (2x), 13, 14, 15.

THE FIFTEEN USES OF *GREET*

The greetings section of Romans served as a new literary departure. That is, no prior precedent exists, although subsequent Christian writing often emulated this epistle's greetings. Jewett writes:

Most frequently, the greeting is a brief and formulaic *errōsthe* ("be well"). The combination of greetings to so large a number of persons and the use of the second person plural form in Romans is unparalleled, contributing to the establishment of a precedent that popularizes greetings in subsequent Christian letters. Since no other Pauline letter carries so many greetings, "this indicates that the situation under which Romans was written differed in some significant way,"⁶ which my hypothesis concerning the purpose attempts to clarify and which the exegesis below will elaborate.⁷

Paul had not been to Rome, but was personally acquainted with a host of people there. In one sense, the many repetitions of the verb *greet* seem redundant. The repetition suggests a stylistic feature signaling the existence of various congregations.

USE OF TERMS COMPATIBLE WITH CORPORATE ASSEMBLY

A couple of features within this section show that Paul strategically placed each imperative *Greet* to distinguish individual congregations. Paul specifically refers to the meetings of three of these groups (indicated by italicized words):

Greet Priscilla and Aquila...and the *church*
that is in their house (*vv* 3–5a).

⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 951. Jewett has a footnote here which indicates the quote is from "Mullins, 'Greeting,' 425."

⁷ Ibid.

Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren *with* them (v 14).

Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are *with* them (v 15).

Attention to the names mentioned in the three groups is important. Priscilla and Aquila were a married couple. Verse 15 initially names a man (Philologus) and a woman (Julia), perhaps as a married couple. Then it mentions a brother (Nereus) and his unnamed sister. Though the first four names may be associated because of familial ties, Olympas and all the saints who are with them look less like family and more like church. The same is true for the five named men in v 14 and the unnamed brethren with them. Furthermore, the greeting to Priscilla, Aquila, “and the church that is in their house” (vv 3-5a) weighs against the idea that the people in vv 5b-15 were part of Priscilla and Aquila’s house church. The wording of v 5a distinguishes one congregation from succeeding ones.⁸ Likewise, vv 14-15 point to two separate assemblies. The word *greet* demarks each of those congregations. By extension, Paul signals the existence of fifteen congregations, each with its own greeting.

POORER ETHNICITIES WERE REPRESENTED

Romans 16:3-15 gives the names of twenty-six people. The names of eighteen were Greek (Andronicus, Apelles, Aristobulus, Asyncritus, Epaphroditus, Hermas, Hermes, Herodion, Narcissus, Nereus, Olympas, Patrobas, Persis, Philologus, Phlegon, Stachys, Tryphena, Tryphosa), seven were Latin (Amplias, Aquila,⁹ Julia, Junia, Priscilla,

⁸ Cf. Galatians, which explicitly addresses more than one congregation, “the churches of Galatia” (1:2). Of course, Galatia (a province) covered a larger geographic region than a city. Nevertheless a crowded city the size of Rome could give rise to a number of pockets of believers.

⁹ Luke identifies Aquila as Jewish in Acts 18:2.

Rufus, and Urbanus), while one was Hebrew (Mary). Six of those with Greek or Latin names were ethnically Jewish (Andronicus, Herodion, Aquila, Priscilla, Junia, and Rufus).

It is widely acknowledged that relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians were not always smooth. Paul greets Jews in some of the congregations; Gentiles in others. None of the congregations explicitly have both Jews and Gentiles in them.¹⁰

Jewett shows why the language of origin for the names is important:

...Paul is struggling against cultural chauvinism in all its forms. Particularly in the imperial context of Rome, where the majority of Greek-speaking persons, including most of those with Jewish background, were slaves or former slaves, respect for original cultural origins and identity was a matter of importance.¹¹

SOME OF THE LEADERS WERE ASSOCIATED WITH PAUL DURING EXILE FROM ROME

Acts 18:2, 18, and 26 document Priscilla and Aquila's prior association with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus (March to September AD 52). They traveled extensively¹² and remained associated with him whether accompanying Paul or separated from him.

¹⁰ This does not mean that all congregations were purely Gentile or purely Jewish. For example, Priscilla may or may not have shared her husband's Jewishness. Acts 18:2 does not say whether she was a Jewess or not. The point remains that Paul does not explicitly mention any congregation as including both Jews and Gentiles.

¹¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 953.

¹² Aquila was born in Pontus (Acts 18:2); he and his wife Priscilla lived in Rome until the Claudian edict of AD 49 (Acts 18:2), was at Corinth (Acts 18:2 and 18) and Ephesus in AD 51 (Acts 18:24-26), was at Corinth in AD 56 (2 Cor 16:19), at Rome in AD 56-57 (Rom 16:3-4), and at Rome with Paul in AD 67 when 2 Timothy was written (2 Tim 4:19).

Paul maintained contact with them, greeting them in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Their frequent travels and close connection with Paul suggest that they served as the Apostle's emissaries. Furthermore, Paul greets them first in Romans 16 and gives them a longer greeting than anyone else in the chapter. They do not evidence long-term or permanent ties to Rome. For these reasons, they seem to be Paul's emissaries, temporarily assigned to Rome, ensuring that the Roman epistle reached all of the churches in the city. This aspect will receive further development later.

Epaenetus was the firstfruits of Achaia (Rom 16:5b). On his second journey, Paul took Epaenetus to Achaia from February 51–September 52 (Acts 17:15–18:18). On the third journey Epaenetus was also there for three months in the winter of 56–57 (Acts 20:2-3). The reference to Epaenetus as the firstfruits of Achaia suggests that he was among the first believers there, meaning that Paul met him around February 51. It also implies that Epaenetus did not believe prior to meeting Paul, so the safer assumption is that Achaia was the birthplace of this man with a Greek name, but he moved to Rome.

Mary (Gk. *Mariam*) "labored much for us" (Rom 16:6); Tryphena, Tryphosa, and the beloved Persis "labored [much] in the Lord" (Rom 16:12). Paul knew them, so it is clear that they traveled. As with Epaenetus, there is no indication as to whether they were natives of Rome.

Andronicus and Junia were Paul's "fellow prisoners," which may mean that they and he were imprisoned together. The apostles regarded these (who believed before Paul did) as noteworthy (Rom 16:7). For them to be held in high regard by the apostles would seem to require that they also had travelled.

Paul calls Amplias "my beloved in the Lord" (Rom 16:8) and Stachys "my beloved" (Rom 16:9). These appellations suggest that they traveled outside of Rome and spent time with Paul.

Paul refers to Urbanus as his "fellow worker in Christ" (Rom 16:9), a term reserved for outstanding partnership with Paul in ministry. Such a commendation would require close association with Paul.

For Paul to speak of Apelles as "approved [Gk. *dokimos*] in Christ" (Rom 16:10) means that he was currently pleasing the Lord and should he persevere in that state, he would have the Lord's approval at the *Bēma* (cf. 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Tim 2:15). Clearly, he and Paul had spent time together.

Paul speaks of Rufus as "chosen in the Lord" (Rom 16:13), which is special.¹³ Note how Paul speaks of the mother of Rufus as his own mother also. Such a comment suggests that Paul and he were close.

These people that have been associated with Paul in times past constitute about two-thirds of the names listed in Rom 16:3-15. He does name a few women. The men listed are qualified for prominent leadership and ministry roles. Paul is not cataloguing a list of church attendees. These are tested ministers, which accords with the idea that the epistle addresses fifteen congregations.

AN OCCASION FOR PAUL TO HAVE MET THESE PEOPLE

Acts 18:1–2 (AD 51) is when Paul first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth:

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because

¹³ The phrase *chosen* [or elect (*eklektos* is used here)] *in the Lord*, likely refers here not to election to everlasting life, but to election for ministry, including formerly ministry with the Apostle Paul. Indeed, there is no clear evidence anywhere in the Bible that there is such a thing as election to everlasting life. Compare Acts 13:46. However, some NT scholars suggest that Paul means that Rufus was "a choice or precious Christian" (Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010], 221).

Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

Luke's statement sounds like every Jew was commanded to leave. The statement of Suetonius allows two different meanings, "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (or Christus)¹⁴ he expelled them [meaning either all Jews or all contentious Jews] from Rome."¹⁵

Rome's Jewish community was substantial (between 15,000 and 60,000)¹⁶ and did not vanish during the reign of Claudius. The reconciliation between Luke and Suetonius may be as simple as Claudius issued a universal command (per Luke), but enforced it only upon those contending over Chrestus (per Suetonius).¹⁷

Jewett reaches similar conclusions about the Claudian edict.¹⁸ He then contends that Paul did not merely meet Priscilla and Aquila on the mission field, but others in Romans 16 also.

...Prisca [i.e., Priscilla] and Aquila, whom Paul greets in Rom 16:3–5, were refugees forced out of Rome whom Paul met in Corinth when he

¹⁴ That this was a substitution of *e* for *i* is widely (but not universally) accepted. The disturbances among the Jews were widespread enough to result in official persecution. Who else, besides Christ Himself would serve as such a lightning rod? The most plausible interpretation is that Suetonius (a Latin speaker) misspelled a Greek name.

¹⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4. translated by J. C. Rolfe, *LCL*. The Latin reads, *Iudaios impulsore Chresto adsidue tumultiantes Roma expulit*.

¹⁶ Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser, ed. Marshall D. Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 84, gives estimates of between 15,000 and 60,000 from Pss. Solomon 2.6, *Josephus Ant.* 17.13-14, *Philo Legat Ant.* 23, and *Josephus Ant.* 14.77-79.

¹⁷ Orosius, *History* 7:15-16, says, "It cannot be determined whether he [Claudius] ordered only the Jews agitating against Christ to be restrained and suppressed, or whether he also wanted to expel Christians as being men of a related faith." Orosius seems unaware that (in the year AD 49) most Roman Christians were Jewish. This is only five years after Acts 10, where Cornelius was the first non-proselyte Gentile in the Church. Positively, though, Orosius understood that Roman Christianity came under the Claudian edict.

¹⁸ Jewett, *Romans*, 60.

arrived there in the winter of C.E. 50.¹⁹ Other likely refugees mentioned in chap. 16 are [1] Epainetos, [2] Miriam, [3] Andronikos and [4] Junia, [5] Ampliatus, [6] Urbanus, [7] Stachys, [8] Apelles, [9] Herodion, [10] Tryphaina, [11] Tryphosa, [12] Persis, and [13] Rufus and his [14] mother. The most probable explanation for Paul's acquaintance with these early Christian leaders is that they met while in exile. Paul knows that they have returned to the capital of the empire during the peaceful, early years of the Nero administration...

Paul's personal remarks towards these people shows that he met them before they returned to Rome. He speaks of one as the firstfruits of Achaia, others are his fellow workers, fellow prisoners, and so forth. A short-lived edict of Claudius put them in contact with Paul, but allowed them eventually to return to Rome.

Paul had opportunity to evaluate them in ministry. They were commendable. It is quite natural that they would have responsibilities in the various local churches of Rome.

VARIOUS CLASSES WERE REPRESENTED

It has been common in recent years to speak in terms of the churches in Rome (and elsewhere in the first three centuries) as being house churches. However, it is important to recognize the economic demographics of Rome. One estimate is that one-third of Rome's residents were slaves, while one-third were freed slaves,²⁰ and one-third were not slaves. More than 90% of free men lived in upper-story tenement dwellings.²¹ Estimated population density for ancient Rome was, "...300 people per acre, almost two-

¹⁹ My date for this is in AD 51.

²⁰ Zvi Yavetz, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Rome* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988), 117.

²¹ Bruce W. Frier, *Landlords and Tenants in Imperial Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), xx.

and-a-half times higher than modern Calcutta and three times higher than Manhattan Island.”²²

In other words, most people in Rome lived in abject poverty. In general, those with Latin-based names were likely to be higher on the social scale than those with foreign names. Earlier, I noted that seven out of the twenty-six names in the greetings section were Latin.²³

Furthermore, two of the congregations addressed by Paul do not name any attendees.

Greet those who are of the *household* of
Aristobulus (v 10b).

Greet those being in the Lord of the *household*
of Narcissus (v 11b).

A question arises as to whether Aristobulus and Narcissus were patriarchs of their families, who worshipped together or whether the worshippers were slaves belonging to these men. Either way, it appears that neither Aristobulus nor Narcissus attended church. If they did, Paul could have said, “Greet Aristobulus and his house.” Paul does not name anyone at all that belongs to either of these congregations.

Only one of Paul’s fifteen greetings to congregations mentions a church meeting in a home. “Greet Priscilla and Aquila...and the church that is in their house” (16:3–5a).

Realistically, the majority of the congregations probably consisted of poorer people—groups where early Christianity tended to make its best penetration (cf. 1 Cor 1:26). The history of the Church bears this out. In view of the likelihood that most of Paul’s audience was impoverished, it seems wise to contrast salient features of house churches and tenement churches.

²² Jewett, *Romans*, 54. Cf. John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City: Ancient Society and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 337.

²³ See p. 104 above.

HOUSE CHURCHES

Jewett is comfortable with traditional definitions of house churches, but argues that the greetings of Rom 16:3-15 appear to limit house churches to one congregation, that of Priscilla and Aquila.²⁴ Other churches would be of the tenement church model. With that proviso, he approvingly cites both Klauck and Schürmann:

In contrast to modern usage, the word "church" did not refer to a distinctive building until centuries after the writing of Romans. The definitive study of house congregations and house churches by Hans-Joseph Klauck opens with a citation from Heinz Schürmann, "The living space of the congregation is the house." These and other widely accepted studies investigate the references to houses as the meeting places of early Christian congregations and usually assume a freestanding building owned or rented by the patron or patroness of a house church.²⁵

In other words, Jewett would acknowledge that Klauck and Schürmann have well-described the situation of the house church of Priscilla and Aquila.

IMPOVERISHED TENEMENT CHURCHES

A brief description of the housing situation of the poor in Rome will give context for considering where those congregations met. Jewett says,

A crucial element in understanding the situation of Christian congregations in Rome is the crowded urban environment. At the time of Paul's letter, most of the population in Rome lived in

²⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 959.

²⁵ Hans-Joseph Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 103 (Stuttgart, GER: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 11. Klauck cites Heinz Schürmann, "Gemeinde als Bruderschaft," in Heinz Schürmann, *Ursprung und Gestalt: Erörterungen und Besinnungen zum Neuen Testament* (Düsseldorf, GER: Patmos, 1970), 68-69. The Schürmann citation is translated by Jewett, *Romans*, 959.

the upper floors of “multistory tenement houses” or in the rears of shops,²⁶ while the nobility and the wealthy citizens of Rome occupied the lower floors of these buildings or in mansions in the better parts of the city.²⁷

Frier contends that such housing “probably accommodated upwards of 90 percent of Rome’s free population.”²⁸ Jewett summarizes a section of Frier as follows:

He describes the most completely surviving *insula* [a multi-story apartment building], which has shops on the ground floor, with several large *cenacula* [upstairs] apartments above it. The upper floors, however, contain “a warren of tiny, squalid rooms, most of them not directly lighted and served by long interior corridors. Most rooms are very small (about 10 sq. m. [108 sq. ft.]), but it is still entirely probable that a small family could have occupied such quarters.”²⁹

As Jewett concludes, “It seems likely that house churches as normally conceived could not find space in the upper floors of such tenements when the rooms were that small.”³⁰ It is for this reason that Jewett differentiates house churches from tenement churches. Tenement churches lacked sponsors and were forced to use tiny spaces, normally occupied by a family. For example, one neighbor might accommodate men and older children, while women and younger children might meet in another believing neighbor’s quarters. The point is that believers who are motivated to assemble together can find ways to do so, even if they were impoverished tenement dwellers.

²⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 53, draws upon James S. Jeffers, “Jewish and Christian Families in First Century Rome,” in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131-33.

²⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 53.

²⁸ Frier, *Landlords*, xx.

²⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 54. See also Frier, *Landlords*, xx.

³⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 54.

It is widely acknowledged that Christianity made great inroads into the poorer segments of ancient society. Jewett's consideration of the circumstances of tenement dwellers assists in thinking through differences between tenement churches and traditional house churches.

PAUL EVIDENCES VARYING LEVELS OF FAMILIARITY WITH THE CONGREGATIONS

Paul greets Priscilla, Aquila, and many of the others with a personal touch, indicating that they had met. On the other hand, several greetings only mention names of people. As mentioned previously, two greetings do not even name actual participants in the groups (vv 10b and 11b).

This would seem to be a tacit acknowledgment by Paul that his information concerning these groups is sketchy. In light of this, it would be hard to argue that Paul's knowledge about all of the congregations is exhaustive or that he necessarily knows every congregation that existed in Rome. In other words, Paul addressed congregations that he knew were in existence. Some of them were led by people he knew well, others had leaders about whom he had some information, while others he knew very little. It is difficult to dogmatize that there were no other congregations in Rome at the time of writing.

A MEANS FOR DISTRIBUTING THE LETTER TO OTHER CONGREGATIONS EXISTED

Of the fifteen addressed congregations, Priscilla and Aquila (and their house church) would serve as an obvious liaison to the other assemblies. Paul greeted them first. They seem to be more comfortable financially than the other congregations. One other consideration is that

the courier was Phoebe, a woman who hosted her own house church in Cenchrea, near Corinth. It is not at all unlikely that she knew Priscilla and Aquila, who were in Corinth in Acts 18:2. There were certainly dangers for a woman travelling alone, but Paul could take steps with regard to providing a safe and comfortable abode when she arrived in Rome. Priscilla and Aquila would be a most logical choice for Phoebe's point of contact in Rome.

Furthermore, Priscilla and Aquila would be the logical people to extend greetings to the various congregations as they delivered copies of Romans to the fifteen groups and to others in Rome.

CONCLUSION

Romans addresses multi-ethnic readers within fifteen distinct congregations, which belonged to various socio-economic groups (including slaves and freedmen who dwelt in tenements). Leaders of several assemblies had associated with Paul during exile from Rome under Claudius. When the Claudian persecution ended, these people (familiar with Paul's teaching) returned to Rome, planting churches friendly to Paul and his teaching. Paul evidences varying degrees of familiarity with these congregations, so other churches (beyond the fifteen) may have already existed. Priscilla and Aquila's economic and social position may have poised them to distribute the epistle to the fifteen congregations and to others as well.

Under such a model, a substantial Christian community already friendly to Paul existed at the time that he wrote Romans. Furthermore, it is easy to see how Christianity in Rome could be so sizeable by AD 64 that Nero would launch persecution against them.

It is also easy to see how some of the tensions mentioned by the epistle could exist in a climate of numerous congregations of varying ethnicity (Jews, Greeks, and Romans). For example, Romans 1 brings up Gentile licentiousness,

part of chap. 2 discusses legalism, while another part of Romans 2 discusses Jews in particular. Romans 9-11 discusses Israel. Chapter 14 considers liberty and doubtful things. It is not hard to imagine contentions arising between the various congregations, as well as within individual groups.

APPLICATION

In the modern industrialized world, much of Christendom places little emphasis upon assembling to learn God's Word and to worship. Attendance is hit or miss. Inconsequentialities such as the impressiveness of the building or the presence of well-heeled congregants often are the basis for selecting a church.

By contrast, Christianity in Rome spread rapidly through the city, especially in poorer quarters, for reasons totally unrelated to, indeed, in spite of, the meeting space or the social standing of the congregants. Multiple groups of believers assembled together in uncomfortable and crowded locations. They told others about Jesus Christ. As a result, even more believers assembled. Christianity in Rome was already sizeable when Paul wrote, but further multiplication over the next seven years brought persecution under Nero. Then Christianity really began to flourish in Rome. May our commitment to assembly and proclamation of the message of life match that of the early Roman Christians. May God bless His word today

so believers would assemble to hear truth and disperse to proclaim God's message of grace.³¹

³¹ Editor's note: The Free Grace movement would expand exponentially if one or two families would join together and begin to form house churches all over the U.S., Canada, and around the world. If instead of thinking in terms of groups of 50 or more which meet in special church buildings with professionally trained and full-time pastors, we started thinking in terms of groups of 5 to 10 people who met in homes and who are led by godly men who may have no formal Bible college or seminary training, we would see an explosion in the number of Free Grace churches.

There were no church buildings for the first three centuries. The NT model for church does not expect or require professional staff, special buildings, or special training.

BOOK REVIEWS

Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived. By Rob Bell. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011. 202 pp. Cloth, \$22.99.

The fanfare that surrounded the release of this book was enormous. Bell, Pastor of a megachurch in Grand Rapids, MI (Mars Hill Bible Church), previously garnered a lot of attention with his book *Velvet Elvis*.

Since Bell is openly postmodern, this book should not come as a shock to anyone. Postmodern Evangelicals believe in salvation now (psychological wholeness, saving the planet via ecology, instituting peace and justice in our time, etc.), in tolerance, and in pluralism. Thus the notion of eternal torment in hell is one that unsurprisingly is rejected by Bell. His view of reality makes a place of eternal torment unthinkable.

It should be noted that Bell, like many postmoderns, deliberately couches his views in such a way as to make it hard to pin him down. Bell practices theological double-speak. Hence the reader knows where he is going, but those who wish to defend him as being orthodox can find snippets that indeed seem to suggest that.

This book is filled with questions, many of which are rhetorical. For example, on pages 5, 11, 60, and 102 there are at least seven questions per page. About one page in five has one or more questions on it. And these questions are rarely answered. Bell assumes that we know his answer to the questions. By the way he slants the discussion, he clearly is pushing the reader to accept his postmodern conclusions.

Any fair-minded reader would come away with the following understandings of what Bell says:

- No human being will spend eternity in eternal, conscious torment (pp. viii, 1-3, 84, 109, 155, 173-74).

- People will be given another chance to be born again after this life is over (p. 108).
- “There is hell now” (p. 71, 79).
- “There is hell later” (p. 79).
- “Hell is not forever” (p. 109).
- Salvation is here and now, not pie in the sky (p. 6).
- Homosexuality is okay with Jesus (p. 9).
- The death of Christ eliminates the possibility of eternal condemnation for everyone: “What Jesus does is declare that he, and he alone, is saving everybody” (p. 155).
- People of every religion are exempt from hell and guaranteed eternal joy: “As soon as the door is opened to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baptists from Cleveland, many Christians become very uneasy...” (p. 155).
- God has one overriding attribute: love. Love wins in the sense that God pours His love on all of mankind. All of His other attributes are subordinate to His love (pp. vii, 1-9, 178, 195, 197-98).
- There will be life after death with God (pp. 21-62).

Unlike most Christian books, there are no chapter and verse Bible references. None. Bell only gives book and chapter, and even these references are very sparse, occurring on only 51 of the 202 pages, by my count (pp. 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 22, 30, 31, 33, 44, 48, 49, 52, 59, 61, 65, 68, 74, 84, 85, 86, 87, 92, 98, 99, 101, 101, 103, 108, 109, 132, 134, 135, 142, 146, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 159, 160, 164, 188, 189).

The book is written in an odd mix of prose and poetry. Sometimes Bell goes pages using an odd poetic style. Here’s an example with his punctuation and line breaks retained:

Yet on these very same websites are extensive affirmations of the goodness and greatness of God, proclamations and statements of belief about a God who is
 “mighty,”
 “powerful,”
 “loving,”

“unchanging,”
“sovereign,”
“full of grace and mercy,”
and “all-knowing.”

This God is the one who created
“the world and everything in it.”

This is the God for whom
“all things are possible” (pp. 96-97).

While I’m sure Bell meant this punctuation and style to be attractive and to communicate well to his audience, it had the opposite effect on me. And I bet it does as well on many who reject postmodernity.

One of Bell’s stories is of a man’s conversion. This story tells a lot about his theology. Bell tells of a young man who told him he smoked marijuana each night till dawn. Then one night “he became aware of the kitchen filling with an overwhelming presence of warmth and love...He said he knew without a doubt in that moment that it was God telling him that he is loved absolutely and unconditionally and that the only possible path for his life was to receive that love and become a follower of Jesus” (p. 139). Bell indicates that he has heard countless other stories like this of encounters with God and that he believes these are accounts of how people were born again (p. 140). This is not surprising since for Postmodern Evangelicals faith in Jesus is not believing something He has promised, but it is instead *an existential encounter with God*.

For Bell being born again is not a matter of believing the right things about Jesus. It is about having an encounter with Him. If you have a story to tell about Jesus, then you are “saved.” He is not picky about whether one says he became “a follower of Jesus,” or that he “trusted in Jesus,” or that he “believed in Him,” or “committed his life to Jesus.”

There are no Scripture and subject indexes. That is unfortunate, since it makes it harder for people to dig out what Bell is saying.

I found this to be a very annoying book. Bell is like the emperor with no clothes who claims to have on beautiful garments. Bell's theology is naked. There really is nothing substantive to his rhetoric. His main point is that God loves everybody and that God's love wins. That is Bell's gospel. That is his good news. God's love wins. Regardless of what people believe, God's love wins since all will eventually get into God's Kingdom.

This is a dangerous book. I only recommend it for those who are well grounded. For such people it can be a helpful expose on Evangelical Postmoderns today. However, the reader should beware that this will not be an easy read. Bell obfuscates his views in such a way as to make his heretical statements seem orthodox.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Denton, Texas

Making Life Rich Without Any Money. By Phil Callaway. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998. 255 pp. Paper, \$12.99.

How can you enjoy your life without spending any money? That is the question Callaway seeks to answer for us with this vast assimilation of stories, tips, anecdotes and humorous narratives that seek to explain how we can lead a rich and fulfilling life. He has a lot to share, since the book is comprised of forty-six chapters, each loaded with several illustrations and accounts. Each chapter revolves around one of six messages Callaway is teaching here, all of which aim to help the reader to understand the main point of the book: that richness comes from living life well, not from your bank statement.

Expecting a book on personal finance, I was pleasantly surprised with the first few chapters as Callaway discussed the importance of both laughter and learning to slow down. But by the fifth or sixth chapter the book became tedious.

The author is both an accomplished speaker and writer, having penned some twenty or so works many of which deal with the need to view life's ups and downs with a pair of positive lenses. But I suspect the material for his books, including this one, come from the hundreds of messages he gives each year as a traveling speaker. Simply put, each chapter reads as if it came from a speech, which by itself isn't so bad. But Callaway is an expert at family-oriented humor, and thus he peppers each chapter with humorous lines and jokes. A lot of them. Every other line is a joke or exaggeration meant to induce laughter. While this may work for a live audience, sitting quietly in a study his jokes fall flat. Actually, they become irritating. Remember the guy you met at the party who really, really, really wanted to be funny? This is that guy. Suffice it to say, I was able to finish the book only after learning to skip every other line. Too much of a good thing is, well, too much.

Second, Callaway has a great message that believers in Christ can identify with, namely, that everything we own won't count for a whole lot once we are dead. Yet despite such a positive message, his teachings aren't much different from other religious authors save the last chapter or two. I believe this is on purpose, since he starts out with quite possibly hundreds of stories highlighting how there must be more to life than this, then narrows down his message to the fact that we will all die one day, that there is a God, and lastly that His Son is Jesus Christ, the author of true peace and happiness. While Callaway *does* limit his gospel response to simply "trust Jesus," it is mentioned only in passing. Also, this only happens once, and the reader is left to wonder what we are trusting Christ *for*, exactly.

Third, since Callaway is writing to a broad audience he mentions the fact of eternity without any sense of future judgment. Why should I live differently than my neighbors? What is the goal for living life in light of eternity? The only reason Callaway gives is that you'll enjoy life more if you do. Slowing down your work schedule will lead to fewer heart attacks. Quality time with the kids will pay off for you when they are older. Reasons such as these are the only ones given for taking a view on life much different than the world. While they may be true, the book is far too long to expound on such simple (and frankly, *common sense*) notions.

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The Message of Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah: The Kindness and Severity of God. The Bible Speaks Today. By Gordon Bridger. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. 303 pp. Cloth, \$18.00.

Having never heard of Gordon Bridger or this series, I did not know what to expect from this commentary. I was very pleasantly surprised.

Most commentaries are either devotional or scholarly. This one is devotional, though Bridger shows he knows the messages of these books. He presents the material in such a way as to make it very accessible for the reader.

I did not realize until after reading the commentary that the author has long been a preacher as well as a teacher. Bridger is British and has ministered in England in pastoral work for over three decades. That explains the marvelous illustrations and applications given throughout.

This work is very personal and practical. It would be very useful for personal Bible study, group study, and for the preparation of sermons.

Bridger often relates the words of Jesus to the message of these three OT prophets in delightfully relevant ways. He also gives modern correspondence to the sins of the past. For example, he says that worshippers of Baal also worshipped the stars, which he likens to modern astrology (p. 204). Similarly Baalism was rife with corrupt sexual practices, which are currently very problematic even in churches (p. 201). And he suggests that the worship of Baal was linked to striving for prosperity, a problem quite relevant in our materialistic culture today (p. 199).

Though this reads like a popular Christian book, it is indeed a verse by verse commentary. It is very easy to read and to understand.

JOTGES readers will not find in this work a presentation of the Free Grace message. The author is not clear about the condition for everlasting life. At times he seems to imply that turning from one's sins is a condition for escaping not only temporal judgment, but also for escaping eternal condemnation (e.g., pp. 24-27). However, since these three OT books are not evangelistic and are not presenting the condition of everlasting life, the reader should be able to overlook occasional comments by the author which are less than clear on justification by faith alone.

I would rate this as an excellent resource for preaching and teaching and personal study. I highly recommend this work.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

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The Topical Handbook of Bible Prophecy: Every Bible Verse on the End Times. By Ron Rhodes. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2010. 175 pp. Paper, \$9.99.

A companion piece to his *Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy: More Than 350 Terms and Concepts Defined*, Dallas Theological Seminary alumni Ron Rhodes offers a helpful and easy-to-use tool for anyone interested in quickly finding Scripture references on topics relating to the end times. More than 300 names, locations, terms and concepts are listed alphabetically.

Properly titled as *a handbook*, Rhode's work is a vast collection of Bible verses organized according to terms and sub-terms. For instance, under the entry for the *Gospel of John* (p. 86), Rhodes lists thirteen subjects relevant to this particular Gospel account, such as *Messiah*, *Jesus came from heaven*, *Jesus is Christ*, *Jesus is King*, etc. Next to each subject is a list of Scripture references. Many entries take up less than half a page, while some (e.g., *Judgment*, *Messianic Prophecies*, *Millennial Kingdom*) take up as much as three pages. Several entries also contain small tables highlighting various differences between terms. *Judgment*, for instance, includes a table showing how the judgment of the nations (Matt 25:32, 40; 25:31) is distinct from the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11-13). This feature is extremely helpful both in understanding and in communicating the finer points of eschatology.

Free Grace readers will be encouraged to find that Rhodes, under the subject *Overcomers* (p. 116), gives sufficient Biblical references to show that loss of salvation is not implied (though a subsequent entry listing how overcoming "may" relate to rewards is puzzling). I also found helpful that some entries, such as Partial Rapture View (p. 118), included both the supposed Biblical references followed by Scriptural refutations for such a view.

While I would have enjoyed perhaps a one or two-sentence definition accompanying each entry, Rhodes's

objective seemed to be to create an easy-to-carry tool for pastors, teachers, and Bible students who may need to quickly locate relevant Bible passages. If this was his aim, Rhodes succeeded greatly.

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The First Letter to the Corinthians. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. By Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. 922 pp. Cloth, \$65.00.

First Corinthians is a book that is of great interest to Free Grace people because this epistle was written to a very immature church, yet Paul refers to them as saints and recipients of the Spirit. This epistle has two key passages on the *Bēma* (1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27) and it deals with many problems faced in contemporary churches as well (divisions, immorality, taking one another to court, misuse of spiritual gifts, etc.).

The authors do not skimp on the discussion of any verse, giving an average of two pages of discussion for each. Key texts, like 1 Cor 6:9-11, receive even more attention (Ciampa and Rosner give eight pages on those three verses, pp. 237-45).

However, the authors do not hold to the Free Grace position. Their discussion of 1 Cor 5:5 and 6:9-11 makes this clear. Regarding the former they say, “those who persist in flagrant sin have no future with God...future salvation is not a forgone conclusion for any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral” (p. 209). Concerning the later they write, “assurance of salvation depends in part on ethical progress; cf. 6:11: ‘that is what some of you *were*’” (p. 209, italics his). The authors see 1 Cor 6:9-11 as “a thinly veiled threat...[that] those guilty of such sins

will not inherit the kingdom” (p. 243). Ciampa and Rosner assume this refers to obtaining what they call “future salvation” and that those who do not inherit the kingdom will be eternally condemned. They seem unaware of the rewards interpretation.

However, the authors have much discussion about rewards. In the subject index there is a reference to “reward, wages” which lists 38 pages (144, 148-49, 151, 156-57, 160, 174, 282, 349, 402-15, 418-20, 433-34, 437-40, 638, 653, 791, 838-39). And their discussion on rewards is excellent. It is especially good since they appear to have no theological axe to grind on the issue.

For example, concerning *reward* in 1 Cor 3:14 (as well as in 1 Cor 4:4-5), they write, “Paul is not speaking of salvation as the reward in question...The issue then is not... heaven and hell, but reward or no reward” (pp. 156-57).

Their comments on 1 Cor 9:23 and Paul’s desire to be a partner with the gospel illustrates the value of this commentary. Though they do believe that Paul expressed concerns about his own eternal destiny in 1 Cor 9:24-27 (cf. pp. 435-43), they reject the suggestion of many commentators that Paul is expressing that concern in this verse (p. 432). They see 1 Cor 9:23 expressing the same idea as in Phil 1:5, 7, where similar wording is found.

I highly recommend this commentary for *JOTGES* readers because it is easy to follow and it has extensive treatment of each and every verse. It also has outstanding indexes. In spite of the fact that it does not represent the Free Grace position, this commentary is well worth owning for the wealth of information it contains.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor

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One-Minute Answers to Skeptics. By Charlie H. Campbell. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005/2010. 122 pp. Paper, \$10.99.

Do you ever have trouble defending your faith? Do you feel unprepared to provide sound Biblical answers to those who question the faith? Believers are clearly exhorted to “always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15b). Pastor and Christian apologetic, Charlie H. Campbell, has authored this book to answer forty of the most commonly raised questions by skeptics of Christianity with the hope of equipping believers in giving a clear and concise account of the hope that is within them.

One-Minute Answers to Skeptics addresses a myriad of questions and topics relevant to any believer including theological issues such as the evidence for God’s existence, inerrancy and authorship of Scripture, and the exclusiveness and uniqueness of Christianity and salvation. In addition, the book provides answers for difficult skeptical questions, having chapters entitled “How (or where) did Cain get his wife?” “Can God make a rock so big He cannot move it?” “Why aren’t dinosaurs mentioned in the Bible?” “How could all the races, with their different skin colors, come from Noah’s family?” Finally, the book discusses other prominent religions including Islam, Mormonism and Buddhism, bringing to light their inconsistencies and false teachings. While each question is answered concisely by design for consumption within a minute, Campbell has conveniently placed references throughout each answer to nearly twenty pages of end notes for further explanation and study.

In regards to Campbell’s soteriology, especially in relation to justification by faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life, a section entitled “Steps to Peace with God” is quite telling. Unfortunately, the commonly used ABC Lordship Salvation approach is provided: “Acknowledge

that you are a sinner,” “Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you,” “Change direction. Turn away from your sinful way of life” (p. 99). This approach includes an emphasis on a willingness to repent so that “God will begin to change you and help you live a life that is pleasing to Him” (p. 100). While repentance from sin and acceptance of the Lordship of Christ are vital qualities for a productive Christian life, they are by no means requirements for justification (i.e., receiving the free gift of eternal life from Jesus Christ). The only condition mentioned throughout Scripture in countless places for regeneration is faith (believing) in Jesus Christ for eternal life (John 1:12; 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:47; Rom 3:21-28; 4:5; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 John 5:13).

All in all, this book is an outstanding resource for any Christian seeking to prepare themselves for the task of giving a faithful witness to others. Chuck Colson said it best in his assessment of this book as ascribed on the back cover, “Well worth the reading.”

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