Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
"Faith Alone in Christ Alone"

VOLUME 15 Autumn 2002 NUMBER 29

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
Published Semiannually by GES

Editor
Robert N. Wilkin

Production
Michael Makidon
Cathy Beach

Manuscripts, book reviews, and other communications should be addressed to GES, Director of Publications, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210 or submissions@faithalone.org.

Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210. You may call us at 940.270.8827 or email ges@faithalone.org. Subscription Rates: single copy, $9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, $18.50; 2 years, $35.00; 3 years, $49.50; 4 years, $62.00; $13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add $4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and $8.50 per year for all other international shipping.

Purpose: The Grace Evangelical Society was formed "to promote the clear proclamation of God's free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship."

Statement of Faith: "Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for man's sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost."

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, 4851 S. I-35 E Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ISBN-10: 0977227499
ISBN-13: 978-0-9772274-9-5

ANOTHER VIEW OF FAITH AND WORKS IN JAMES 2

ROBERT N. WILKIN
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

How one understands any given passage is dependent, at least in part, on his understanding of the book in which it is found. James 2:14-26 is a prime example.

E. D. Hirsch, in his book *Validity in Interpretation* suggests that the interpreter of any literature must make a series of genre guesses. Correct guesses, those that rightly understand what the author is saying, are called *intrinsic genres*. Incorrect guesses are *extrinsic genres*.[1]

Hirsch illustrates that extrinsic genre guesses result in a wrong understanding of the author's point with Donne's poem, "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning." When his students misinterpreted the poem, he attempted to correct them. They were unmoved, however, because they felt the particulars of the poem fit their genre conception. They were unwilling to see that Hirsch's genre guess *better fit* the particulars.[2]

It is the contention of this article that something similar has occurred in the exegesis of Jas 2:14-26. The genre conception most often given somewhat fits the particulars of the passage; thus proponents of that view see no need to consider any other view. However, there is good reason to believe that another genre understanding *better fits* the particulars of the passage.

James 2:14-26 has long been recognized as a crux passage. A recent article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* by C. Ryan Jenkins laid out four interpretations:[3]

---

[1] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 88-89.

[2] Ibid., 73-74.

[3] C. Ryan Jenkins, "Faith and Works in Paul and James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January–March 2002): 63-64.

- View A. In this view James 2 shows that works are instrumental in a sinner's justification before God. Those who propose this view assert that James was arguing that a sinner's acceptance with God depends on both faith and works.
- View B. James was dealing with physical deliverance from the devastating affects of sin. James was not addressing unbelievers concerning [eternal] salvation…James then was referring to justification/vindication *only before others* in a nonsalvific context.[4]
- View C. James was stating that a Christian's justification before God depends not on faith alone but, on faith and works and…he was directly refuting Pauline theology (as expressed in Romans 4 and Galatians 2–3). This view is not committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.
- View D. James's concern was to refute antinomianism by showing that one's true conversion will be "justified" objectively by works… James sought to show that a person who possessed faith in Christ will be justified (i.e., vindicated as a true Christian) by his or her works, and that a mere profession of faith that is not vindicated or evidenced by works is not characteristic of genuine conversion.

We might call these views respectively, the Arminian view, the temporal deliverance view, the New Testament scholar view (since many scholars see no need to harmonize Scripture or uphold inerrancy), and the traditional view. The traditional view is the one defended by Jenkins in his article and it is the traditional Reformed understanding of James 2.

In this article I will attempt to show three things. First, the traditional understanding has some difficulties. Second, the temporal deliverance understanding has points in its favor. And third, the traditional Reformed understanding of the perseverance of the saints is not dependent on the traditional understanding of James 2.

II. Difficulties With the Traditional Understanding

A. The Uses of Brothers (*Adelphoi*) in James

James addresses his readers with one of three designations: "brethren," "my brethren," and "my beloved brethren." While this could quite

---

[4] Italics his.

naturally refer to Jewish people, regardless of their spiritual condition, the evidence in the epistle suggests that each time James designates his readers as "brethren," he is indicating that they are fellow heirs of the grace of God. Therefore, his readers are believing Jews who have been part of the *diaspora* (1:1).

In his first use of *adelphoi* James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (1:2-3). It would be very odd for James to be encouraging unbelieving Jews to count their trials as joy. Odder still would be to speak of the testing of their faith. The very first use strongly suggests that the brethren James has in mind are Jewish believers.

The second use is in 1:16-18.[5] James calls his readers "my beloved brethren" and then explains that God "brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (1:16, 18). That the new birth is in view is undisputed in the commentary literature. The context clearly shows that the brethren of 1:16-18 are regenerated.

Verse 19 begins, "So then, my beloved brethren." The most natural understanding of *brethren* here is that it continues to refer to the regenerate brothers of the immediately preceding context.

James's next use of *adelphoi* is as follows: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (2:1). In the first place, this is a continuation of a string of uses that refer to regenerate people. In the second place, James specifies here that these brethren have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus there is little doubt that regenerate people are in view in this section (cf. 2:5, "my beloved brethren").

The next use of *adelphoi* is in Jas 2:14. If "my brethren" now refers to unregenerate people, James is making an abrupt change with no hint of this fact. In fact, all through Jas 2:14-26 he refers to the faith of his readers, and of Abraham.

Verseput strongly defends the regenerate status of the readers. He writes, "'The twelve tribes' casts the readership with surprising clarity in

---

[5] The word *adelphos* does occur in 1:9. However, there it is not direct address. I have excluded the uses of the term in 2:15 and 4:11 as well for the same reason. All excluded uses are in the singular and are not designations for the readers.

the role of true Israel."[6] A footnote appears here in which he continues, "The clear assumption of the author that his audience was homogeneous in its belief in 'our Lord Jesus Christ' (2.1) prohibits understanding *tais dōdeka phylais* to refer to the Jewish community at large."[7]

Soon thereafter he continues, "Thus, in the language of the author, *pistis*—which has already been described in 2.1 as 'the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ' (*tēn pistin tou kyriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou*)—can readily function as the single most essential identifying feature of the religious community of the 'brethren' to whom he writes."[8]

Verseput concludes: "James is not seeking to downgrade the importance of 'faith' in 2:14-26. On the contrary, faith retains its role as the primary distinguishing feature of the community."[9]

Without examining all of the other uses of *adelphoi*,[10] the following are representative and support the conclusion that regenerate people are meant:

---

[6] Donald J. Verseput, "Reworking the Puzzle of Faith and Deeds in James 2:14-26," *New Testament Studies* (January 1997): 97.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 98. It should be noted that Verseput later writes, "The author of the epistle insists that one's Godward service—i.e., faith—cannot be divorced from righteous deeds, for obedience is the most holy form of faith" (p. 115). Does he mean that all true believers always or characteristically produce good works? It is unlikely he means that, for earlier in the same paragraph he writes, "neither are 'works' understood as the natural product of faith, the visible sign of an inner disposition, for on the discourse level the independence of the two elements, faith and works, has been and is maintained throughout" (p. 114). Most likely what Verseput means is clarified in the conclusion: "Piety without righteousness is vain and ineffectual, unable to achieve the recognition of God, whereas deeds of obedience to the divine will can be said to constitute the proper and valid religion which God approves. Viewed in this light, it becomes evident that James is not seeking to downgrade the importance of 'faith' in 2:14-26. On the contrary, faith retains its role as the primary distinguishing feature of the community. But as the prophets of old had denied the efficacy of sacrifice without obedience, so faith without works is dead" (p. 115).

[9] Ibid., 115.

[10] I chose not to discuss Jas 2:19 and the faith of demons in the text of the article. My reasons are threefold. First, we have addressed that verse and issue extensively elsewhere. For a detailed discussion of Jas 2:19, see John Hart, "The Faith of Demons: James 2:19," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1995): 39-54. See also Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven*

> My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. (Jas 3:1)

This most naturally refers to regenerate individuals. James would not likely be telling unbelieving Jews that not many of them should seek to be teachers in the church! Besides, the Judgment Seat of Christ is the most natural understanding of this future judgment. Compare the uses of *adelphoi* in 3:10, 12 and 4:11.

> Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord…Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned [literally, *judged*]. Behold, the Judge is at the door! (Jas 5:7, 9)

These verses, in comparison with Rom 14:10-12, show that this concerns the Judgment Seat of Christ as well. Why James would tell unbelieving Jews to be patient until the Lord comes back is hard to grasp. It is much more natural if he is understood as addressing regenerate individuals. Compare the uses of *adelphoi* in 5:10, 12, and 19.

This, of course, doesn't fit well with the traditional understanding of Jas 2:14-26 which sees "brethren" as a flexible term that includes believing and unbelieving Jews. Then the call to works in Jas 2:14-26 is seen as the means by which "brethren" determine whether or not they have true faith. If all the brethren addressed have true faith in Christ, a different genre conception is necessary.

B. The Use of *Sōzō* in James

A second way to evaluate our genre understanding of James is by considering the uses of the word *sōzō* (to save) in the book. While an author is not bound to use the same word the same way each time in an epistle, it is a possibility which one should explore. The evidence

---

Character Through Testing (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), pp. 64-66. Second, the argument that demons don't believe in monotheism and hence illustrate false faith is patently false. The Gospels make it clear that the demons not only believe in monotheism, but they also believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (see, for example, Matt 8:29). Not only that, but why would James use the great shema of Israel, something dear to every Jewish believer, to introduce false faith? Third, Jesus did not die for demons. There never has been, nor will there ever be, any eternal salvation for demons. Thus regardless of what they believe or do, they are ultimately doomed.

strongly suggests that the four uses of *sōzō* in James, outside of Jas 2:14, refer to temporal deliverance, not to eternal salvation from hell.[11]

Here are the other four uses, with comments:

> Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (Jas 1:21)

James made it clear in 1:16–20 that he was talking to "my beloved brethren" (1:16, 19), whom he identifies as those whom God "brought forth by the word of truth"—a reference to their new birth. If James has not shifted his attention to different readers, the people in 1:21 who need saving are born-again brothers in Christ. Clearly born-again people do not need eternal salvation. They do, however, need temporal salvation from the deadly consequences of sin in their lives (cf. 1:15).

The temporal deliverance understanding of 1:21 is supported by the expression *sōsai tas psychas hymōn* (to save your souls). In the Septuagint and the NT this expression always or nearly always refers to the saving of one's physical life.[12]

---

[11] Some barely even consider this evidence. See, for example, Jenkins, "Faith and Works." He mentions only two of the five uses. He writes, "In objection to view B, it seems unnatural to assume that James 1:21 and 2:14 refer to a 'physical' salvation rather than an eternal one, especially since the word 'soul' (*psychē*) and not 'life' (*zōē*) is used in 1:21" (74). Since *psychē* is not found in 2:14, he is really commenting on only one of the five uses. And then his discussion is based on a single word and not the expression "saving the psyche" (*sōzein tēn psychēn*), which in the Septuagint (see fn. 12) and NT always refers to the physical deliverance of one's life. Compare, for example, Matt 20:28 (cf. 27:42); Mark 3:4; 10:45 (cf. 15:30); Luke 6:9; Acts 27:22 (cf. v. 31); and 1 Pet 3:20. When the Lord Jesus spoke of laying down His life for us, He used *psychē,* not *zōē* (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 10:11, 15, 17).

[12] See for example, Mark 3:4, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life [*psychēn sōsai*] or to kill?" (Cf. Luke 6:9); "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives [*psychas anthrōpōn apolesai*] but to save them" (Luke 9:56, MT); "There will be no loss of life [*psychēs*] among you, but only of the ship…Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (Acts 27:22, 31); "In the days of Noah…eight souls were saved [*oktō psychai diesōthēsan*] through water" (1 Pet 3:20). This expression occurs approximately eight times in the Septuagint as well, always with the sense of saving the physical life (Gen 19:17; 32:30; 1 Sam 19:11; Ps 30:7; 71:13; 109:31 [108:31 in the Septuagint]; Jer 31:6; see also Job 33:28, which some might un-

Additionally, the readers were to receive the word "already implanted" in them, which supports the idea that they are born-again believers and that the deliverance is temporal.

Finally, James makes it clear that by "receiving the word" he does not mean believing it. In this context, receiving the word is being "doers of the word, and not hearers [= believers] only" (1:22; cf. vv. 23, 25).

> There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (Jas 4:12)

The saving and destroying here appears to be general in scope. God is the one who saves and destroys in all senses, temporal and eternal. Yet there is reason to believe James has the saving and destroying of *physical* life specifically in view. What follows in the illustration of Jas 4:13-17 deals with this life. James says, "your life…is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (v. 14). James 4:12 fits perfectly with the temporal deliverance genre understanding.

> The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (Jas 5:15)

Eternal salvation is not in view here. This use of *sōzō* clearly refers to the *saving* or healing of one's life from an illness that could well lead to physical death (cf. vv. 19-20).

> He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (Jas 5:20)

Verse 19, which precedes this verse, says "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back…" The potential wanderers are *brethren…among you*. This suggests that James is not thinking of unbelievers, but believers, who wander away from truth. If so, then he is warning here that physical death may well occur if a fellow believer doesn't turn him from his sin.

Dr. Charles Ryrie comments: "*any among you*. The reference is evidently to Christians, and the *death* is physical death which sin may cause (1 Cor 11:30)."[13]

---

derstand as Job hoping not to lose eternal life, but which is best understood as him hoping not to lose physical life).

[13] The Ryrie Study Bible, loc. sit, italics his.

In light of the other uses of *sōzō* in James, one should at least be open to the possibility that temporal salvation is in view in Jas 2:14 as well.[14]

C. The Use of *Sōzō* in 2:14

What did James mean in 2:14 when he asked, "Can faith save him?"[15]

If *sōzō* here refers to salvation from eternal condemnation, then the traditional view seems mandatory. Otherwise James would be teaching that salvation from eternal condemnation requires faith plus works, in clear contradiction to the Gospel of John, Romans 3–4, Galatians 2–3, and a host of other texts.

However, there is an apparent connection between the first and second uses of *sōzō* in James. Some commentators have noted that Jas 1:21 and 2:14 are parallel in thought.

If in 1:21 James is warning genuine believers that they must be doers of the word to escape temporal judgment, then the idea that 2:14-26 is proclaiming the same idea seems reasonable. This, combined with the other three uses of *sōzō* in James, provides good reason to reconsider the temporal salvation understanding here.

Additionally, the fact that he is addressing *brethren* in this passage supports the temporal judgment view.

III. Two Types of Faith in James 2?

The traditional view hangs on a slender thread. Indeed, it hangs on one letter, the definite article preceding the word *faith* in 2:14.

If the definite article with *pistis* in 2:14 does not support the two types of faith understanding, then that position collapses, regardless of what is said about any other word in the passage.

---

[14] For more discussion of this point see Earl D. Radmacher, "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James,' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1990): 39-41.

[15] Because of the use of *mē*, the Greek expects a negative answer: Faith can't save him, can it? However, that still doesn't tell us what type of deliverance is in view.

If James were concerned that some of his readers were not regenerate, he would surely make this clear. However, the evidence is less than overwhelming.[16]

Repeatedly James refers to the faith of his readers. Unless James is referring to two different types of faith in Christ, one saving and one non-saving, the matter is beyond dispute.

In the first place, if we exclude Jas 2:14-26 from consideration, there is no evidence for a non-saving type of faith in any of the remaining 5 uses of *pistis* in James (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5; 5:15). For example, in the immediately preceding context, faith in 2:1 obviously refers to genuine faith. "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality." One would think that if the entire epistle were concerned with antinomianism and false professions, then we would find repeated evidence of non-saving faith in the entire epistle, and not just in 2:14-26. Possibly James could have modified the word "faith" in such a way that saving faith had one designation (e.g., *genuine faith*) and non-saving faith a different one (e.g., *disingenuous faith*). Yet as Radmacher pointed out in a response to a paper presented at the 1989 ETS annual meeting by John MacArthur on faith in James, such modifiers are not found in James:

> Faith…is used sixteen times in James without ever needing a modifier. Yet the following modifiers with "faith" are sprinkled through MacArthur's paper: "counterfeit" faith, "authentic" faith, "spurious" faith, "imitation" faith, "nominal" faith, "passive" faith, "sluggish" faith, "intellectual" faith, "sensual"

---

[16] In his 1989 Evangelical Theological Society address, John MacArthur indicated that "it is common for apostolic writers to include in letters addressed to churches stern warnings for those whose profession of faith was questionable." He then cited the Epistle of Hebrews and the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. He suggested they both contain warnings to false professors. Then he gave this conclusion: "So the fact that the epistle was addressed to the 'brethren' does not prove Hodges' point ['that the warnings of James 2 cannot be directed at false professors']." John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Faith According to the Apostle James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 1990): 29. In the first place, he fails to deal with any of the uses of "brethren" in James. Second, he fails to show that the warnings in Hebrews or the admonition in 2 Cor 13:5 are indeed addressed to false professors. And finally, even if epistles by other authors (or the author himself) had sections addressed to false professors, what evidence is there that James did this in this epistle?

> faith, "dead" faith, "traditional" faith, "demon" faith, "heart" faith, "spiritual" faith, "vital" faith, "transforming" faith, "personal" faith, "orthodox" faith, "actual" faith, "real" faith, "obedient" faith, "saving" faith, [and] "efficacious" faith. [17]

In the second place, evidence for two types of faith anywhere in the Bible is quite suspect. The late Reformed scholar and apologist Gordon Clark wrote an excellent book entitled *Faith and Saving Faith*. In it he showed that all faith is a conviction that something is true. He indicated there was no such thing as two types of faith:

> In spite of the popularity and supposed superior spirituality of the contrast between a *mere* intellectual proposition and a *warm*, living person, it rests on a mistaken psychological analysis. Even Berkhof admits, with at least an appearance of inconsistency, that "As a psychological phenomenon, faith in the religious sense does not differ from faith in general…Christian faith in the most comprehensive sense is man's persuasion of the truth of Scripture on the basis of the authority of God."[18]

Clark acknowledges that not all that one believes is saving. However, his point is that it is the object of the faith that makes saving faith saving, not the faith.[19] If Clark is right, there aren't two different types of faith, and the traditional understanding of Jas 2:14-26 cannot stand.

Finally, the eleven uses[20] of *pistis* in Jas 2:14-26 call into question whether James was talking about two types of faith.

> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has *faith* but does not have works?" (Jas 2:14, emphasis added)

Is the person saying he has non-saving faith, or saving faith? It wouldn't make sense if a person were claiming non-saving faith. Who

---

[17] Radmacher, "First Response," 37.

[18] Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 107, italics his. See also the entire section, 91-118.

[19] Ibid., 107-110.

[20] Those who suggest the supposed distinction in Jas 2:14-26 fail to actually consider more than a few uses of *pistis* in the passage. See, for example, Jenkins, "Faith and Works," 65-66. In his word study of *pistis*, he fails to examine even one use of the word in 2:14-26 or anywhere in James.

would make such a claim? Thus this must refer to genuine faith, whether the person actually has it or not.

However, the traditional view focuses not on what the man is claiming, but on the very fact he is proclaiming faith, yet he lacks works to back up the claim. The traditional view suggests that the word "*says*," combined with "but does not have works" is James's way of saying that the profession is false.

Why did James speak of his profession in the first half of the verse, but not the second half? This point is a bit of a problem for the traditional understanding.

In the two previous verses James had exhorted regenerate brethren, "*So speak and so do* as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (italics added). In 2:1-13 James chastised his readers for not rightly treating the poor in their assemblies. Now in 2:14 James follows up with the question of what happens to the person who speaks but does not do. Thus the word "says" in verse 14 need not question the profession at all. James's point may well be that professing genuine faith that is indeed genuine is not enough to please God. To please God one must also have works.

> Can faith save him? (Jas 2:14b)

This is the second use of *pistis* in the verse. Here the traditional view would expect to find, "Can that *profession of* faith save him?" But we don't find that.

Pistis here most naturally talks about the same faith as the first use. If that faith was genuine faith, as it surely was, then so is this one.

Of course, many understand the definite article here to serve as a demonstrative pronoun. Hence some understand this as *such faith* or *that faith*. Then they conclude that this suggests the faith itself is false faith.

Yet that would require a demonstrative pronoun to modify *the claim*, not the faith: "Can *that claim of faith* save him?"

Additionally, it is questionable whether we should draw any special significance from the presence of the article. The article is also found with *pistis* in 2:17, 18, 19, 22, and 26. *In fact, every time* pistis *occurs in the nominative case in James, it is always articular.*

In Greek abstract nouns routinely carry the article where the English does not. Greek has "the love" or "the faith" where English simply has "love" or "faith." A parallel passage using the abstract noun *agapē* is found in 1 Cor 13:1-4ff.

The anarthrous *agapēn*, the noun in the accusative case, occurs three times in verses 1-3. Then twice in verse 4 and once in verse 8 the noun is found in the nominative case, with the definite article present in each case. No commentators suggest that we are talking about some substandard form of love in verses 1-3 that is proved by the use of the article in verses 4 and 8. No one says the article means we are talking about *false* love in verses 4 and 8.

The same situation occurs in James 2. Every nominative occurrence in this chapter is articular. However, the article does not occur with *pistis* in verses 14, 18, and 24, where two accusatives and one genitive appear.

And in none of the other uses of the articular construction in 2:14-26 is this alleged distinction found.

> Do you see that [the] faith was working together with his works? (Jas 2:22a)

James is speaking of Abraham and his faith in offering up his son Isaac. Surely this was true faith. James is not saying *Do you see that such faith was working together with his works*? In verse 20 we read "[the] faith without works is dead." If that is false faith, and the definite article in 22 refers back to that false faith, then Abraham had false faith when he offered up Isaac!

> And by works [the] faith was made perfect. (Jas 2:22b)

Again, this is the faith of Abraham when he was about to plunge the knife into Isaac and sacrifice his only son. If there is such a thing as inadequate faith, this isn't it. Yet the definite article is used just as in verse 14.

> You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by [the] faith only. (Jas 2:24)

James is concluding his comments on the justification of Abraham by works before men. It is reasonable to take *monon*, translated "only" in the NKJV, as an adverb here.[21] Then the verse could be understood in this way, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only by faith." In other words, James is thinking of two justifications. Abraham

---

[21] Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 659, takes *monon* as an adverb here. However, it suggests it means "in isolation."

was justified by faith in Genesis 15. Then decades later he was justified by works in Genesis 22. The former was before God. The latter was before men. This is in keeping with Paul's comments regarding Abraham and justification by works in Rom 4:2, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." In any case, no matter how one understands verse 24, *pistis* here clearly refers to genuine faith.

There is strong support for the idea that *pistis* in Jas 2:14-26 refers to genuine faith. The evidence suggests that the problem James was confronting was not the type of faith his readers had. Rather, the problem was that they were not acting in a loving way toward one another.

IV. The Temporal Deliverance Understanding Has Points in its Favor

A. The Emphasis on Profitability in James 2:14 and 16

Repetition of phrases in a context often provides clues to proper interpretation. James 2:14-17, the first portion of 2:14-26, opens with the words "What does it profit?" Those words occur again after the illustration of Jas 2:15-16. The exact same phrase "what does it profit" (*ti to ophelos*) occurs as the very last words of verse 16.

Authors often indicate emphasis by placing words or phrases first or last in a sentence or paragraph. Here we find the same phrase occupying both places of emphasis.

Why does James twice ask the question, "What does it profit"? The obvious answer is because he is discussing profitability!

First James discusses possible profit to the materially advantaged believer who fails to provide for his needy brothers and sisters. He then discusses the possible profit to those needy brothers and sisters who receive a kind word, but no tangible help. James' answer is the same in both cases. What do kind words without material support profit either kind of person? Nothing. The believer who closes his heart on needy brothers in his church will not profit. He will experience God's judgment here and now. The needy brothers and sisters will not profit either. They will go home cold and hungry. That is a lose-lose situation. James is saying that faith without works benefits neither the one who fails to give nor those who fail to receive. This in turn helps us understand the expression "faith without works is dead."

B. "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD"

The repetition of "what does it profit?" helps unlock the meaning of verse 17 (and the repeated expression in verses 20 and 26). Verse 17 immediately follows the second use of "what does it profit?"

James 2:17 reads, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." In light of the repeated phrase and the obvious emphasis on lack of profit, it is reasonable to understand James to mean, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, *does not profit*." Deadness here is clearly figurative, and points to the lack of profitability. There is no profit in cold dead orthodoxy, for the rich or the poor believer.

Why didn't James just say that, then? Why introduce the idea of deadness? There are three logical reasons.

First, James has already introduced the idea that "sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:15). Thus the believer who commits the sin of failing to help disadvantaged believers in his church is on the path of death. He may not die immediately. But he will certainly not escape God's temporal judgment (2:14). That believer is on a deadly course.

Second, the needy brothers or sisters who remain in want are a step closer to death themselves. Left unaided, literal death is possible. In any case, they are not experiencing the life that God wishes them to have.

Third, the idea of death has as its opposite life or vitality. Thus James is making the point that loving works directed to fellow believers in need give vitality and life to our faith. James doesn't say that faith—or true faith—makes our works good, as is commonly thought. In that case he would have said, "Thus also works by themselves, if they do not have faith, are dead."

Verse 26 says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead." There the first element in each case is body/faith and the second is spirit/works. Faith is likened to the body, not the spirit.[22] The energizing spirit of a Christian is his works, not his faith. His faith is the body that must be energized by the spirit which is works.

---

[22] John Hart, "How to Energize Your Faith: Reconsidering the Meaning of James 2:14-26," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 1999): 47-48. Hart says, "James is teaching that faith without works is simply a cold orthodoxy, lacking spiritual vibrancy…The real issue for these believers is the absence or presence of a freshness, vitality, and energy in their faith. When a Christian engages in practical deeds to benefit others, James says our faith comes alive."

Many assume James is saying something like this: "Thus also faith by itself, if it has no works, is not *true* faith."[23] While that makes sense within the traditional grid, one wonders if it fits James. Whether faith has works or not, it is by definition still faith. James didn't say, "faith without works is not faith."

The traditional view understands this phrase in verses 17, 20, and 26 to refer to what characterizes one's whole life, not brief moments of one's life.[24] Thus if a person's life is generally characterized by good works, he has genuine, that is, living faith. That same person may have turned his back on needy believers many times over the years. Yet the traditional view would say that in none of those instances was his situation comparable to Jas 2:15-17 because, while he was negligent on occasion, his life was generally characterized by good works.

Yet is this consistent with James? James does not give illustrations based on what *characterizes* one's life, but on what occurs or doesn't occur *at specific moments in time*. In verses 15-16 James gives an example we can all relate to. If any of us fails to meet the needs of believers around us, then *at that moment* our faith is unprofitable, dead, and lifeless. We have failed to enliven our faith. Our orthodoxy has lost its vitality and has become cold and dead. The illustration does not concern the whole of one's life.

---

[23] Jenkins, "Faith and Works," 66, says, "James, however, was contrasting a dead faith (which is only an intellectual assent) with a living faith that produces works and subsequently vindicates that profession." He and others point to the word "dead" in Jas 2:17, 20, 26 in the expression, "faith without works is dead" as describing a special type of faith that is not true faith. However, three points argue against this. First, if this is the overriding issue in James, why is only one modifier used for the bad kind of faith, and that only three times? Second, why is there no positive modifier for the good kind of faith anywhere in the epistle? And third, is it really accurate to say that the word "dead" identifies some unique kind of faith? Is it not more accurate to say that the predicate nominative modifies the phrase "faith without works"? Faith is dead or unprofitable when it is not joined with works. But it is still faith.

[24] See, for example, Jenkins, "Faith," p. 78 ("although faith is the sole instrument by which the righteousness of God is revealed in fallen sinners [Rom 1:17; 4:5], it will nevertheless be normatively and objectively demonstrated in the fruits of regeneration." Ryrie, a Free Grace advocate, is alone in adopting the view that Jas 2:14-26 teaches that good works will occur somewhere, somehow, sometime, but that they will not necessarily persist or be characteristic.

Similarly, when James considers the examples of Abraham and Rahab, he does not speak of what characterized their lives. He speaks of one incident in each of their lives. In that instant their faith was active and mature. We are not told, for example, whether or not Rahab's life from that point onward was characterized by godliness.

I have a 1984 Diesel Mercedes Benz automobile with 250,000 miles on it. But you know what? My Mercedes is the best car I've ever had. I typically rent cars several times each year while on speaking engagements. They are usually new cars with less than 10,000 miles on them. And I always come home appreciating my car.

As good as my Mercedes is, however, it won't run without fuel. *A car, no matter how fine it is, is dead without fuel.* Does that mean that if a car ever runs out of fuel, it ceases to be a real car? Of course not. It means that it loses its energizing force. So also, faith without works is like a car without fuel. It won't do what it is designed to do. Works are the fuel that makes our faith profitable, productive, and lively.

A believer whose life is generally characterized by good works may go through times when he is unproductive because he fails to put his faith to work. Whenever a believer has faith without works, he is in a dead, unproductive condition, experientially.

Now my concern is not what characterizes my car generally. My concern is whether my car works when I need it.

What do we do if a car is out of fuel? We fill it up so the car is alive again. We don't go out and buy a different car! So, too, a believer whose spiritual life is dead (i.e., his faith is not combined with works) needs to get to work. The problem is not that he needs to believe something different. Notice that nowhere in his epistle does James call for faith in some other object. James is concerned that his readers need to look around them and start meeting needs.

C. The Judgment of Believers Immediately Precedes and Follows 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 is preceded and followed by verses dealing with the judgment of believers. Serving as bookends to the passage, 2:13 and 3:1 certainly test one's understanding of 2:14-26.

The traditional view sees 2:13 and 3:1 as referring to a generalized final judgment of all of humanity. The proposed purpose of that judgment is to announce who gets into the kingdom and who doesn't. Thus 2:13, 2:14-26, and 3:1 are understood as calling for people to try to do enough good works to get into the kingdom. The traditional view, of

course, points out that these works are motivated, empowered, and even done by God, so there is no ground for boasting or merit. Still, the traditional view does assert that James is saying that in order to get into the kingdom one must persevere in good works.

But is that a reasonable understanding of 2:13 and 3:1? Jesus promised in John 5:24 that the one who believes in Him "shall not come into judgment." The judgment in view there is the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15). No believer will be judged to determine his eternal destiny. That is set the moment one believes in Christ. Otherwise what does "will not come into judgment" mean in John 5:24?

Yet the NT authors are clear that there is a time of judgment for believers. Paul calls it the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10). John calls it the believer's day of judgment (1 John 4:17).

James, at the end of the epistle, speaking of Jesus' soon return, says "the Judge is standing at the door" (5:9). We know that this judgment will occur after the Lord returns to rapture the Church unto Himself (1 John 2:28). Either it will occur during the Tribulation, or in the few months between it and the start of the Millennium (Dan 12:11-12).

James 5:9 is parallel to Rom 14:10-12. Both Paul and James warn believers not to grumble against one another because the Judgment Seat/Judge is coming soon.

The purpose of the judgment of Christians is to recompense us for the deeds that we have done. Whatever we sow in this life, we will reap in the life to come (Gal 6:7-9; see also 1 Tim 4:8; 2 Tim 4:6-8; 1 Pet 4:13; 5:2-4).

James 2:13 is at the close of the discussion about showing partiality to the rich and mistreating the poor in the church (2:1-13). The point is that if we fail to show mercy to the needy among us, we will have a tougher judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Only by showing mercy to others will we receive special mercy at the Bema.

James 2:14-26 follows and builds on the necessity of meeting the needs of fellow believers. The focus is on temporal judgment here and now, as contrasted with future judgment at the Bema in 2:13.

Then in 3:1 James begins his discussion on proper use of the tongue with another reminder about the Bema. In the early church any man could speak at the Lord's Supper. Some were designated as teachers. These were elders who did more of the teaching than other men in the assembly. James warns here that one should not take lightly the idea of being a teacher in the church. At the Bema those who have had that role

will incur a stricter judgment. Failure to reverence God's Word in one's teaching will be a great mark against one at the Bema.

The verses immediately before and after Jas 2:14-26 are dealing with genuine believers. They are called "my brethren" (2:1, 5; 3:1). Only believers will be at the Bema, which is what James is referring to. James would never warn unbelievers to be cautious about becoming teachers in the church. Nor would he warn unbelievers of the need to be merciful to believers in the church.

That the bookends relate to the judgment of believers supports the interpretation that 2:14-26 concerns the judgment of believers as well.

V. Reformed Theology Does Not Require the Traditional Understanding

In my opinion even those who are five-point Calvinists should be open to the temporal salvation understanding for two reasons. First, it in no way contradicts the Reformed position. Reformed theology believes that God disciplines His children. Second, as we've already seen, the evidence strongly favors the temporal salvation view.

Let's consider the first point more fully.

Reformed theology agrees with the idea that if genuine believers willingly sin, God will bring temporal judgment upon them. Reformed theology sees the temporal judgment of genuine believers in view in passages such as 1 Cor 11:30. Most, but not all, would also see the temporal judgment of genuine believers in Jas 5:19-20 and 1 John 5:15.

Thus the idea of temporal judgment is not itself antithetical to Reformed theology. One could maintain a strong view of the perseverance of the saints and still hold that whenever a believer fails to put his faith to work, it is unproductive and will not deliver the believer from God's temporal judgment.

Reformed theology need not react to the temporal judgment view of James 2 as though its entire system of thought would crumble if that interpretation were adopted.

Now the loss-of-salvation view of James 2 is clearly antithetical to the Reformed doctrine of eternal security. But the temporal judgment view affirms eternal security. It merely understands James to be saying something which Reformed thought admits is found in the apostle Paul's writings and in those of other OT and NT authors.

VI. CONCLUSION

Far from being an epistle of straw, James is an epistle of steel. And Jas 2:14-26 is one of the most powerful passages in the entire Bible. It is a call to action. Get to work. Don't just talk the talk; walk the walk.

Look around you, find needs, and meet those needs. If you do, your life will be enriched now and forever. If you don't, you are on a deadly course that leads to pain and ultimately to premature death.

R. T. Kendall holds the temporal deliverance understanding of Jas 2:14-26.[25] His remarks on this passage challenge both the traditional view and our complacency in the face of need around us:

> What startles me is the number of people who insist that one must have works to show he is saved but who themselves have virtually *nothing* of the very works James has in mind! They wish to use James as a basis of "assurance by works" but not the kind of works James has in mind—caring for the poor. I have yet to meet the first person who holds (or preaches) that giving another "those things which are needful to the body" must follow faith to show that it is saving faith indeed. We prefer to be selective in our use of James.[26]

It's time to reevaluate our understanding of Jas 2:14-26.

---

[25] R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 208-217; see also 171-72. It should be noted that Kendall believes the person lacking temporal salvation in 2:14 ("Can faith save him") is the needy brother (of 2:6) illustrated in the next two verses (vv. 15-16). Thus his view is that faith without works cannot save the needy brother from his destitute condition. See pages 171-72, 209, 216-17.

[26] Ibid., 212, italics his.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF AUGUSTINE'S CHANGE FROM PREMILLENNIALISM TO AMILLENNIALISM

PART TWO

David R. Anderson
Pastor
Faith Community Church
The Woodlands, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

A significant change in one area of systematic theology can cause significant changes in another area. By definition a system is coherent and consistent. Changes in one area of the system will most likely cause changes in other areas of that same system, which is why we have likened systematic theology to a spreadsheet. In the first installment of this study we chose Augustine as a case in point. His change in eschatology from premillennialism to amillennialism caused significant changes in his soteriology, especially in the area of perseverance of the saints. Specifically, his reinterpretation of Matt 24:13 ("he who endures to the end will be saved") as a spiritual salvation instead of a physical salvation (to enter and populate the Millennium) caused drastic changes in his soteriology. Perseverance of the saints (faithfulness until the end of one's physical life) became the *sine qua non* of his soteriology. One could believe in Christ, have the fruit of the elect, but prove he was not elect if he should not persevere in faithfulness until the end of his physical life. In this second installment of our study we would like to see how this change in Augustine's eschatology affected the soteriology of John Calvin and that of modern Christianity.

II. THE SOTERIOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

As we have already noted, the concept of *simul iustus et peccator* (that one could be declared righteous by God in his position, yet still

retain sin in his condition) was passed on to Martin Luther by Philip Melancthon, and John Calvin hitch-hiked with Martin Luther. When John Calvin first published his *Institutes* in 1536 there were only six chapters. He defended forensic justification by faith alone from Romans 4. He understood that one could be declared righteous at a moment in time when a sinner's faith intersected with God's offer of the free gift of eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ. As such, no sins past, present, or future could bar the sinner-turned-saint from entrance to God's Kingdom.

So much for *iustus* (being just). But what about *peccator* (being sinful)? How can the sinner-turned-saint be declared just by God when in his character he still falls so far short of God's holiness; that is, still sinful? Initially, the Reformers saw a divorce between what they called justification and what many theologians today call progressive sanctification. Justification took place at a moment in time in heaven's courtroom; sanctification was the transformation of one's character and walk to conform to that of Christ. But justification did not guarantee sanctification.

However, the Council of Trent formed in 1545 as the rebuttal to the doctrine of the Reformers. This Council continued to meet until 1563. They attacked the Reformers' doctrine of justification as preaching license. To tell people their future sins are already forgiven in Christ is to tell them they can live any way they want and still go to heaven when they die. This kind of preaching will promote loose living, the Council accused. These attacks needed answers. So John Calvin continued to write. When he finished his *Institutes* in 1559, there were eighty chapters. And under pressure from the Council of Trent, Calvin remarried justification and sanctification. "You cannot possess Christ without being made partaker in his sanctification…in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness."[1] What was Calvin's basis for this remarriage? The influence of Augustine.

Yes, the long arms of Augustine reached right across the "Dark Ages"[2] (411–1000) into the Medieval Period of church history in the West (1054–1500). After the Dark Ages, the medieval scholars went

---

[1] John Calvin, *Institutes,* III.16.1; 11.1.

[2] The "Dark Ages" are thought to be the period between the defeat of Rome (A.D. 410) by Alaric up to A.D. 1000.

back to the Fathers. In the West it was natural to go to the Latin writers. Hence, the starting point for most medieval thinkers was to ponder the writings of Augustine. The "Great Schism" (1378–1418) was a time of competition between Rome and Avignon in France for the seat of the papacy, and during this time Augustine and Ambrose became a focus of study in the universities in and surrounding Paris.

Much of this was due to the fact that Peter Lombard produced the *Four Books of Sentences* for his students in Paris in 1140. It was a topical listing of verses and patristic quotes. His assignment to solve the apparent inconsistencies in the Bible and the Fathers with plausible answers caused his students to wrestle with the thinking of Augustine. Lombard's book was the most important publication of his age. Every theologian was required to comment on it. And in time the University of Paris became the most important center for learning in Europe. College de la Sorbonne became known as "the Sorbonne" and synonymous with the University of Paris. This college produced Erasmus and John Calvin.

By 1500 Augustinian thinking was pervasive in European scholastic. Erasmus helped facilitate this with his editorial work on the writings of Augustine. But even before Erasmus the "Augustinian School" had developed in Great Britain as well as Paris. Thomas Bradwardine reacted to the Pelagian approach to justification at Oxford, retreatintg to the teachings of Augustine for support. There was not much cross current between England and the Continent because of the Hundred Years War. But Gregory of Rimini at the University of Paris was Bradwardine's counterpart in Europe. He was a member of the Augustinian order, which claimed Martin Luther some years later. Thus when John Calvin developed his *Institutes* he could claim that his theology was thoroughly Augustinian.

Calvin's theology was thoroughly Augustinian, including, of course, his soteriology. Calvin's understanding of forensic justification might appear to be a major departure from the life-long process of justification advocated by Augustine. But it was not. Unfortunately, under pressure from the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), via the Council of Trent, John Calvin felt forced to come up with an answer to the accusation of license stemming from his "moment in time" justification.

The RCC had adopted Augustine's doctrine of life-long justification wholesale. At the Council of Trent the RCC defined justification as the *process* of becoming righteous, but even justification had to be

augmented if one wanted to get to heaven.[3] A mortal sin could cancel out any accrued justification, but through penance one could be restored. And the RCC continued in Augustine's belief that it is not possible to know if one is going to heaven before death: "No one can know with the certitude of faith, which cannot admit of any error, that he has obtained God's grace."[4] The best one can attain to in this life is hope mixed with "fear and apprehension." God rewards the good works of His saints even though He is the power source behind these works, and these rewards help pry open the gates of heaven.[5]

The Council of Trent put a curse on anyone saying justification is not increased by good works.[6] A further curse was put on anyone who believed good works were not meritorious for entrance to heaven.[7] The concept of "imputed" righteousness was believed to be a serious threat to moral effort. Bruce Demarest sums up the RCC approach when he says:

> Traditional Roman Catholics, in other words, trust in God's infusion of a new nature and plead the worth of their God-enabled works. Justification in Catholic theology is a comprehensive term that includes, among other things, what Protestants understand by regeneration and sanctification. For Rome, justification is not divine-wise an objective *pronouncement* of righteousness but is human-wise a lifelong *process* of becoming righteous.[8]

With this kind of pressure Calvin needed plausible answers to the accusers of antinomianism. His defense was to claim that one who was truly justified in God's court room at a moment in time would most certainly go on to maturity in Christ (progressive sanctification), given sufficient time in this world before physical death to do so. In other words, justification guaranteed sanctification—or, Matt 24:13. Only those who persevere in the faith to the end of their physical lives will be eternally saved. Once again, Augustine's understanding of Matt 24:13

---

[3] Council of Trent, X.
[4] Ibid., IX.
[5] Ibid., XVI.
[6] Ibid., Canon 24.
[7] Ibid., Canon 32.
[8] Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 350.

became the benchmark of the elect. If one was truly elect, he would persevere; if he did not persevere, he was not elect.

Of course, this drove Calvin into the same kind of contradictory casuistry Augustine developed. What are we to say of those believers who have all the characteristics of genuine Christianity, but they fall away from the faith before they die? Many Evangelicals today would simply use the "professing but not possessing" retreat. They profess to be believers, but, indeed, their faith is not saving faith because it is only intellectual assent. Thus these professing believers are not genuine believers at all. They profess faith but do not possess faith. But this is not what Augustine did. Nor Calvin.

Augustine said the non-elect can have genuine faith. Augustine said the non-elect can be legitimately regenerated by the Holy Spirit. But because they have not received that most necessary of all gifts, the gift of perseverance, these regenerated believers are non-elect. Forget the fact that the Scriptures never suppose that one who is regenerated is not also elect (cf. 1 Pet 1:1, 3 and Titus 1:1; 3:5). When pressed on this matter, as previously stated, Augustine explained this contradiction as "a mystery."

Calvin fell into a similar trap. Pressed into a remarriage[9] of justification and sanctification, he had to have a way of explaining how some can bear all the good fruit of the elect yet prove they were not elect because they did not persevere to the end of their lives on earth. His answer was "temporary faith." He based his understanding of temporary faith on his interpretations of the parable of the sower, the warning of Hebrews 6, and the warning to the people saying, "Lord, Lord…" in Matthew 7.[10] Here, for example, is what Calvin said concerning Heb 6:4-5:

> I know that to attribute faith to the reprobate seems hard to some when Paul declares it (faith) to be the result of election. This difficulty is easily solved. For…experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same

---

[9] We call this a remarriage because the original marriage took place in the theology of Augustine with his view of life-long justification, a justification which would obviously subsume sanctification.

[10] Jody Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 254.

> feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgment they do not in any way differ from the elect.[11]

Hence, the people in Hebrews 6 could have been enlightened, have tasted the Word of God, the heavenly gift and the power of the age to come, but still fall away and prove they were never elect. Calvin called this operation of the Spirit an "ineffectual" calling, "an inferior operation of the Spirit."[12]

Calvin seemed to think that allowing the reprobate such full experiences of God justified His rejection of them for eternity. Dillow explains:

> The central claim of this teaching is that God imparts supernatural influences to the reprobate which approximate, but do not equal, the influences of effectual calling. He is illuminated, he tastes, he grows, and he has similar feelings as the elect. However, it seems God is deceiving this man into believing he is elect so that God can be more than just in condemning him when he finally falls away. After all, the man had these "tastes."[13]

Apparently, such deep experiences with God make the reprobate all that much more inexcusable when they do not *really* believe. At least this theodicy goes a step beyond Augustine's standard cop-out for an inexplicable contradiction: "mystery."

But imagine the implications of a statement like this for assurance: "Experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them." So, here we have two groups of people who look like the elect, and both groups "in their own judgment" are elect. However, according to Calvin, some of those who look like the elect (meaning they have the same fruit as the elect) and think they are elect, are not in fact elect and will prove this fact by falling away some time before they die. This poor class of people is self-deceived. Can it be more transparent? With such a teaching no one could know he was one of the elect until he dies. Of course, that is precisely what Augustine taught, and Calvin would have admitted the same had he been consistent within his own system. Alas, he was not.

---

[11] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.11.
[12] Calvin, *Commentary*, Luke 17:13; *Institutes*, 3.2.12; 3.2.11.
[13] Dillow, 254.

Because of the terrible possibility that one might actually be one of the reprobates when he thought he was one of the elect, Calvin says, "Meanwhile, believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest carnal security creep in and take the place of assurance of faith."[14] So now we have a distinction between "carnal security" and "assurance of faith." Calvin is now stretching as far as he can to maintain the Reformed doctrine of instantaneous justification in an amillennial system of theology, which says the just must persevere until the end or they were never just in the first place. "In the elect alone He implants the living root of faith, so that they persevere even to the end."[15]

Apparently, Calvin even thought some of those in the parable of the sower who produced fruit were not elect: "…just as a tree not planted deep enough may take root but will in the process of time wither away, though it may for several years not only put forth leaves and flowers, but produce fruit."[16] He must have realized the implications of some of his teachings because he sprinkles his writings with answers to supposed objections which only confuse the issue more. Take this one, for example:

> Should it be objected that believers have no stronger testimony to assure them of their adoption, I answer that there is a great resemblance and affinity between the elect of God and those who are impressed for a time with fading faith, yet the elect alone have that full assurance which is extolled by Paul, and by which they are enabled to cry, Abba, Father.[17]

That really helped. How is the believer (whether real or imaginary) to know if he has *full* assurance? Maybe his assurance is only part assurance, but how is he to know? R. T. Kendall recognizes the problem here when he writes:

> And if the reprobate may experience "almost the same feeling as the elect," there is no way to know finally what the reprobate experiences. Furthermore, if the reprobate may believe that God is merciful towards them, how can we be sure our believing the same thing is any different from theirs? How can we be so sure that our "beginning of faith" is saving

---

[14] Ibid., 255.
[15] Ibid., 256.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 255.

> and is not the "beginning of faith" which the reprobate seem to have?[18]

Calvin digs an even deeper hole by speaking of an inner assurance given by the Spirit to the elect, and then says the reprobate can have a similar sensation. With this kind of teaching one could never have assurance of his salvation. He could only know he is elect when he dies. The pressure from the RCC trapped Calvin into the very same fear of the eternal future inherent in the Catholic system that he was trying to escape. Dillow hits the nail on the head when he observes:

> In the final analysis Calvin has thrown away the possibility of assurance, at least until the final hour. When he grants that the only certain difference between the faith of the elect and the faith of the reprobate is that the faith of the former perseveres to the end, he makes assurance now virtually impossible.[19]

To summarize, we are trying to demonstrate Spread Sheet Theology. To change one ingressed doctrine in a system will most likely change other ingressed doctrines in that very system. When Augustine changed his eschatology, it affected his soteriology—drastically. Matthew 24:13 (perseverance in the faith to the end of one's physical life as a requirement for eternal salvation) became the cornerstone of his salvation system. Purgatory developed as a figment of his logic based on Matt 24:13 (what to do if one does persevere to the end of his life in the faith but still has vestiges of sin in his character—*voila*, Purgatory). The RCC bought into Augustine's theology, both in terms of eschatology and soteriology.

The Reformers like Calvin retained the eschatology of Augustine (amillennial), but tried to change the soteriology (forensic justification). But that was like pouring new wine into old wineskins. "Declared righteousness" could not dance with Augustine's understanding of Matt 24:13. The latter won out. The remarriage between justification and sanctification, which Luther and Zwingli had fought hard to resist, took place in Geneva. And with the Geneva Academy, which trained pastors in the Reformed tradition, the errors of Augustine and Calvin have been perpetuated until today. Augustine's amillennial understanding of Matt

---

[18] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 24.

[19] Dillow, 258.

24:13 continues to be a fly in the ointment of modern soteriology, which undermines one's assurance of salvation at the least and teaches a works-oriented salvation at the most.

III. The Soteriology of Western Christianity Today

The soteriology of Western Christianity today falls into two main categories: Roman Catholic soteriology and Protestant soteriology. The former has completely absorbed Augustine's approach to justification, leaving the election of a professing believer in question until his death. The "making righteous" of the elect person continues through his life and even in Purgatory after death, if necessary. As discussed under "Augustine's Soteriology," persevering in the faith until the end of one's life based on an amillennial understanding of Matt 24:13 was the basis for this approach to soteriology in general and justification in particular.

In Protestant circles John Calvin set the tone with the Geneva Academy, which did more to disseminate doctrine into the West than any other influence. With its amillennial stance and spiritual understanding of Matt 24:13, the modern industry of spiritual fruit inspecting flourished. The fruit inspecting of Theodore Beza, William Perkins, and the English Calvinists has been well documented by R. T. Kendall.[20] All of these adopted the "temporary faith" solution to the warning passages in Hebrews suggested by Calvin, when interpreted according to their understanding of Matt 24:13. If one has the fruit of the elect and the faith of the elect but does not persevere in the faith until the end of his physical life, then God must have given the believer only "temporary faith." It must be noted that this is neither fake faith nor spurious faith. It is genuine faith, but alas, it is *temporary*. As such, the one who possesses genuine, but temporary, faith is non-elect.

Such reliance on Matt 24:13 as the *sine qua non* of eternal salvation closes the gap between the Arminians and the Calvinists as it relates to the bottom line for getting into heaven. As J. Lanier Burns, who chairs the Systematic Theology Department at Dallas Theological Seminary, has told this author, "The most Arminian theologians in the world are Five Point Calvinists."[21] R. T. Kendall echoes this sentiment when he

---

[20] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism.*

[21] Private interview.

says that when it comes to perseverance, the Calvinists of the Puritan persuasion and Arminians have the same position:[22]

> If Perkins holds that the recipient of the first grace must obtain the second (perseverance) or the first [initial faith] is rendered invalid, there is no practical difference whatever in the two positions. If the believer does not persevere (whether Arminius or Perkins says it), such a person proves to be non-elect.[23]

As the fruit inspecting industry crossed the ocean to America, there is a familiar ring. Charles Hodge typifies this group:

> Election, calling, justification, and salvation are indissolubly united; and, therefore, he who has clear evidence of his being called has the same evidence of his election and final salvation…*The only evidence* of election is effectual calling, that is, the production of holiness. And *the only evidence* of the genuineness of this call and the certainty of our perseverance, is a patient continuance in well doing (emphasis mine).[24]

Or, as John Murray put it, "The perseverance of the saints reminds us very forcefully that only those who persevere to the end are truly saints."[25]

And how does this understanding of perseverance differ from "the churches of Christ"? Robert Shank, one of their chief spokesmen writes: "Obviously, it can be known only as one finally perseveres (or fails to persevere) in faith. There is *no valid assurance* of election and final salvation for any man, *apart from deliberate perseverance in faith*" (emphasis mine).[26] But Shank is a pure Arminian, who left the Southern Baptist Convention over the issue of eternal security. It is strange how aspects of these two systems (Calvinism and Arminianism) become alike, when one studies their doctrines of perseverance based on an amillennial interpretation of Matt 24:13.

---

[22] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 143.

[23] Ibid., 144.

[24] Charles Hodge, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (1860; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 212.

[25] Quoted by Dillow, 259.

[26] Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield, MO: Westcott, 1961), 293.

Yet surely the modern advances of exegesis under the scrutiny of the grammatico-historical method have cleared away the brush hiding the inconsistency of interpreting "the end" of Matt 24:13 differently from "the end" of Matt 24:3, 6, and 14. Surely. So let us take a contemporary NT scholar who teaches at a respected, conservative seminary as a case in point: Scot McKnight.

In a 1992 article McKnight addressed the warning passages of Hebrews.[27] The first question he had to settle was whether the recipients of the epistle were believers or unbelievers. Like a prospector panning for gold, he sifted through the evidence very carefully. Page after page of research amassed the evidence and concluded the obvious—these are actual believers, not fake believers or professors/not possessors. He does not like the implications connected with Calvin's solution of "temporary faith," so he searches for another explanation for his conclusion as to how actual believers can wind up in hell.

McKnight is to be commended for not allowing his Reformed approach to perseverance to cause him to declare these recipients unbelievers. However, because he is convinced that only believers who persevere to the end of their lives are elect, he must make categories among those who have actually believed. So he distinguishes between "genuine, true, real, or saving" faith and what he calls *phenomenological* faith.[28] Those who are *phenomenological* believers are those who, from the human perspective, have been observed to have all the fruits of genuine faith, but from an ontological standpoint may have fallen short of the same.[29] Because these believers have genuinely experienced the Holy Spirit, the powers of the age to come, the taste of God's Word, and so on, they have enjoyed spiritual *phenomena* which are genuine spiritual experiences shared by the elect.[30] But, alas, they are not elect. How do we know? Because they do not persevere in the faith until the end of their lives, and Matt 24:13 tells us that people who do not persevere until

---

[27] Scot McKnight, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions" *Trinity Journal* (Spring 1992): 22–59.

[28] Ibid., 24, n. 12.

[29] Ibid., n. 10.

[30] McKnight recognizes these believers as regenerate, but for him regeneration does not necessitate perseverance and is, by his definition, a life-long process. So, much like Augustine, these believers can be regenerated but fall away from the faith and be eternally damned.

the end cannot be saved. (Notice that Hebrews never uses such terminology.)

McKnight's entire article is a classic study in circular reasoning. He assumes what he is trying to prove. He assumes, from Matt 24:13, that anyone who does not persevere in the faith until the end of his life cannot go to heaven. But the evidence he amasses from Hebrews demonstrates the readers to be believers. Now the only way to keep these believers out of heaven is to say they either lose their salvation (an Arminian option), they go to purgatory for further cleansing (a Roman Catholic option), or there must be different categories of believers (his final option). On this basis, he understands only Joshua and Caleb from the redeemed "Egyptian" generation of Israelites to be with the Lord today (see below). How Moses appeared with the Lord at the transfiguration he does not explain. Why Michael the archangel contended with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 9) remains a mystery.

Yes, McKnight recognizes the recipients of Hebrews as believers, but they may be only *phenomenological* believers who wind up in hell because of apostasy. He uses the severe language in the warning of Heb 10:26ff. to determine (by analogy of faith) that all the warning passages in Hebrews are alluding to the danger of hell-fire if one does not persevere:

> The following logic is at the heart of the author's exhortations: if willful disobedience and apostasy in the Mosaic era brought discipline and prohibited entrance into the Land (a type of the eternal rest), then surely willful disobedience and apostasy in the new era will bring eternal exclusion from the eternal rest.
>
> In light of the final sense of several of these expressions (cf. especially the harsh realities of 10:30–31, 39) and the use of imagery in Hebrews that elsewhere is used predominantly of eternal damnation, it becomes quite clear that the author has in mind an eternal sense of destruction. The author of Hebrews makes it unambiguously clear that those who do not persevere until the end will suffer eternal punishment at the expense of the wrath of God. There is no escape; like the children of Israel who disobeyed, those who shrink back will be destroyed. The consequences for those who apostasize [sic]

> are eternal damnation and judgment; therefore, the author has exhorted his readers to persevere until the end.[31]

Never mind the fact that the words "hell," "lake of fire," "eternal," "everlasting," "forever," "damnation," and the like never occur in any of these warning passages. He is convinced the language of 10:26–39 is so severe it must refer to eternal damnation. Does he conclude the same for Deut 4:24 where *apōleia apoleisthe* (utterly destroy) and *ektribē ektribēsesthe* (utterly destroy) are even more emphatic than the *apōleian* (destruction) of Heb 10:39?[32] Not likely. The curses in Deuteronomy are temporal curses. God's covenants with Abraham and David ensure an eternal relationship with Israel. The issue in Deuteronomy 4 and 30 is fellowship, not relationship. Then could the same not be said of the Hebrew Christians of Hebrews, especially when drawing on the warnings of temporal judgment given in Deuteronomy 32 (32:35 and 36 are quoted in Heb 10:30), the language of which is even more graphic than that of Heb 10:26ff.?

McKnight concludes that those who do not persevere until the end cannot go to heaven, since that is the "single condition"[33] for final salvation (whatever happened to believing in Jesus?). With the circle complete he warns his own readers that we should not be hasty in giving assurance of salvation to people who look like genuine believers. Why? Because they may only be *phenomenological* believers.

How can one know if he is a phenomenological believer instead of a genuine believer, since the observable fruit for each category is the same

---

[31] Ibid., 35-36. His view of "fire" and "burning" is limited to hell-fire. But note Deut 4:24 and the consuming fire, the jealous God, and the utter destruction (the LXX uses *apōleia apoleisthe* to emphasize the *utter* destruction to come upon Israel if she is unfaithful, and this is the same term used in Heb 10:39). Malachi 4:1 also points to the fire, which will destroy the Jews in the land. They will not prolong their days in the land.

Interpreters who object to the warning in Hebrews 10 as being a temporal judgment instead of eternal, speak of the much worse judgment to come upon believers in Christ who apostatize as opposed to the judgment which came upon the unfaithful Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea. However, they overlook the fact that a judgment which affects one's rest in the Millennium (1,000 years) is much worse than a judgment which affects one's rest in the land for forty years.

[32] When a verb in Hebrew or Greek is preceded by a noun with the same root as the verb, the action of the verb is being emphasized.

[33] Ibid., 59.

until the former falls away somewhere before the end of his life? Obviously, one cannot know which category he belongs to until the end of his life. Again, McKnight is to be credited for some consistency. That is, he warns us that no one can have assurance of his salvation in this life.

But is this not the very conclusion of Augustine and Calvin? Augustine never espoused assurance of salvation before death. Calvin did, but only initially. Assurance was of the essence of faith in his early writings, but not after his interaction with the Council of Trent. It would seem the apple does not fall very far from the tree.

IV. CONCLUSION

Once again, this has been a study in Spread Sheet Theology. By this nomenclature we refer to a system which has a high level of consistency, comprehensiveness, congruity, and coherence. Changing one doctrine ingressive to the system will most likely cause changes in other parts of the system as well. We have chosen the theology of Augustine as a case in point.

Though Augustine was a pretribulational, premillennial, dispensationalist in his early theology, a change in his eschatology resulted in a change in his soteriology. When he reacted to the eschatological feasting of the Donatists and their obsessive preoccupation with the dating of Christ's return to set up His kingdom on earth, Augustine used the hermeneutics of Tyconius to eliminate any future, physical, kingdom of Christ on earth. In this sense he became amillennial (though he did see a thousand year reign of Christ in heaven).

This change in his systematic theology caused a reinterpretation of some of Augustine's biblical theology. He no longer interpreted Matt 24:13 as a promise of physical salvation leading into the Millennium (since there was not going to be a physical Millennium in his new approach to eschatology). Now he saw Matt 24:13 as a promise of spiritual salvation. In his mind a new test for soteriology was born: one must endure in his Christian faithfulness until the end of his life. This verse became the driving force and final arbiter in Augustine's soteriology.

When the Reformers came along over a thousand years later, a revival in the study of Augustine's writings had been in vogue for over a hundred years. His amillennial eschatology still held. But the Reformers sought to make a change in soteriology. Justification could be declared in the court room of heaven at an instant in time. One could be declared

righteous by God in his position, yet still retain sin in his condition: *simul iustus et peccator*. This was a monumental change in soteriology, enough to effect the Reformation. If they had followed through on a good system of theology, the Reformers would have examined their eschatology to see how their new approach to soteriology might cause changes in their understanding of the future. But they did not develop a good system. Instead they tried to amalgamate Augustine's theology with their own. The result was an alloy of contradictions.

John Calvin, who began teaching assurance is of the essence of faith, wound up teaching that no man could tell if he were elect or reprobate until he died. Matthew 24:13 remained a cornerstone of the soteriology of the Reformers. Fruit inspecting flourished among the followers of Calvin and came to America through the Puritans. Writers like John Owen wrote tomes on how to know if one was among the elect.[34] All of this was driven by an amillennial interpretation of Matt 24:13.

It might be argued that there were certainly other passages than Matt 24:13 marshaled to support the doctrine that one must persevere to the end in order to be saved. True. But Matt 24:13 remained the cornerstone on which the other passages were built because it is the only verse which includes both the word "saved" and the word "end."

Scot McKnight's article on the warning passages in Hebrews was offered as a case study in the affect a "spiritual salvation" understanding of Matt 24:13 can have on interpreting an entire book. His understanding of Matt 24:13 (endure until the end of one's life in order to go to heaven) as the single (and surely he must mean the single most important) spiritual condition which must be met in order to separate the sheep from the goats guides him throughout the maze of twists and turns in Hebrews.

Rather than allowing his interpretation to emerge from the words of the text, McKnight uses a point of reference (Matt 24:13) outside the text of Hebrews to determine his understanding of Hebrews itself. His "*phenomenological* believer" concoction, in which the epistle is addressed to actual but not genuine, observable but not ontological believers, must stand as one of the all-time examples of creatively

---

[34] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols., vol. 3: *A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (1677; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 45-47, 226-28. This particular volume is over 650 pages and was dedicated, according to Owen, to helping professors of Christ determine if they were possessors of Christ.

"forcing" the text when one comes to the end of an exegetical *cul de sac*. How much simpler to change one's eschatology back to the pre-Augustinian days of premillennialism when Matt 24:13 could have a physical reference and the "rest" in Hebrews could refer to the Millennium (as the early Fathers taught) rather than the eternal state.

The appeal of this study is really a warning. It is dangerous to mix theological systems. By definition, mixing systems will create contradictions. We must be careful when we pick and choose that which seems appealing from one system and try to fit it into the constructs of another system. Those who claim to be Dispensationalists should be careful not to introduce ingressive doctrines from Reformed theologians into their system and vice-versa. These are two mutually exclusive systems. This author agrees with R. C. Sproul when he claims there is no such thing as a "four point" Calvinist, when the points are defined by classic Dortian Calvinism.[35] One is either a "five point" Calvinist or none (although being a "no point" Calvinist does not make one an Arminian). Dortian Calvinism is a system. To pull just one point out of the system destroys the entire system.

On the other hand, to incorporate one point from Dortian Calvinism into Dispensationalism can also destroy the entire system.[36] If the Dortian view of perseverance of the saints is correct (the view taught by Augustine), then the spiritual view of Matt 24:13 is also correct. If the spiritual view of Matt 24:13 is correct, then amillennialism is true. If amillennialism is true, then there is no distinction between Israel and the Church. If there is no distinction between Israel and the Church, then Dispensationalism is false.

We applaud the emphasis on Biblical Theology in recent decades, since it accentuates the strength of grammatico-historical exegesis. However, let us not lose sight of the fact that Biblical Theology stops with what the text said to its original recipients, as opposed to Systematic Theology, which starts with the original audience but does not stop there.

---

[35] R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 193.

[36] It must be pointed out that dispensationalists like Lewis Sperry Chafer redefined the "points" of Dortian Calvinism to fit their system. Chafer, for example, limited the perseverance of the saints to eternal security in his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), 267–354. For the sake of clear communication, it might be better to stay consistent in our definitions.

A good systematic theologian must not only contextualize; he must also decontextualize and recontextualize. That is, he must find out what the text said to its original recipients, look for the timeless truths which transcend cultures and centuries, and transfer those timeless truths into the respective contexts of differing modern societies. Systematic Theology speaks to us today.

Furthermore, Systematic Theology incorporates Historical Theology in its quest to understand how the theology of today developed. Both Biblical and Historical Theology feed like tributaries into the river of Systematic Theology. When we focus on one of the tributaries to the neglect of the other or of the main river itself, we get stuck in St. Louis when we are trying to go down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

Finally, let us remember, Systematic Theology is like a spread sheet. Changes in one of the major points of the system will most likely cause changes in other points of the system as well. This could be good. It could lead to a new system with a greater degree of consistency, coherence, congruity, and comprehensiveness. But if it leads to increased contradictions or fails to incorporate all the evidence, perhaps the proposed change is invalid. We believe that Augustine's eschatological change from premillennialism to amillennialism led him and his followers into a theological labyrinth of contradictions in soteriology which persists until today.

A REVIEW OF DAVE HUNT'S *WHAT LOVE IS THIS? CALVINISM'S MISREPRESENTATION OF GOD*

LAURENCE M. VANCE[*]
Vance Publications
Pensacola, Florida

I. AN OVERVIEW

One would think that the debate over the doctrines of Calvinism, which has gone on for four hundred years, would have subsided by now. Yet, books on the subject continue to appear. Most of them, however, are from the Presbyterian/Reformed or "Sovereign Grace Baptist" points of view. It was a pleasant surprise, therefore, to see that the well-known author and director of The Berean Call Ministry, Dave Hunt, has penned a reply to the doctrines of Calvinism.

What Love is This? has twenty-three short chapters (10–24 pages) with numerous headings within each chapter to further organize the material. There is an extremely detailed table of contents that gives the name and page number of the sections in each chapter. The book is well-documented, with endnotes. Although Calvinism, with its maze of theological jargon, can at times be a difficult subject to understand, *What Love is This?* is not overly technical. Hunt does a good job of explaining in layman's terms what Calvinism actually teaches and how it contradicts the Bible. There is a Scripture Index, but no index of persons or topics. All Scripture is quoted from the King James Version, and, except for two references to "erroneous renderings" (pp. 54, 210), a reference to God as "Jahweh" (p. 291), and some scattered references to some Greek and Hebrew words, the King James Version is followed throughout. Although Hunt does occasionally quote other non-Calvinists for their explanation of a particular facet of Calvinism, he relies on Scripture to answer the claims of Calvinists. There are an abundance of quotes from Calvinists, including an assortment of Calvinism's modern proponents

[*] Laurence M. Vance is the author of the 788 page work *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991, 1999).

like R. C. Sproul, John Piper, and James White. However, whether this means that Calvinists will not raise their perennial cry that they have been misrepresented is doubtful. When quoting Calvin himself, it is unfortunate, though, that Hunt uses the older English translation of Calvin's *Institutes* by Henry Beveridge instead of the newer one by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Press, 1960). He does, however, reference Calvin's *Institutes* by book, chapter, and paragraph, so at least Calvin's quotes can be looked up in either edition.

After two introductory chapters, there are four chapters centered on John Calvin, Augustine, and Arminius that provide some needed historical background information. This is followed by chapters on each of the five points of Calvinism, with additional chapters in between each point that relate to or expand on the point under discussion. One chapter in particular gathers together some pivotal Scriptures (Rom 9:13, 18, 22; John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4, 4:10; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 3:9) for a brief analysis. The longest chapter is on Calvinism's third point, Limited Atonement, a doctrine that even some Calvinists reject.

II. STRENGTHS

Hunt rightly traces Calvinism, not back to the Bible, but back to Augustine, and shows the influence of Augustine on Calvin. He quickly points out in the first few chapters some of the standard tactics used by Calvinists to garner sympathy for their views: claiming that they are being misrepresented, appealing to the great Calvinistic Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and classifying all non-Calvinists as Arminians. Hunt also raises two issues that Calvinists would rather he didn't: the difficulty that the average person has in understanding the arcane maze of theology that is Calvinism, and the fact that even Calvinists don't agree among themselves (or with Calvin) on the finer points of their doctrine.

What Love is This? exposes the major errors of Calvinism and refutes them, albeit briefly, using Scripture instead of confusing theological jargon. Hunt takes on the Calvinistic notions that Calvinism is the gospel, foreknowledge really means foreordination, God has ordained everything which transpires in history, God knows only what He has decreed, faith is an irresistible gift, the depravity of man means that man has the inability to respond to the gospel, a man must be regenerated *before* exercising faith in Christ, Christ died only for the "elect,"

assurance of salvation is to be sought in persevering in good works, and that election and predestination refer to salvation itself. On this latter point, however, although Hunt connects election and predestination with things that accompany salvation, rather than with salvation itself, he still labors under the misconception that foreknowledge is the reason for election and predestination (pp. 197, 220, 225, 229, 231, 232, 234), instead of foreknowledge being in harmony with them, a point he raises only once (p. 225). Hunt also seems to concede that election and predestination took place before the foundation of the world.

The theme of the book is its subtitle: Calvinism's misrepresentation of God. Hunt shows that Calvinism misrepresents God's love, decrees, sovereignty, will, grace, nature, character, knowledge, foreknowledge, gospel, and, of course, His Word.

III. WEAKNESSES

Although the overall content of *What Love is This?* is accurate and helpful, the book is marred throughout by factual, stylistic, and typographical errors. The Calvinist Robert Morey is misquoted (p. 316). The theologian *Dabney* is misspelled "Dabny" (p. 374). The word *Baptist* is misspelled "Baptism" (p. 430). The endorsement by Tim LaHaye that appears at the beginning of the book is misquoted on the front cover. Calvin's protagonist *Servetus* is misspelled "Servitus" (p. 314). It is debatable whether Bishop Davenant was "one of the greatest experts on ecclesiastical history" (p. 19). The words *election* and *predestination* are not "used interchangeably in Scripture" (p. 219). Augustine did not join the Roman Catholic Church (p. 33). Erasmus did not publish a "translation of the New Testament in Greek" (p. 171). John Bunyan was not one who "opposed Calvinism" (p. 19). The title of Edward Gibbon's historical work is misstated (p. 73). Stefan Zweig's book *The Right to Heresy* does not contain the word *Erasmus* in the title, and the quote taken from Zweig comes from page 57 of his work rather than 207-208, as the endnote indicates (p. 73). The word *Berea* is misspelled "Berean" (p. 420). The Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon did not reject Limited Atonement (p. 19). The quote ascribed to John Wesley (p. 221) is actually from his mother, Susanna Wesley. The quote from Duncan (p. 25) is from page 10 of his book, not page 10.25 (p. 31). The word *Doctrines* in the titles of two books is printed as the singular "Doctrine" (pp. 422, 425). Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were

adopted in 1541, not 1561 (obviously following a typo from the first printing of my book, *The Other Side of Calvinism,* which was corrected in the second printing). Calvin's *Institutes* first appeared in Latin in 1536, not 1586 (p. 419). The demonstrative pronoun *touto* from Ephesians 2:8 is wrongly transliterated *tauto* (p. 362). Additionally, the quote on the same page ascribed to F. F. Bruce not only doesn't appear on pp. 220-21 of Bruce's work, as related in Hunt's endnote (p. 376), it also doesn't appear under Bruce's discussion of Eph 2:8.

Besides these factual errors, the endnotes have assorted inconsistencies and formatting errors, in addition to using the archaic term *op cit*. The same is true of the Bibliography. There is too much use of ellipsis and brackets. For some unknown reason, an attempt was obviously made to capitalize the word *scripture* only when it occurred in the singular, but even this was not consistently followed (pp. 267, 280, 322). Books of the Bible are spelled out instead of abbreviated when Scripture quotations are cited.

Unfortunately, the book also suffers from numerous annoying typesetting flaws. The book abounds with unnecessary spaces before endnote numbers, between words, quotations, and bibliographical entries, and before and after dashes and slashes. This is augmented by the fact that no words are hyphenated at the end of lines. The bottom margin of each page varies greatly—but the text is generally way too close to the physical bottom of the page. To avoid beginning a new page at the end of a chapter, the font of the endnotes is sometimes noticeably reduced even though blank pages appear at the end of the book and between some chapters.

IV. Conclusion

It is high time that Calvinism is exposed for what it is: a theological aberration that has deceived many erstwhile and contemporary preachers and theologians. Will this book by Dave Hunt convert the Calvinist from the error of his way? Probably not. It should, however, help keep many from straying in that theological direction. Although Tim LaHaye is probably a little presumptuous in his claim that "this book could well be the most important book written in the twenty-first century for all evangelical Christians," in spite of its deficiencies, *What Love is This?* is still an admirable introduction to the flaws in the doctrines of Calvinism.

DO BELIEVERS EXPERIENCE THE WRATH OF GOD?

RENÉ A. LOPEZ
Dallas, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

All who teach the grace message know the importance of defining concepts and words in order to interpret the Bible correctly. For this reason, grace advocates are serious when it comes to clarifying God's message of grace. Yet, how serious and clear are we when it comes to understanding God's message of wrath? Unfortunately, many Christians assume that whenever the expression "God's wrath" appears in the Bible it usually means eternal judgment that falls only upon the unregenerate (Rom 1:18–3:20).[1] This common interpretation surfaces two questions that will be answered in this article: "Do the Scriptures reveal the subject of God's wrath to be temporal in nature[2] and does God's wrath fall

---

[1] An informal experiment conducted by this writer while teaching at Trinity International University found that nine out of ten Christians automatically consented to a definition of "God's wrath" to usually mean "eternal-judgment."

[2] Many passages in the Scriptures are understood by theologians to be speaking of eternal wrath. Unfortunately, space does not allow a full treatment of all the biblical passages where God's wrath is found. Hence, the aim of this article is not to disprove whether God's wrath is ever eternal, but to prove whether wrath appears temporally in the OT and NT, and can it apply equally to unbelievers and sinning believers. However, out of all of the OT an NT passages researched by this writer, only two passages in the OT seem to imply eternal punishment: Malachi 1:4 mentions, "Even though Edom has said...the LORD will have indignation forever" (*ʿod ʿolam*). This term means more of "a duration of indefinite but not necessarily infinite length [eternal] (see 1 Sam 27:12, where 'lifetime' is the meaning; Gen 49:26, where 'long-enduring' is the meaning)," Douglas Stuart, "Malachi," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary, Volume 3, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 1289-90. Amos 1:11 also says, "He kept his wrath forever" (NKJV). Not only is God not the subject of this wrath, but also the Hebrew word here must

equally on sinning believers as well as unbelievers?" The Greek word for "wrath" (*orgē*), with God as its executor, appears in Romans far more than any other NT book. Because Romans is written to Christians (1:7, 15), it will be vital to examine each passage where wrath appears in the epistle in order to meet this article's objective. But first, it will be necessary to survey the OT and NT occurrences (outside of Romans) in order to see whether God's wrath is temporal in nature and whether it falls equally upon sinning believers as well as unbelievers.

II. GOD'S WRATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Septuagint translates the Hebrew words *ʾap*, *ʿeḇra*, *qeṣep*, and *ḥārôn*[3] with the Greek words *orgē* and *thymos.* Sometimes a combination of both is used (Deut 9:19). Although there are four Hebrew words translated as "wrath" and/or "anger" in the English translations, *ʾap* is the most common.[4]

In the OT, God's wrath is poured out against sinning nations and even His own people, Israel. First, the unbelieving nations and their kings are objects of God's temporal wrath. This is a concept that permeates the OT (Isa 13:9, 13; 30:27; 59:18-19; 63:6; Jer 50:13; 51:45; Ezek 25:14; Jonah 3:9; Ps 2:5; 110:5; Mal 1:4).

Second, and more pervasive than the previous, is how Israel appears as the object of God's temporal wrath (Num 12:9; Deut 4:25; 28:15; Judg 2:14; 2 Sam 24:1; Ps 60:1; Amos 3:2; Isa 10:5; 30:27). Also God's wrath comes upon individual believers such as Moses (Exod 4:24; Deut 1:37; 4:26). The fact that Moses appeared at the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and was speaking with Jesus leaves no question that he was regenerate (cf. Matt 17:1-3). However, when he sinned, God's wrath fell upon him. God's wrath also came upon king Rehoboam (2 Chr 12:12).

---

mean "continually" (NIV), because it is Edom who unrelentingly pursues his brother Israel with wrath. Thus, a continual pursuit by Edom to destroy Israel is the meaning.

[3] There are 14 Hebrew words in the OT that the LXX translates *orgē* (wrath) or *thymos* (anger). See Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Literature* (Including the Apocryphal Books) (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 1008.

[4] G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 210, 322.

When Israel and Rehoboam forsook God's law (2 Chr 12:1), God's wrath—in the form of the Egyptian army—came upon Judah and Israel (12:2-5, 9). Yet, when the king and Israel's leaders humbled themselves (2 Chr 12:6), God's wrath subsided (12:7, 12).

God's wrath in the OT falls indiscriminately upon individuals, both unregenerate and regenerate, who continually sin. However, His wrath is more evident in passages dealing with those in covenant relationship with Him (Num 25:3; 32:10; Deut 29:25; Judg 2:14, 20; Ps 78:21).[5] Disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30) accounts for this phenomenon. Fichtner suggests that "consistent linking of nouns for wrath with Yahweh, the covenant God, is of supreme theological significance…[because it] shows that the idea of wrath is closely bound up with belief in the covenant."[6] Therefore, one should expect God's wrath to be unleashed against His own people, even more so than pagan nations.[7]

After briefly considering God's wrath in the OT, four characteristics seem to emerge: First, God expresses His wrath in strong personal terms (Ezek 7:8; Ps 60:3). Second, God usually expresses His wrath in two forms, through "natural agencies such as famine and pestilence"[8] (cf. Deut 28:15-68; Amos 4:6) and through sinful men (Isa 44:28; Hab 1:6). Third, God often associates His love with His wrath (Hos 14:4). Fourth, God expresses His wrath temporally.[9] Since His wrath always manifests itself because of sin, whether or not covenant relationship is involved, it

---

[5] H. C. Hahn, "*orgē*," *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed., Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1978, 1986), 108–109. Hahn goes on to say that *orgē* is more often provoked by apostasy, unfaithfulness, and violation of God's law on the part of the covenant people Israel.

[6] Fichtner, "*orgē*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, eds., Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964-76), 396.

[7] See also Hahn, "*orgē*," in NIDNTT, 109, who says that it is within this "framework of covenant theology the wrath of God can be seen as an expression of rejected and wounded love. This is the deepest root of the concept of wrath, and in this light one can understand the overwhelming force of the message."

[8] G. H. C. MacGregor, "Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* (January 1961): 102.

[9] Ibid. It would have helped if MacGregor addressed the length and/or duration of this wrath.

carries with it a temporal element. That is, wrath will cease when covenant obedience is restored (Deuteronomy 28–29), and forgiveness will be seen through mercy (Hab 3:2). However, His judgment can either end upon completion of discipline (2 Chr 36:21-23) or termination of life (Josh 7:1-26; Num 25:1-18). In the OT, God's wrath appears as His temporal displeasure against sin.

Thus, the common thread found in these four characteristics is this: God's wrath is His displeasure against the sin of those who do not have a covenant relationship with Him (pagans), and to a greater extent against those who *do* have a covenant relationship with Him, but live in disobedience. Once sin is dealt with, wrath subsides.

III. GOD'S WRATH IN THE NT EXCLUDING ROMANS

In order to guard against formulating too simplistic a view of God's wrath in the NT, we need to clarify three things: (1) the definition of the wrath of God; (2) whether God's wrath falls equally on unbelievers as well as sinning believers;[10] and (3) the distinct aspects of God's wrath.

A. GOD'S WRATH DEFINED

The word *orgē* appears thirty-six times and *thymos* appears eighteen times in the NT; the combination of the two appears twelve times in six verses.[11]

---

[10] Christ's death does not keep believers from experiencing wrath. Weideman correctly points out one reason some argue "…against the believer suffering wrath is the doctrine of propitiation. It is argued that if Christ satisfied the wrath of God at the cross then the believer should never have to experience it. This argument, however, ignores the fact that the death of Christ is not applied limitlessly to the believer. For instance, the penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual. Although the penalty of spiritual death is removed from the believer, the penalty of physical death is not removed. A believer's body must still experience physical suffering and death, the results of God's righteous judgment upon sin which aroused His wrath. Therefore, the propitiation of Christ does not necessarily eliminate all temporal punishment under God's wrath for the believer" (Stanley R. Weideman, "An Exegetical Study of the Wrath of God in the New Testament" [Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978], 62).

[11] In NT studies some scholars think that there is no distinction between *orgē* and *thymos*. However, this is questionable. One would have to say that in

Man appears as the executor of *orgē* five times, and as the executor of *thymos* seven times.[12] Jesus appears as the executor of *orgē* only three times,[13] never *thymos.* Satan appears only once as the executor of *thymos*, never *orgē.*[14] By far, more than any other reference, God appears as the executor directly and indirectly of *orgē* twenty-seven times.[15] God also appears as the executor of *thymos* ten times, directly and indirectly.[16] Therefore, this evidence suggests that when speaking of wrath in the NT, God is usually at the center.

The fact that God's wrath comes as a result of sinful action can be demonstrated by numerous passages in the NT.[17] The vices mentioned in Eph 5:2-5 are clearly the reason "the wrath of God comes" (in 5:6; cf. Col 3:6). In 1 Thess 2:16, Paul's reason for the present wrath is due to sin. In Rev 14:8 the statement, "she has made all nations drink of the wine of wrath of her fornication," shows the correlation of God's wrath and sin (Rev 18:3).

---

all twelve occurrences where both words appear together that NT writers are rendering it as either appositives or just being redundant. The distinction of both of these words should be retained in order to make sense when both appear. See Fichtner "*orgē*," in TDNT, 5:409, 419, 422.

[12] The references for *orgē* are Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 2:8; Jas 1:19-20 and for *thymos* are Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; Heb 11:27.

[13] Mark 3:5; Rev 6:16-17.

[14] Rev 12:12.

[15] They are the following: directly it appears in John 3:36; Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Heb 3:11; 4:3; Rev 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15; and indirectly it appears in Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7; 21:23; Rom 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4-5; Eph 2:3; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; 5:9.

[16] They are the following: directly it appears in Rev 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7, 16:1, 19; 18:3; 19:15; and indirectly it appears in Rom 2:8; 14:8.

[17] C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932), 21-22, believes God is not directly involved in unleashing wrath, but that it is "some process or effect in the objective realm of facts." He understands God's wrath to be something "impersonal." This is something difficult to sustain in light of all the NT verses that clearly point to God's ownership of wrath (see passages above). See also G. L. Borchert, "God's Wrath," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds., Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 991.

Interestingly, in the NT, God's wrath is toward unrighteous practice, not one's unregenerate position—evidenced by the previously mentioned passages.[18] However, even if Eph 2:3 states that the unregenerate are "by nature children of wrath," given the context, the evidence of their actions (i.e. "walked," "conducted," and "lust of our flesh" [2:2-3]) are what allows Paul to properly refer to it as their nature (*physis*), which results in "wrath" (*orgē*). The disobedient actions stemming from their nature is what incurs wrath. Yet, Paul labels the cause (nature) by the effect it incurs (wrath) and comes up with the phrase "children of wrath," as with the term "sons of disobedience."[19]

In Eph 2:2-3, the close relationship of God's wrath with sinful actions is seen between the parallel statements "children of wrath" and "sons of disobedience." The words "children" and "sons" are parallel as well as the words "disobedience" and "wrath." Today, nature gives way to actions, but man's initial sin against God in the garden gave way to His fallen nature. This brought wrath and death. Thus, Stählin is correct in saying, "In the NT *orgē* is both God's displeasure at evil, [and] His passionate resistance to every will which is set against Him."[20]

B. God's Wrath Determined

In the NT, God's wrath falls upon the unregenerate. First Thessalonians 2:16 states that "wrath has come upon them" due to their

---

[18] If God's wrath is always against sin, will the unregenerate sin in the lake of fire and continue to experience His wrath? If so, some might think that God's wrath by default would have to be eternal. This would be true if "wrath" and "eternal punishment" were synonymous, but they are not. God's wrath occurs temporally until the final ruling of eternal punishment. For example, a victim's relative was once asked before the execution of the man who killed her brother whether she was still wrathful about the horrendous crime. She responded, "I am not angered or wrathful anymore because justice has been served. I am at peace." Thus, God's wrath subsides in eternity because eternal justice has been served. Sin which is not dealt with incurs God's wrath, but sin that is dealt with subsides His wrath. All sin will have been dealt with in eternity, either by grace or law. For a distinction between "wrath" and "eternal punishment," see Stählin, "*orgē*," in TDNT, 5:434.

[19] Paul is using an idiomatic Hebrew figure of speech denoting the essence of a person's character. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 504, 832-33.

[20] Stählin, "*orgē*," in TDNT, 5:446.

sins (which comes as a result of rejecting Jesus). In Matt 3:7, John the Baptist addresses the wrath that came against the unbelieving Sadducees by calling them a "brood of vipers!" In addition, John 3:36 points to unbelief as the reason why God's wrath persists.[21]

God's wrath also falls upon the regenerate, as one can reasonably argue from Heb 3:11 and 4:3. In Heb 3:7-15, the writer exhorts the Hebrew Christians by quoting from Ps 95:7-11. This is an appropriate worship psalm for this occasion. The author's audience is on the verge of leaving the Christian worship system (cf. 10:25) and returning to Judaism.[22] Three clues give evidence to the fact that these were Hebrew Christians.

First, "brethren" points to fellow Christians. It is true that "brethren" may be used to refer to Jews in an ethnic manner. Peter's address in Acts 2:29, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely" is such a case (see Rom 9:3). Mark refers to Jesus' brothers in an organic sense (3:31). However, in Heb 3:1, the author calls them "holy brethren," not just "brethren." These are two common terms, when used in combination, which refer to Christians (Col 1:2). "Brethren" is also mentioned again in Heb 3:12, (forming a possible inclusion). In Hebrews, "brethren" occurs seven out of eight times where the context argues for spiritual kinship.[23] The exception where the sense is that of ethnic kinship occurs in 7:5. The author thus believes that they are Christians.

Second, the warning not to "depart" (*aphistēmi*) can be understood as addressing believers. As bad as the word "apostatize" sounds, all it means is "go away, withdraw."[24] Logically then they have to actually *be* a part of the group, in order to be asked not to depart *from* the group. The context points to the possibility of being lured from their present worship system into another. From verses 2-5, the Greek word *oikos* appears six

---

[21] Though the Greek literally reads "he who disobeys the Son," the translation "he who disbelieves the Son" is proper since unbelief is clearly in view. See BAGD, 82.

[22] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 100.

[23] Hebrews 2:11, 12, 17; 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22.

[24] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v., "*aphistēmi*," 155.

times. This is the same word translated in the LXX (Num 12:7) as "tabernacle." Hebrews 3:3 states, "Moses indeed was faithful in all of his house." This seems to refer to Exod 40:16 and the arrangement of the tabernacle (cf. 40:1-15) in order to establish the worship system. However, no matter how important Moses was in establishing this system, Christ is greater, because He is what the whole worship system is about (see chapters 7–9) by being "over His own house" (Heb 3:6). Thus, the warning to the Hebrew Christians (3:6b-12) refers not only to abandoning their faith, but also to abandoning the newly established worship system which they held at one point (3:12-14). This is suggested by the phrases "partakers of the heavenly calling" and "partakers of Christ" (3:14).

The Exodus generation did not enter into the land because of their "unbelief" and because they did not "hold fast…to the end" (3:6, 12, 14). The word "unbelief" can refer to unbelievers (1 Cor 6:6), but it can also refer to immature believers. The Lord's eleven disciples were rebuked for their "unbelief" in His resurrection (Mark 16:14; John 20:27). Hebrews 5:12-14 shows that the Hebrew Christians lacked maturity.

Finally, if "entering" God's rest (3:11) or being "partakers of Christ" (3:14) are terms that should be equated with entering the kingdom and/or receiving eternal life, Moses himself could not have been justified. This would be evidenced by the fact that he never entered the Promised Land. The term "rest," mentioned in Heb 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 8, 9, is used synonymously with the term "inheritance." This inheritance would have been in the form of the land of promise which Israel was to possess.[25] However, possession of the land would have come only through obedience to God's commands,[26] which first generation Israelites[27] and Moses failed to accomplish.[28] This resulted in God's wrath (3:11; 4:3).

These are real warnings to real Christians not to disobey and incur God's wrath. That is what makes this and all other warnings within Hebrews so powerful. Hence, the NT warns, commands, and exhorts all Christians to live holy lives[29] (cf. Romans 5–8; 12–14; 1 and 2

---

[25] Deuteronomy 3:18-20; 12:9-10.

[26] Deuteronomy 3:18; 6:1; 28:58-68; 29:14-28.

[27] Numbers 26:2, 65.

[28] Deuteronomy 32:48-52.

[29] BDAG, 721, points to extra-biblical documents of the *Koine* period which mention God's wrath coming on disobedient Christians: "Of the Lord's

Corinthians; Ephesians 4–6; James; 1 Peter; 2 Peter; 1 John; Revelation 2–3). Paul clearly warned the Christians in Eph 5:1-7 to live obediently and not to "partake" of the sins of the "children of disobedience," because this would logically bring upon them the wrath of God.[30] When one commits a sin there will always be a result and a consequence. That is the force of the command and warning.

As in the OT, the "wrath of God" in the NT falls upon the unregenerate and on disobedient believers. Thus, God awaits one's choice—for the unregenerate to believe and for the believer to obey. Thus, to extinguish the wrath of God requires obedience for the regenerate; and for the unregenerate, faith.

C. God's Wrath Distinguished

In order to avoid confusion, it is critical to distinguish the NT categories and nuances of meaning of God's wrath: present, present-eschatological, and strict-eschatological.[31]

First, the present wrath of God should be understood as referring to God's past and present displeasure and His judgment against sin. In 1 Thess 2:16 the verb "has come" (*ephthasen*, aorist indicative) may be understood as describing an event "that is not yet past as though it was already completed."[32] In this passage, God's wrath has presently come upon the Jews.[33]

Second, the present-eschatological wrath of God can be defined as "already-but-not-yet." That is, God's wrath can presently be in effect

---

wrath against renegade Christians, Hv [Hermas, *Visions*] 3. 6. 1. The Lord turns away (divine) indignation from someone . . . Hv 4. 2. 6.—Of the wrath of God's angel of repentance, Hm [Hermas *Mandates*] 12. 4. 1."

[30] R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), 38.

[31] The "present" nuance of God's wrath is His dealing with sin now. The "present-eschatological" nuance of God's wrath comes with a "already-but-not-yet" element. That is, God's wrath can begin to be manifest at the present but awaits a future culmination. Finally, the "strict-eschatological" nuance of God's wrath comes at some future point in time.

[32] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 563, allows for this occurrence to be viewed as a proleptic aorist, however, he believes that this interpretation is "debatable." See Matt 12:28 where this same verb is used with a present force (cf. Rom 9:31; 2 Cor 10:14).

[33] Other passages with a strict-present nuance of God's wrath are Rom 1:18; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4-5.

without necessarily excluding impending future wrath to come.[34] In Eph 5:6, the present tense verb "is coming" (*erchomai*) may be viewed as having a futuristic force, as "an event *begun* in the present time, but completed in the future."[35]

One could argue for the purely eschatological use here. However, contextually, if Paul's present exhortation is to have its full affect in Eph 5:6, present realities with future connotations carry more weight. The bigger context in Ephesians 1–3 emphasizes the present position in Christ, and Ephesians 4–6 emphasizes the present—not future—practice in the Spirit.[36] Thus, the use of wrath in Eph 5:6, when viewed in light of the context of the letter, can reasonably be interpreted in light of the present-eschatological view.[37]

Finally, the third category of wrath in the NT occurs with a strict-eschatological nuance, which has only the future in mind. It does not take into account the present reality, only present change based on future realities. Passages that are used to demonstrate this view are 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9. First Thessalonians 1:10 speaks of "the wrath to come." These words appear together in six verses (Matt 3:7; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10; Rev 6:17; 11:18). "The wrath" points to the future reality of the "coming of the Lord," (1 Thess 3:13) or "coming of our Lord" (4:15; 5:23).

---

[34] Stählin, "*orgē*," in TDNT, 5:430.

[35] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 537, states that futuristic presents are found especially with "verbs of coming, going, etc…"

[36] William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 230, says, "The wrath spoken of here, though in a sense already present, is also ever on the way, until on the day of the great consummation of all things it will fully be revealed." See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1990), 325-26, who, although disagreeing with this position here, says that, "Most commentators allow for both present and future aspects of wrath in 5:5" (Editor's note: It actually occurs in 5:6). He goes on to mention that those who hold an already-but-not-yet wrath position include Abbot, Schlier, Barth, Ernst, Schnackenburg, and Mussner.

[37] Other passages with a present-eschatological nuance of God's wrath are Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7; 23:21; John 3:36; Eph 2:3; Col 3:6. A national judgment is referred to in Luke 3:7; 21:23, see J. H. Thayer, ed., *Thayer's Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 452.

The term "the wrath" usually appears in the Book of Revelation with the article "the" in front of both *orgē* and *thymos*. The only time the article is omitted in Revelation is when it is used of the devil's wrath (Rev 12:12). This is not surprising considering that in every case except one,[38] when *orgē* and *thymos* appear in NT, with men as their executors, it is always without the article.[39]

Perhaps, since the article "the" usually appears with the term "wrath" in Revelation, which culminates God's wrath in history, it should be identified as the article "par excellence" by which all other occurrences are classified.[40] Thus, although "the wrath" to come may influence present behavior, its culmination is strictly future.[41]

D. SUMMARY

Several factors emerge from these observations. First, God's wrath in the NT comes because of sinful practices and not because of a person's position. However, a person's internal state must change (e.g., Rom 3:21–4:25) before external results appear (5–8; 12–15). Second, God's wrath in the NT applies equally to unbelievers as well as sinning believers. Third, when speaking of God's wrath, three different categories appear in the NT: the present aspect, present-eschatological aspect, and the strict-eschatological aspect.

Thus, even in passages that speak of God's future wrath, this writer could not find one single instance where wrath referred unambiguously to eternal punishment. Wherever God's future wrath appears, it can reasonably be argued, given the context, as referring to the time of the

---

[38] Perhaps, the article appears with "wrath" (for the Egyptian Pharaoh's wrath) in Heb 11:27 in order to heighten the effect of what living by faith accomplishes. That is, the meaning here could be that even under the most severe wrath, like no other (hence, the wrath—not just any wrath—is mentioned), people that live by faith can overcome it.

[39] Such passages are the following: Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28; 2 Cor 12:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 2:8; Jas 1:19-20. However, when speaking of the Lamb's wrath in Rev 6:16-17, it comes with the article, "the wrath of the Lamb."

[40] One must take notice that even when the term "of God" (*tou Theou*) does not appear with "wrath" (*orgē*), in Judaism *orgē* stood autonomously as an entity that was understood as God's wrath (Stählin, "*orgē*," in TDNT, 5:423).

[41] Other passages that might well be viewed under the eschatological-future categories are Rev 11:18; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 18:3; 19:15.

tribulation judgment. Whether God's wrath should ever be understood as eternal judgment is highly questionable.[42] Instead, God's wrath should be defined as His temporal displeasure and display of judgment against all human sin, whether performed by unbelievers or sinning believers. This is also true in the Book of Romans.

IV. GOD'S WRATH IN ROMANS

The concept of God's wrath is more conspicuous in Paul's writings than anyone else in the NT.[43] Twenty-one out of the NT's thirty-six uses of *orgē* appear in Paul's thirteen letters. Twelve of these are in Romans (1:18; 2:5 [twice], 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 [twice]; 12:19; 13:4, 5).

It has been said that fifty percent of all solutions lie in acknowledging the problem. The problem one encounters in the commentary tradition of Romans is the common assumption that God's wrath usually means eternal punishment[44] and by default cannot apply to Christians. It is this author's contention that all twelve occurrences of God's wrath in the Book of Romans need reassessment.

---

[42] Others have made this same observation in the NT. See Stählin, "*orgē*," TDNT, 5:423, 433-34. Stählin believes in an OT eternal *orgē*, but says the wrath of God in the NT never "last[s] to eternity." In addition, Zane C. Hodges, "The Message of Romans," *The Kerugma Message* 6 (February 1997), 1, believes "there is not a single NT example of this word [Greek, *orgē*] where it refers unambiguously to the experience of eternal punishment. Every NT instance of God's *orgē* can be understood as a reference to the temporal display of God's displeasure with human sin."

[43] MacGregor, "Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament," 102. Fifty-eight percent of all occurrences of this word appear in Pauline literature.

[44] The prevailing thought in scholarship interprets wrath, with few exceptions, throughout Romans as eternal punishment. See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Revised ed. Black's New Testament Commentary, ed., Henry Chadwick, vol. 6 (London: A & C Black Limited, 1957; reprint, [Peabody]: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 44, 100, 176-77; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 135, 190, 310, 607; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959-65), 171.

A. ROMANS 1:18

This verse clearly teaches that God's wrath (*orgē Theou*) is presently "being revealed" (*apokalyptetai*). Almost universally, all admit the present reality of God's wrath in 1:18.

First, the particle "for" (*gar*) beginning in verse 18 carries a causal sense and refers back to the clause "God's righteousness is revealed" (present tense) in 1:17. Therefore, since God's righteousness is presently being revealed (same tense and verb as in 1:18) this gives support for understanding the phrase "God's wrath is revealed" as something that occurs presently.[45]

Second, an even better reason to understand God's wrath as a present reality comes from the statements: "God also gave them up" (Rom 1:24); "God gave them up" (Rom 1:26); and "God gave them over" (Rom 1:28). God's present wrath is evidenced as He lifts His hand of protection and allows sin to run its course. As in the OT, wrath continues to be poured out upon the unbeliever, forcing him to sink deeper and deeper into the mire of sin. This wrath will continue from today until the "day of wrath" as mentioned in Rom 2:5, 8.

B. ROMANS 2:5, 8

The transition from the first group (1:18-32), who are "without excuse" (1:20, NASB), to the second group (2:1-16), who are also "without excuse" (2:1), is important to note. Just as the first group experiences God's wrath (1:18), contextually the wrath in 2:5, 8 should also be seen as a present reality. In 2:1, the word "therefore" (*dio*) acts as a connector—linking both groups.[46] One, however, should not understand "therefore" to relate primarily to the sins of the Gentiles, which are described in 1:21-32, but to God's wrath in 1:18.[47] It follows

---

[45] Barrett, 33.

[46] Moo, *Romans*, 129, says that if Paul meant to distinguish both of these groups, he would have transitioned "with something like 'in the same manner also.'" See also C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 141, who also admits that "therefore" in 2:1 refers to the whole section 1:18-32.

[47] Moo, *Romans,* 129.

then that "God's wrath" in 1:18 is the same "wrath" which these people are storing up for themselves in 2:5.[48]

Furthermore, the term "wrath" in 2:5 grammatically refers back to "treasuring up," which also points to the present temporal "wrath" mentioned in 1:18.[49] The reason Paul connects the word "wrath" to "treasuring up," which the unregenerate (also see v. 8) are accumulating now, is perhaps because he is looking through an OT paradigm.[50] This includes God's present manifestation of wrath and His future "day of wrath."

Clearly, in verses 5–8, Paul juxtaposes those who obey and receive "eternal life" (which law-claimers would have to do perfectly [not just hear, 2:13]) to those who do not obey and receive "indignation and wrath." Although most commentators assume the terms "the day of wrath" and "indignation and wrath" refer to final judgment, it does not seem to be the case. Instead, "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" may be understood by Paul as Christ's imminent return[51] known as the rapture (1 Thess 4:13–5:11)—not as the

---

[48] Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans*: *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 301, understands "treasuring up wrath" to refer to ongoing present reality culminating at the day of the Lord: "Yet is the same wrath that is revealed from heaven against the heathen (1:18)."

[49] Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959), 34, interprets "wrath" in 2:5 as "treasuring up" which refers to the present experience of wrath in 1:18. Cranfield, *Romans*, 145-46, disagrees with Barth, but still gives a favorable consideration to his view by being consistent with the Greek and is in line with "Paul's thought in general," and has "strong support."

[50] G. L. Borchert, "God's Wrath," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 991, says, "In interpreting Paul, the eschatological nature of God, with its roots in the OT and Judaism, must be recognized."

[51] H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 101, believes that Paul knew a rabbinic tradition that the Messiah's reign would last forty years. Thus, at most, Paul could have looked for the coming of the Lord in his time, or very soon thereafter. See also J. M. Scott, "Restoration of Israel," in DPL, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 804, who says, "Paul probably thought that once the Spanish mission was completed the full number of the Gentiles would be reached," which he probably thought would come in his lifetime.

"Great White Throne Judgment" of Revelation 20. The term "the righteous judgment of God" in Rom 2:5 appears only once in the entire NT. However, a variant occurs in 2 Thess 1:5: "righteous judgment of God." Upon a closer examination of the context of 2 Thess 1:4-9, we discover other terms like "tribulations," "revealed," "flaming fire" [=judgment, cf. Rev 1:14; 2:18], "everlasting," "obey," and "glory" which are all found in Rom 2:5-8. Of course, 2 Thess 1:4-9 refers to Rev 19:11-16 which is part of "that day," "the day of wrath," and "the day of the Lord."

In 2:5 Paul refers to "the day of wrath" (*en hēmera orgēs*), also known as "the day of the Lord," which is located in the seven-year tribulation period when God will judge the world.[52] Numerous passages point to this coming day (Isa 2:12; 13:6, 9; 24:21; Jer 24:21; Joel 2–3; Ezek 7:7; Zeph 1:7, 14-15, 18; 2:3; Mal 3:2; 4:1; possibly Rom 9:22; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). It will culminate at the tribulation with "indignation and wrath" (=*orgē kai thymos,* 2:8). This phrase is used three times by John in Rev 14:10; 16:19; 19:15 and it refers to God's judgment in the tribulation.

Romans 2:8 further strengthens the idea that Paul is referring to the tribulation period by his use of "indignation and wrath."[53] Although the LXX uses the combination of *orgē kai thymos* in a general sense for God's anger (Deut 29:22; Ps 68:25; Isa 10:5), it also uses this same combination to refer to the day of the LORD (Isa 13:9; 30:30; Jer 7:20; 21:5).[54]

For Paul, Christ's imminent return provides a way out of the day of wrath (1 Thess 4:13–5:11) for the regenerate. In turn, for the unregenerate, the rapture means that the "day of wrath" (cf. 1 Thess 5:1-3) has merely begun. God's wrath in Rom 2:5, 8 is addressed to the moralist who thinks he can earn eternal life through the law. Impossible (3:20)! Therefore, for the unbeliever to continue on that course will only accumulate present wrath and will culminate in the ultimate day of wrath

---

[52] David R. Anderson, "The National Repentance of Israel," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1998): 23, understands that: "Rom 2:5 may look like eternal judgment at first blush." Instead, it belongs to the "wrath to come in the Tribulation period."

[53] The two other places where he uses *orgē kai* (and) *thymos* together refer to human beings (Eph 4:31; Col 3:8) not God.

[54] Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 302.

known as the tribulation judgment. The unregenerate Jews experienced a foreshadowing of this future day of wrath when thousands died in Rome (A.D. 64) and in Jerusalem (A.D. 70).

C. ROMANS 3:5

In typical fashion, Paul uses an imaginary objector in Rom 3:5. The objector supposes that if sin demonstrates God's righteousness and glory, "to inflict wrath" upon them would be unjust. Man's unrighteousness merely shows God's righteous character and basis to be their Judge. Wrath here takes on the form of present punishment for the following reasons (cf. 1:18; 2:5). Here "the wrath" (*tēn orgēn*) refers back to God's wrath of 1:18.[55] The Greek article in front of wrath is an article of previous reference.[56] It points back to the present wrath that began the argument of the book. This wrath is part of the present problem within the bigger context of 1:18–3:20, which culminates in the present solution found in 3:21–4:25. Thus, contextually, this wrath must have a present nuance.

Furthermore, since "the wrath" refers back to God's present wrath in 1:18, the term "inflict" (*ho epipherōn*, present tense) has a present force that could be translated "bringing His wrath" (NIV).[57] The meaning then

---

[55] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1988), 135, says, "The *orgē* is primarily eschatological (v 6), but includes the 'wrath' already being displayed—*epiphēeron,* present tense."

[56] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 217-20.

[57] J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistle of St. Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 266, interprets the verb "to judge" (=*krinei*, present tense) as the NIV translators do "how could God judge the world." Lightfoot says, "It is perhaps best here (as in 2:16) to read the present rather than the future [will judge=] (*krinei*)…The judgment alluded to is going on day by day." Certainly, in one sense a present "judgment" is occurring demonstrated by the linking of the present wrath to God's wrath of 1:18. However, present wrath need not imply a present judgment. Instead, Paul means to say that God's present infliction of wrath causes the objector to unfairly accuse Him. If so, then how can he hold simultaneous ideas of a future just Judge who is presently unjust because He inflicts wrath? It is impossible. Contra Morris, God's character is the point in question, which is inferred by the fact that wrath is being presently inflicted.

in vv. 5-6 is this: God's righteous character (v. 4) gives Him the right, now, to inflict wrath on sinners and thereby receive glory by showing His justice which proves His holy character. Thus, God is just. Otherwise, as Jews know,[58] how will He judge the world (vv. 5-6)? God is the Judge and is serious about sin. Those who do not come to Him on His terms—through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone—abide in His present wrath. This is something we need to be reminded of, since it seems to have evaded our "no fear" generation.

D. ROMANS 4:15

In 4:15, the phrase "because the law brings wrath" should be taken negatively, even though Paul states that the law in itself is "holy," "just," and "good" in 7:12. However, if one tries to use the law to earn God's righteousness, which Paul's Jewish contemporaries believed that they could do (2:1–3:20),[59] then the law will result in wrath. Contextually, the idea from vv. 13-16 shows that the promise Abraham believed—coming by grace through a faith-type-righteousness—could not have been achieved through the law. Paul refers to the negative affects that the law brings in contrast to the promise of a faith-based-righteousness. Of course, Christians "are not under law but under grace," which comes by faith and promise (Rom 4:13, 16; 6:14). But to those who are not under grace, the law is continually at work and wrath continues to be upon them (1:18–3:20).

Furthermore, the principle of law-keeping for believers will also result in a death experience and wrath.[60] Hence, *katergazetai* (to work or bring) appears in Romans six times within 7:8-20 (8, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20)

---

[58] God's future judgment of the world was a common Jewish belief (Isa 66:16; Joel 3:12; Pss 94:2; 96:13. See Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 328.

[59] Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 235, acknowledges that Paul's "Jewish contemporaries would prefer to say 'the law brings righteousness.'" However, "Paul has argued resolutely that righteousness comes through faith." Contra Dunn, Moo, *Romans*, 277, believes Paul's point here is to explain how wrath, while existing before the Mosaic Law, intensified when the Mosaic Law appeared because people were now accountable to a written code. Thus, the promise cannot come to Abraham's seed (Jews) through the Mosaic Law since the law intensified wrath not righteousness.

[60] Brice L. Martin, "Paul on Christ in the Law," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1983): 274, understands that to live by the Law "is fatal" (cf. Rom 6:14-15; 7:6; Gal 5:18).

and five times elsewhere (1:27; 2:9; 4:15; 5:3; 15:18). Strikingly, it appears in the section where Paul makes the contrast between "the commandment" (cf. 7:8, 9, 10, 11, i.e., "the law" as well, cf. 7:16, 22, 25) and "the law of sin which is in his members" (cf. 7:21, 23). This suggests that even though Paul was under grace, if he attempted to carry out the law, it would result in a death experience (cf. 7:7-25). The word *katergazetai* appears in the present tense, and is used throughout the book with a present reality (except twice, 7:8; 15:8, aorist tense) referring to the wrath which began in 1:18.[61] This wrath must be a present reality because when one observes the law, he does so in the present. Thus, the outcome must by necessity be present as the context indicates.

E. ROMANS 5:9

Commentators almost universally interpret the phrase "the wrath" found in 5:9 as eternal judgment.[62] Therefore, this view understands salvation—which is directly linked to wrath here—in the sense of justification before God. However, this interpretation of wrath raises several concerns.

First, the phrase "saved from wrath *through Him*" in 5:9 and "*by His life*" in 5:10 are parallel phrases which demonstrate the concept of "life" (italics added). Contextually the word "life" appears overwhelmingly more in sections that deal with the present experience of life (Romans 5–8; 12–15) than in sections that deal with eternal life (Romans 1–4).[63] Paul intentionally uses "life" or "live" in an experiential manner (Rom 6:2, 11, 13; 7:1, 2, 3; 8:12-13).

Second, Paul also uses the "death-life" motif together in eight verses (chapters 5 and 8) where the contrast is between experiential life and experiential death. The word death (*thanatos*) appears only once in the

---

[61] Dunn, *Romans*, 214. Dunn says Paul's answer to the law problem and humanity "is to link Torah with God's wrath rather than with the promise—the tense implying that Paul had in mind the outworking of God's *orgē* in 1:18-32 rather than His final judgment as in 2:5, 8."

[62] Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 138; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 268; Cranfield, *Romans*, 266; Murray, *Romans*, 1:171; Moo, *Romans*, 310.

[63] For a detailed analysis see René A. Lopez, "An Exposition of SOTERIA and SOZO by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 45-46. The noun "life" and verb "live" appear three-times from 1–4 and twenty-five times from 5–8.

first four chapters (1:32), twenty-four times in chapters 5–8, and never in chapters 9–16.

Third, Paul does not use *sōzō* (save) or *sōtēria* (salvation) in the justification section of Romans (3:21–4:25). Unfortunately, this has gone relatively unnoticed. [64] Instead, Paul uses the word *dikaioō* (justified) to connote judicial acquittal in Romans.[65] To say that "saved from wrath" means deliverance from future eternal judgment would be redundant since this was expounded to the fullest extent in 3:21–4:25.

Deliverance from "the wrath" (*tēs orgēs*) in 5:9 refers to the temporal wrath of God (*orgē Theou*) that began the argument of the book in 1:18; this wrath is against the dominion and condition of sin.[66] This view understands wrath as something Christians can still experience post-justification (cf. 13:4-5). Therefore, deliverance from the power and experience of sin comes "through Him…by His life" (i.e., living the resurrection-life of Christ found in the following section concerning sanctification, Romans 6–8).

F. ROMANS 9:22

In 9:22, the word "wrath" appears twice, "What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction." This verse has produced much speculation. Again, "His wrath" (*tēn orgēn*) refers to God's wrath in 1:18, since the article is one of previous reference.

Moo sees the "destruction" of these "vessels of wrath" as eternal.[67] The bigger context here could support Moo's idea. In 9:1-13, Paul presents Israel's rejection of the promise. Then in 9:14-33, Paul gives the reason for Israel's present state. In 9:14-17, Paul shows God's sovereign right to do as He pleases. No one has a claim on Him and His mercy (vv 15-16). Thus, it follows that in 9:17-33, Paul shows God's sovereign right to exercise both His wrath and His mercy.

---

[64] John F. Hart, "Why Confess Christ? The Use and Abuse of Romans 10:9-10," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1999): 17, notes: "An observation that is rarely detected is that Paul has deliberately avoided using 'salvation' (*sōtēria*) and 'save' (*sōzō*) in his entire discussion about justification by faith in 3:21–4:25!"

[65] Lopez, "SOTERIA and SOZO in Romans," 43.

[66] Zane C. Hodges, *Problem Passages in the Greek New Testament* cassette CP 1560 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974).

[67] Moo, *Romans*, 607.

In v. 22, Paul uses the verb "to show" (*endeiknymi*) when referring to His wrath. He uses the same verb earlier in v. 17 to demonstrate the purpose of His wrath, namely to show His power. God presently endured Pharaoh (a vessel of wrath) so that He could demonstrate His power through the ten plagues of Egypt. It follows then, that God presently endures the "vessels of wrath" for the purpose of manifesting His glory through the "vessels of mercy" (9:23). Logic dictates that the term "vessels of wrath" in 9:22 refers to present wrath, because the parallel term in 9:23 "vessels of mercy" must be a present occurrence, since God wants "to make known ['to show', vv. 17, 22] the riches of His glory to the vessels of mercy" in the present.

Some may interpret "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" as wrath that leads to eternal destruction since it parallels the phrase "prepared beforehand for glory" in 9:23. In Romans, most of Paul's uses of "glory" underscore man's final destiny (2:7, 10; 5:2; 8:18, 21, 28-30).[68] Hence, if the term "glory" refers to man's blissful eternal destiny, it follows then that the parallel term "destruction" refers to man's horrific eternal destiny.

However, even if the meaning of the expression "for destruction" (9:22), parallel to the expression "for glory," encompasses a temporal as well as eternal scope (which seems to be the case here),[69] it does not logically prove that wrath is eternal, since "destruction" is the result of wrath. Thus, this destruction is not equal to wrath, but is the final outcome of it. That is, wrath is what draws God's judgment, while destruction is the outcome of the final judgment. To interpret the cause (wrath) as equal to the final effect (destruction) results in merging two related but distinct concepts.

G. ROMANS 12:19

From 12:17–13:8, the context is mainly concerned with Christians not taking matters into their own hands. Verse 17 makes this point by stating, "Repay no one evil for evil." The idea is one of retaliation. The reason we should not repay evil for evil is because it is God's job. God repays.

---

[68] For a detailed analysis see Lopez, "SOTERIA and SOZO in Romans," 76-77.

[69] One can argue that both "glory" (4:20; 5:2; 15:17) and "destruction" (3:16; 14:15, 20) encompass a present–temporal element in Romans.

Paul begins v. 19 with "Beloved." He gently—but firmly—exhorts them "not to avenge" themselves, but rather to "give place" (*dote topon*), or turn over, their revenge to God's wrath. The two other places in the NT where the expression "give place" appears has someone else as its executor (Luke 14:9; Eph 4:27). The idea here would then mean to "make room for the wrath of God."[70] Hence, Paul quotes from Deut 32:35 to make his point, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." The context of Deut 32:35 refers to the repayment of Israel's enemies by God at a point in time. Thus, it is temporal wrath. Furthermore, the expression "the wrath" has the article of previous reference pointing to God's temporal wrath in 1:18.[71]

The government may well be the executor of this wrath (13:4-5). The subject matter certainly extends to 13:8. This temporal wrath can presently come directly from God or indirectly through the civil government (cf. 13:4-5).[72]

H. ROMANS 13:4-5

Both occurrences of "wrath" in 13:4-5 refer to the temporal punishment inflicted by "God's ministers," (i.e., the government through whom God works indirectly). The present context flows from 12:17, "Repay no one evil for evil." The Christian must depend on God's wrath to repay evil (v. 19). On the contrary, believers must repay evil with good (v. 21). Therefore, as Dunn correctly acknowledges, vv. 1-4 "serve as the thesis which [Paul] elaborates and repeats for emphasis in verse 5."[73] Thus, the wrath in 13:5 is not only temporal, but has Christians in mind. The Christian is the "you," which is connected with the following phrase: "Therefore, *you* must be subject not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake" (cf. Jas 5:20; 1 John 5:15-16, both of which refer to Christians experiencing wrath).

---

[70] Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:646.

[71] Morris, *Romans*, 454, interprets this also as temporal wrath.

[72] Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 749.

[73] Ibid., 759. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 224, acknowledges the contextual connection from 12:17–13:5.

V. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, God's grace and wrath are equally important. In the OT, God's temporal wrath fell upon unbelievers and believers. Under the New Covenant, unbelievers and disobedient believers continue to experience God's temporal wrath.

May we that labor for the grace message not develop a false sense of security concerning the experience of God's wrath, as Tasker aptly asserts,

> The New Testament is very far, however, from asserting that the Christian is automatically, as it were, removed from any manifestation of divine anger. The burden of its message is that the justified sinner must become the sanctified sinner. He is called to abide in the divine love. The essential difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that, while the latter, whether he realizes it or not, is inevitably subject to God's wrath, the believer, by continual submission to the Holy Spirit, remains under grace, and so escapes that wrath. Paul was much concerned to warn the Christian of the danger of being deluded by a false sense of security.[74]

God's wrath does not discriminate when it comes to sin. Wrath is as much of a reality for believers as it is for unbelievers.

---

[74] Tasker, *The Wrath of God*, 38.

GRACE IN THE ARTS:

G. K. CHESTERTON: THE THEOLOGY OF PHILIP YANCEY'S FAVORITE WRITER

JAMES A. TOWNSEND
Elgin, Illinois

A 1950s cowboy comic book advertised on its front cover that sidekick Andy Devine was "the master of mirth and of girth; that's why he's the rage of the sage." Although G. K. Chesterton was once photographed with several of his cronies dressed in full Western get-up, he could hardly be denominated "the rage of the sage." However, that other line of the preceding advertising could be readily reapplied, for Chesterton was unquestionably "the master of mirth and of girth."

Evangelical Protestants are most likely to have read some of Chesterton's quips, courtesy of the British intellectual C. S. Lewis or the popular evangelical author Philip Yancey, with whom G. K. Chesterton is a favorite. In fact, Yancey calls Chesterton "The 'Ample' Man Who Saved My Faith."[1] Therefore, it seems appropriate to ask about the faith of the one who saved Yancey's faith.

I. INTRODUCTION

G. K. Chesterton (hereafter mostly referred to as GKC) was often remembered for his wit and his weight. He was weighty in a dual sense of the word, for GKC was a heavyweight in the Jude 3, combative-for-Christianity sense of the term. One biographer-friend called him "the

[1] Philip Yancey, "The 'Ample' Man Who Saved My Faith," *Christianity Today* (September 2001): 66-72.

greatest man of the age."[2] Sir Laurence of Arabia reported that George Bernard Shaw (GKC's frequent sparring partner in public debates) called him "a man of colossal genius."[3] Etienne Gilson, the foremost twentieth century authority on St. Thomas [Aquinas] commented ruefully on Chesterton's [book] *St. Thomas:* "I consider it as being without possible comparison the best book ever written on St. Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement."[4]

GKC was prolific in publication, penning seven books in 1926, six in 1927, and six in 1929. He authored around 4,000 essays and 100 books, including volumes of poetry and plays. He may be most remembered as the author of a mystery series starring the Roman Catholic priest-as-detective, Father Brown (a somewhat Columbo-like underplayed mystery solver).

C. S. Lewis once spoke of wit as "that sort of mental agility or gymnastic which uses language as the principal equipment of its gymnasium."[5] GKC's quotable quips could easily constitute a separate volume. For example, he spotted a peacock with its "tail, that trailing tapestry of eyes" like the "monsters of the Apocalypse whose eyes were multiplied like their wings."[6] On another occasion he viewed a house as "a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, [and] a chair [as] an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two."[7] He once capered: "A yawn may be defined as a silent yell."[8] He quipped: "An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered."[9] Or, said Chesterton, "Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it."[10] He

---

[2] Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), 267.

[3] Ibid., 367.

[4] Laurence Clipper, *G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 110-11.

[5] C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 97.

[6] Ward, *Chesterton*, 249.

[7] G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd, 1902), 69.

[8] G. K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 47.

[9] G. K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1908), 36.

[10] Ibid., 266.

called nonsense "a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth."[11]

C. S. Lewis was once labeled a "paradox-monger."[12] But GKC (before Lewis) was the acknowledged prince of paradox. Even the later famed mystery writer Dick Francis commented obliquely: "Horses appear to be as full of paradoxes as G. K. Chesterton."[13] An example of GKC's paradox-making is: "Its faith was doubtful, but its doubt was faithful."[14] Elsewhere he noted that skepticism "implies a dogma of hopelessness and definite belief in unbelief."[15]

In Chesterton the intellect and imagination were but two sides of his Janus face. He argued: "A man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword."[16]

The man of so much width and wit had a strong sense of world-wonder and earth enjoyment. One may assume that GKC was asserting himself autobiographically when his character Adam Wayne declared (in 1904): "He was…one of those who live on the border of fairyland. But he was perhaps the first to realize how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city."[17] His close friend and biographer was to say that GKC might "use the word 'jolly' more than forty times a day."[18] "I can't help enjoying enjoyment," said his character Christabel Carstairs.[19] Reflecting on the *inkiness* of a certain ink, GKC penned: "I do not think there is anyone who takes quite such a fierce pleasure in things being themselves as I do."[20] In fact, GKC claimed that "joy is a far

---

[11] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 64.

[12] Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), ix.

[13] Dick Francis, *Dead Cert* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1962), 52.

[14] Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (New York: Rand, McNally & Co., nd), 13.

[15] Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 70.

[16] G. K. Chesterton, *Twelve Types* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1902), 125.

[17] G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 68.

[18] Ward, *Chesterton*, 379.

[19] G. K. Chesterton, *The Wisdom of Father Brown in The Father Brown Omnibus* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1951), 213.

[20] Ward, *Chesterton*, 567.

more elusive and elvish matter, since it is our reason for existing…"[21] Because GKC had a heavyweight intellect and a humorous imagination, all preachers should read him with a set of 3 by 5 index cards close at hand for filing purposes.

II. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

GKC's wry wit emerges in the very first sentence of his auto-biography:

> Bowing down in blind credulity…before mere authority and…superstitiously swallowing a story I could not test at the time by experiment…I am firmly of opinion that I was born on the 29th of May, 1874…and baptized according to the formularies of the Church of England in little church of St. George…[22]

Of his early religious upbringing GKC wrote: "As a fact my family, having become Liberal, was no longer Protestant. I was brought up a sort of Universalist and Unitarian" where "the Universalist did not believe in hell" and "heaven was a happy state of mind."[23] GKC was taken to hear Rev. Stopford Brooke preaching the "New Theology" of liberalism.[24] Brooke had left the Church of England when GKC was six years old. At age 12 GKC had gone to the same school as John Milton had, namely, St. Paul's school. His future was foreshadowed when he joined the Junior Debating Club, consisting of numerous brilliant boys who went on to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. His college years (1892-1895) were spent at Slade School of Art while he also sat in on lectures in English literature at the University of London. Chesterton analyzed himself: "I was a pagan at the age of twelve, and a complete agnostic by the age of sixteen…"[25] His father had imbibed the liberal-universalist

---

[21] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 124.

[22] G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), 1.

[23] G. K. Chesterton, *The Thing* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929), 74.

[24] Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 12.

[25] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 1994), 122-23.

teaching, and his mother was an agnostic.[26] When GKC reflected back on his views at age seventeen, he stated: "all that time I had not even thought of Christian theology."[27] Apparently GKC was churchless during the early 1900s.

In a poem GKC had published in 1900 he wrote of "an empty throne" and "angels dead," yet he penned in one stanza:

> "I am," [man] says his bankrupt creed;
> "I am," and is again a clod:
> The sparrows start, the grasses stir,
> For he has said the name of God.[28]

Judging from line three immediately above, natural revelation seemed to be nudging at him, and by 1901 in *The Defendant,* GKC was speaking in positive terms about Christianity.[29]

His in-family debating partner—his brother Cecil—converted from the Anglo-Catholic stance to the Roman Catholic Church in 1912. It was GKC's wife-to-be, Frances, who converted Gilbert (GKC) "from what he calls the Higher Unitarianism to the most…rational kind of Anglicanism –Tractarian more than Ritualistic. She was educated by the [Anglican] nuns of Clewer [where she'd been brought up]."[30] Literary analyst Laurence Clipper claimed: "If one wishes to date the beginning of Chesterton's commitment to religion…it is safest to point to 1908, the year of both *Orthodoxy* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*."[31]

In 1904 GKC met the Roman Catholic priest who would later become the model for his Father Brown mystery series. He was Father John O'Connor who would pen his own biographical memories of GKC under the title of *Father Brown on Chesterton.* (O'Connor ended his religious career as "a Monsignor and Privy Chamberlain to Pope Pius

---

[26] Ward, *Chesterton*, 632.

[27] Ibid., 211.

[28] G. K. Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), 15.

[29] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 158.

[30] John O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1937), 28.

[31] Clipper, *Chesterton*, 129.

XI."[32]) O'Connor recorded a memorable moment in his recollections as follows:

> In 1912 GKC "interrupted me…by telling me he had made up his mind to be received into the [Catholic] Church and was only waiting for Frances to come with him, as she had led him into the Anglican Church out of Unitarianism. 'Because I think I have known intimately by now all the best kinds of Anglicanism, and I find them only a pale imitation [of Catholicism].'"[33]

To the correspondent of the *Toronto Daily Star* GKC wrote: "The change I have made is from being an Anglo-Catholic to being a Roman Catholic. I have always believed, at least for twenty years in the Catholic view of Christianity."[34]

Those readers who are dyed-in-the wool Protestants are baffled at such a transition, wondering, "How can a thinking person shift to a church which has a less-than-biblical view of salvation?" Partly, such a shift is explained by the doctrinal values of Anglicanism and Catholicism *at that time.* Chesterton's was a period in religious history when many of the principal voices in the Church of England had become liberal (on the Bible, Christ, evolution, etc.), so by comparison, the Roman Catholic Church seemed the more conservative of the two churches. In other words, Anglicanism was then moving toward the liberalism of the churches of his early years. GKC declared: "I had a strong intellectual contempt for Modernism, even before I really believed in Catholicism."[35]

GKC asserted: "I grew up in a world in which the Protestants, who had just proved that Rome did not believe the Bible, were excitedly discovering that they did not believe the Bible themselves."[36] Consequently GKC could blast out against "Arian and Pelagian demagogues like Dean [William] Inge [of St. Paul's Cathedral] and Dr. Barnes [bishop of Birmingham]."[37] Therefore, GKC labeled "the

---

[32] Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 93.

[33] O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 85.

[34] Ibid., 139.

[35] Chesterton, *The Thing*, 211.

[36] G. K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), 29.

[37] G. K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows* (New York: Sheed and Ward, n.d.), 19.

Modernist Movement" as carrying "the stink of decaying Christianity."[38] Thus, the liberalism of the leading lights in Anglicanism drove Chesterton into the fold of dogmatic Catholicism.

Of course, GKC was also rather dogmatic about drinking (being against teetotalism), which certainly would incline him toward Catholicism rather than toward any dissenters. His weight (more than some college football linemen at over 300 pounds) and his wine-drinking undoubtedly contributed to the three-to-six month critical illness during 1914-15 when he was in semi-consciousness for part of that time. (He was also a virtual cigar chain-smoker.)[39] His Catholic brother Cecil's death in 1918 and his trip to Palestine and Rome in 1919 also nudged him toward Catholicism.

In 1920 GKC was at Mrs. Wilfred Ward's home in Rome where he conversed with Lord Hugh Cecil. GKC concluded:

> The strongest impression I received was that he was a Protestant. I was myself still a thousand miles from being a Catholic, but I think it was the perfect…Protestantism of Lord Hugh that fully revealed to me that I was no longer a Protestant.[40]

GKC's friend Maisie Ward indicated: "You can certainly search [the] pages [of GKC's autobiography] in vain for any account of the process of his conversion; for that you must look elsewhere; in the poems to Our Lady, in *The Catholic Church and Conversion,* in *The Well and the Shallows,* etc.[41] Maurice Baring and Father Ronald Knox (the Bible translator) were among the most ardent supporters of GKC's eventual entry into Catholicism. Maisie Ward, Chesterton's Catholic biographer, seems to presume a real conversion prior to GKC's entry to Catholicism when she wrote: "The profound joy of his early conversion to Christianity was linked with Anglicanism…"[42] GKC obviously lingered, hoping his wife would join him in becoming a Roman Catholic. Frances wrote in 1922 to Father O'Connor: "I should be only too glad to come with him [to Roman Catholicism] if God in His mercy would show the

---

[38] Ibid., 211, 232.
[39] Ward, *Chesterton*, 494.
[40] Ibid., 445.
[41] Ibid., 453.
[42] Ibid., 455.

way clear, but up to now He has not made it clear enough to me to justify such a step."[43]

On July 30, 1922, Chesterton entered "the Kingdom of Heaven with the formalities of the Kingdom" according to his priest-friend.[44] "The ceremony took place in a kind of shed with corrugated iron roof and wooden walls…for at this time Beaconsfield had no Catholic Church. Father Ignatius Rice, O. S. B…came over from the Abbey at Douai" to help out.[45] GKC said confession. Frances wept. He wrote a sonnet that day on his conversion. "Father Walker, who prepared him for his first Communion wrote…that he was perfectly well aware of the Real Presence [of Christ]…gathered from the fact that he was covered with perspiration when he actually received Our Lord."[46] Chesterton declared it the happiest hour of his life. Oddly, GKC did not often go to Confession, though when he was asked why he'd converted, he responded, "For my sins."[47] Finally on June 12, 1936, GKC was anointed, received his last Communion and died. "Father Vincent McNabb sang the Salve Regina at his bedside."[48] On the 27th Father John O'Connor sang the Requiem Mass for GKC at Westminster Cathedral.

III. His Basic Beliefs

A. The Bible

"I [am]…an orthodox Christian," GKC wrote in 1910, a dozen years before becoming a Catholic.[49] Thus he began "to dance and sing in the glorious Carnival of theology."[50] For a launching pad GKC observed: "Every religion and every philosophy must…be based on the assumption of the authority or the accuracy of something."[51] Naturally we want to know his convictions about the locus of that authority.

---

[43] Ibid., 464.
[44] O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 147.
[45] Ward, *Chesterton*, 465.
[46] Ibid, 625.
[47] Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 232.
[48] O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 151.
[49] G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910), 13.
[50] Chesterton, *G. F. Watts*, 75.
[51] Ibid., 43.

As a Protestant in 1902, GKC stated:

> Protestant Christianity believes that there is a Divine record in a book; that everyone ought to have free access to that book; that everyone who gets hold of it can save his soul by it… Catholic Christianity believes that there is a divine army… upon earth called the Church, that all [people] should be induced to join it; that any[one] who joins it can save his soul without ever opening any of the old books of the Church at all. The Bible is only one of the institutions of Catholicism, like its rites or its priesthood. It thinks the Bible only efficient when taken as part of the [Catholic] Church.[52]

Protestants should find nothing objectionable in his first sentence, assuming that in the phrase "by it" he means "by its proper use." GKC views the Bible as the means of salvation for a Protestant, but as "only one of the institutions of Catholicism" and "the Bible [is] only efficient when taken as part of the [Catholic] Church." Any convinced Protestant can say "right on!" to GKC's early assessment of the major difference between the two groups concerning the locus of authority. Amazingly he can write that anyone who joins the Catholic faith "can save his soul without ever opening any one of the old books of the Church at all." A Protestant can certainly agree with the pre-Catholic Chesterton that this is precisely one major problem Protestants have with Roman Catholicism. Indeed, Roman Catholic scholar William Smith could remark at the 2002 Conference on Roman Catholics and Evangelicals at Wheaton College that he'd never seen a Catholic *ever* in his life bringing a Bible to his own local Catholic Church! In 1906 GKC was to write that "Catholics can live in a tradition of Christianity without having looked at the New Testament."[53]

Later GKC could write with tongue-in-cheek of the liberal Anglican Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral as promoting a "Bible, with all its inexhaustible supply of errors and inconsistencies."[54] Therefore, one might conclude that GKC held to an errorless Bible.

Chesterton was unquestionably biblically literate. Even in his first book of published poems he obviously knew Habakkuk 2:2 and devoted

---

[52] Ward, *Chesterton*, 290.

[53] G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men* (New York: The Press of the Readers Club, 1942), 74.

[54] Ibid., 505.

a poem to the battle at Gibeon in Joshua 10. Much later he could refer to his Jerusalem tour guide as "a Roman Catholic…but in a far cry from deserving the charge of not knowing the Bible."[55] Though the remark was made prior to his conversion to Catholicism, it still shows that as of 1919 GKC still viewed (from the above exception) the average Catholic as essentially biblically illiterate.

In one of his later, most Catholic of defenses, GKC indicated that the Catholic Church "sweeps the whole world with one encyclopedic cyclone of uniformity…so wedded is it to its fixed idea that its own word is the Word of God."[56] No longer is the Bible seen as the sole source of the Christian's authority, for it is placed within the interpretive, official voice of the Catholic Church. In the same volume GKC remarks with sarcasm that "Protestants are famous for the close and passionate study of the Scriptures, unhindered by pope or priest…"[57] To such a remark, Bible-based Christians simply want to say—without the sarcasm—"Amen!"

In one of his outbursts against the Reformation, GKC speaks of the irony of early Protestants running into a Catholic cathedral,

> Overturning the altar and driving out the priest, finding there certain sacred volumes inscribed "Psalms" or "Gospels"; and (instead of throwing them on the fire with the rest) [the Reformer] began to use them as infallible oracles rebuking all the other [church] arrangements. If the sacred high altar was all very wrong, why were the secondary sacred documents necessarily all right? If the priest had faked his sacrament, why could he not have faked his Scriptures?[58]

This is a telltale statement about the position Chesterton eventually adopted concerning Scriptures when he (for the sake of argument) calls them "the secondary sacred documents." This is precisely the problem a Protestant has with Catholicism: the Bible becomes "secondary." Yes, says the Protestant, in the Bible we have "infallible oracles" by which all else in the religious realm must be measured or evaluated.

---

[55] G. K. Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, n.d.), 65.

[56] Chesterton, *The Thing*, 79.

[57] Ibid., 70.

[58] Ibid., 29.

In 1935 the Catholic Chesterton owned that "real Protestants believe [the Bible] infallible…"[59] In the same book GKC observed that "it was the literal inspiration and inerrancy of the…Scriptures" that Protestantism in the 1800s believed.[60] Then he wrote that that view still lingers in provincial corners and is called fundamentalism, strongly suggesting that he did not then subscribe to the fundamentalist version of Scripture. He had shifted from an infallible Bible to an infallible Church.

B. GOD

Laurence Clipper averred that "Chesterton deplores the simplistic thinking of the Moslem mind, which ignores the profound implications of the Incarnation and the Trinity…"[61] In short, GKC held the standard view of God, so we will not spend extensive time on this point.

GKC affirmed: "God is God, Maker of all things visible and invisible."[62] Furthermore, he could affirm: "The most incredible thing about miracles is that they do happen."[63]

GKC offered many pro-creation and anti-Darwinian statements. For example, he said: "the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection was a hypothesis; and it is still only a hypothesis."[64] Elsewhere he argued: "If evolution destroys anything, it does not destroy religion but rationalism."[65] He grants that if it simply means that an ape eventually becomes a human, "then it is stingless for the most orthodox; for a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly…"[66] This last assertion seems to allow for theistic evolution (similar to C. S. Lewis's later statements).

C. SUPERNATURAL SPIRITS

GKC aligned himself generally with orthodox views on angels, Satan, demons, and spiritism. Even in a 1900 poem he penned:

---

[59] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 198.
[60] Ibid., 183.
[61] Clipper, *Chesterton*, 92-93.
[62] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 174.
[63] G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Mattituck, NY: The American Reprint Co., 1910), 24.
[64] G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1936), 142.
[65] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 42.
[66] Ibid., 43.

> God Almighty and with Him
> Cherubim and Seraphim,
> Filling all eternity—
> Adonai Elohim.[67]

Elsewhere he asserted: "I do believe in angels, and incidentally fallen angels."[68] "I believe in the devil," announced Father Brown,[69] echoing his creator, for GKC's biographer acknowledged that "Chesterton believed in…the devil…"[70] Poetically in 1900 GKC wrote of Satan:

> He was but an angel ere he fell,
> But I—before I fell—I was a man.[71]

In the sphere of supernatural spirits, one unusual entry may be noted—and it is initiated by GKC's priest-friend, the prototype for "Father Brown." Father O'Connor remembered:

> I had kept [GKC] up too long [one night] with enlarging on the place of St. Michael the Archangel in the scheme of things…Michael was the first creature to resist temptation [of Satan's rebellion], to resist it…once for all. So he watches over all undoings of [that] disaster, especially the Passion. That is why I feel sure that he is the angel…who rolled away the stone, since the Resurrection is the Challenge Miracle…[72]

Speculative, though not heretical.

The creator of Sherlock Holmes authored six books on spiritualism and séances. GKC commented on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's spiritualism: "I doubt if anything but a devil from hell would say that all things are aspects of purity and peace."[73] "All evil has one origin," enunciated Father Brown.[74]

---

[67] Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 64.

[68] G. K. Chesterton, *William Blake* (London: Duckworth and Co., n.d.), 97.

[69] G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown in The Father Brown Omnibus* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1932), 379.

[70] Ward, *Chesterton*, 370.

[71] Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 127.

[72] O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 135.

[73] G. K. Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (New York: John Lane Co., 1912), 161.

[74] Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown,* 376.

D. HUMANITY

Even in George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman,* GKC referred to one shining moment in Shaw's characters which revealed "at that moment the splendor of the God who made them and of the image of God who wrote their story."[75] Elsewhere he wrote that "every man … is shaped in the image of Heaven."[76] The "basis for democracy," asserted GKC, lies "in a dogma about the origin of man."[77] GKC referred (through his fictional character) to "the good priest and the good atheist,"[78] demonstrating that the image of God is still retained even in the God-denier.

Absolutely pivotal to all GKC's philosophy is his doctrine of free will, which causes him to speak with great intensity and extent about the horribleness of Calvinism and Puritanism. (He probably uses these two *isms* for a punching bag more than any other of the ideas he eschews.) In contrast to Calvinism, the Chestertonian Catholic "accepted the ultimate arbitration which reconciled free will and grace, and did not exclude either."[79] GKC claimed: "The Catholic Church believed that man and God both had a sort of spiritual freedom. Calvinism took away the freedom from man, but left it to God."[80] Similarly he said: "A Calvinist is…obsessed with the Catholic idea of the sovereignty of God," so he "wishes particular people to be damned…"[81] Nothing could be simpler, GKC opined, than what Calvinism says: "men go to Hell because God made them on purpose to send them to Hell."[82] Thus, Calvin's God became demonic according to GKC. Consequently GKC concluded:

> Of the idea of Predestination there are broadly two views: the Calvinist and the Catholic…It is the difference between believing that God knows…that I choose to go the devil; and

---

[75] Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 208.
[76] Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 47.
[77] Ward, *Chesterton*, 572.
[78] Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 37.
[79] G. K. Chesterton, *Chaucer* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1932), 257-58.
[80] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 192-93.
[81] Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, 80.
[82] Chesterton, *Chaucer,* 294-95.

> believing that God has given me to the devil, without my having any choice at all.[83]

As a result, poet William Cowper was "driven mad by…the ugly and inalienable logic of predestination" which is "hideous necessitarianism."[84] Therefore, Chesterton coupled Calvinism's double predestination with names such as Nestorians, Mohammedans, and Lenin,[85] and placed "Islam and Kismet, Calvinism and predestination, modern behaviorists and Freudians" all in the same corral.[86] The previous quotations constitute but a sampling of the many tirades GKC loosed on Calvinism, because for GKC "the determining factor in human life [is] the free will of man."[87]

E. SIN

Chesterton defended the doctrines of the Fall and original sin but not the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity. In one of his clever mysteries GKC has Father Brown ask concerning some new religion: "Can [this new religion] cure the one spiritual disease?" His French-friend-to-be Flambeau inquires what that may be. Father Brown answers: "Oh, thinking one is quite well."[88] When *The London Times* asked for an essay on "What's Wrong with the World?" GKC replied with the crisp answer: "Dear Sirs: I am."[89] In yet another picturesque slant on the same subject GKC declared: "we live on a planet with a sloping roof…"[90] No wonder Chesterton's long-time friend said that "sin was almost the greatest reality" to him.[91]

In his first volume of nonsense poetry GKC referred to "The Early Sin—the Fall."[92] In one poetic line GKC wrote:

> To the last our blood is tinctured
> With the madness of the fall…[93]

---

[83] Chesterton, *The Thing*, 65-66.
[84] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 14.
[85] Ward, *Chesterton*, 618.
[86] Clipper, *Chesterton*, 104.
[87] Ward, *Chesterton*, 394.
[88] Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 194.
[89] Philip Yancey in *Orthodoxy*, xix-xx.
[90] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 11.
[91] Ward, *Chesterton*, 129.
[92] G. K. Chesterton, *Greybeards at Play* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 22.

H. G. Wells once asked if the Fall really happened and GKC replied in a monosyllable, "Yes."[94]

In his highly paradoxical manner, GKC referred to "the one grand and logical basis of all optimism—the doctrine of original sin."[95] He also observed: "Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved [empirically because you] can see [it] in the street."[96]

Although GKC took the Fall and original sin at face value, on the other hand he proclaimed: "The Calvinist…darkened the land with a creed of Total Depravity and the Scottish Sabbath."[97] Likewise he pointed out: "There are moments when [Aldous Huxley] seems to drift toward that Calvinist exaggeration that was called Total Depravity."[98] Consequently, GKC did not equate the biblical perspective on sin with the "T" in the Calvinist's TULIP.

F. CHRIST

Even back in 1900 GKC inserted in an early poem:

> I only find him at last
> On one old hill where nod
> Golgotha's ghastly trinity—
> Three persons and one god.[99]

Of course, the orthodox Christian would object to the lower case "g" in "god," but GKC uses in the poem a double meaning—(1) three crucified individuals, including Christ; and (2) the "trinity" of the Godhead as present there. His early biographer deduced that by 1903 "It is clear that by now he believed in the Divinity of Christ."[100] GKC proclaimed that it was not a compromise to say that "Jesus Christ was

---

[93] G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works: Vol IX* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), 50.

[94] Ward, *Chesterton*, 504.

[95] G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1903), 21.

[96] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 11.

[97] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 31.

[98] G. K. Chesterton, *Sidelights on New London and New York* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932), 220.

[99] Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 50.

[100] Ward, *Chesterton*, 197.

perfect God and perfect Man…"[101] He noted: "Whereas the most recent heretics…would simplify the God-man by saying He was only Man, the most ancient heretics simplified Him by saying He was only God."[102] He further amplified concerning Christ's deity and humanity by explaining: "Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half-human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God."[103] As a result, GKC could affirm (quotably) that the Incarnation was "that incredible interruption that as a blow broke the very backbone of history."[104]

As a corollary of his high view of Christ, GKC could speak of Him as "the Creator and the Redeemer of the world."[105] In *The Everlasting Man* GKC affirmed belief in Christ's substitutionary atonement.[106] He spoke with affection of the Anglican Prayer Book's clauses "By Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension."[107] Gloriously GKC acknowledged: "Christianity is the religion of the Resurrection…The history of Christianity…started with the staggering miracle of a dead man who was a live man, and was not a ghost."[108]

Despite his overall orthodoxy in Christology, GKC voiced several somewhat eccentric views regarding Christ's temptations. Many conservatives would take issue with GKC's remark that "we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness [temptation] was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin."[109] A bit more bizarre is his assertion that "the Lord thy God may tempt Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane. In a garden [that is, Eden] Satan tempted man; and in [the] garden [of Gethsemane] God tempted God."[110] This last

---

[101] G. K. Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1934), 71.

[102] G. K. Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 87.

[103] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 152.

[104] G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 151.

[105] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 20.

[106] Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, xi.

[107] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 50.

[108] Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 130-31.

[109] Chesterton, *Twelve Types*, 49.

[110] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 209.

statement flies in the face of James 1:13. However, given the fact that Chesterton was a life-long journalist and not a professional theologian, we can rejoice in his ardent championing a full-orbed essentially orthodox Christology.

G. Salvation and Assurance

The question any Protestant believer wishes to ask any John Henry Newman, Tom Howard, G. K. Chesterton, or any other ex-Protestant-become-Catholic is: How can you participate in a church where the doctrine of salvation—the how—is defective? Up to this point in the theological treatment, Protestant evangelicals have had relatively little to take GKC to task over.

But now we must ask the indispensable question: how does a person come into a right relationship with God? GKC does use terms such as "born again" and "regenerate" on rare occasion, but his use of this terminology does not necessarily carry NT cargo in its boxcars. In his book *As I Was Saying,* GKC has a chapter entitled "About Changing Human Nature." One might expect to find something in this chapter about supernatural conversion, but (though he mentions evolutionists, spiritualists, and Jesus) there is no mention of Christian conversion.[111]

In the subsequent statement it is difficult to tell whether he is speaking of "conversion" to Christianity or to Catholicism when GKC said: "The mark of the Faith is not tradition; it is conversion. It is the miracle by which [people] find truth in spite of tradition and often with the rending of all the roots of humanity."[112] Elsewhere GKC says that "conversion is something more personal and less corporate than communion…"[113] He will also announce that Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* "is not only a story of a conversion, but of a sudden conversion, as sudden as the conversion of a man at a Salvation Army meeting."[114] However, GKC went on to say that Scrooge was converted *to* the punch bowl, not *from* it. From this idea he concluded that Dickens "represented a higher and more historic Christianity" than someone who

---

[111] Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, 145.

[112] Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, 22.

[113] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 174.

[114] G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciation and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1911), 112.

would be an absolute abstainer from alcohol.[115] But evidence does not indicate that Charles Dickens was a born-again Christian.[116]

In other contexts GKC sought to penetrate to the major difference between Protestantism and Catholicism on the subject of salvation. GKC wrote that

> the point of Protestantism was that it wiped out all of man's sins at once as if they were all equally sinful. All of Christian's burden [in *Pilgrim's Progress*] fell from him before the Cross. He did not have to unpack his own luggage in the confessional-box. But Catholicism always tended more to a table of sins, as of different weights and measures…[117]

In a second lengthy statement GKC chronicled the principal nub of disagreement between Protestants and Catholics as follows:

> The genuine Protestant creed is now hardly held by anybody—least of all by Protestants…If almost any modern man be asked whether we save our soul through our theology, or whether doing good (to the poor, for instance) will help us on the road to God, he would answer without hesitation that good works are probably more pleasing to God than theology. It would probably come as quite a surprise to him to learn that, for three hundred years, the faith in faith alone was the badge of a Protestant, the faith in good works the rather shameful badge of the disreputable Papist…and that was the most important quarrel between Catholicism and Protestantism [which GKC equates with Calvinism].[118]

Observe that GKC denominates this issue to be "the most important quarrel between Catholicism and Protestantism." Of course, informed Protestant readers would not wish our position to be represented as "faith in *faith* alone" but rather faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. Also, we would respond by saying that Protestants do not believe we "save our soul through our theology." Rather, we are saved by Christ alone through our trust in His promise of eternal life to all who believe in Him. (That is our "theology" of salvation.)

---

[115] Ibid.

[116] See James A. Townsend, "Charles Dickens: Cheshire Cat Christianity," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1999): 76-82.

[117] Chesterton, *Chaucer*, 229.

[118] Chesterton, *The Thing*, 72.

Chesterton has yet a still longer statement concerning the salvation views of Protestants and Catholics. The Catholic Chesterton wrote:

> What [the earlier orthodox Protestant] valued was the theological Scheme of Salvation…Of that theological theory there were two main versions: one universal in Scotland… (the Calvinist view) that God chose some to receive the benefits of redemption and rejected others even in the act of creating them; the other [or the Wesleyan one], that men could accept God but only by accepting this theological scheme of salvation, and that their good works had no effect on the result. This was the great doctrine of Faith independent of Works, which was so chiefly recognized as the chief mark and test of Protestantism, [so] that we might almost say that it was the whole of Protestantism…
>
> From this idea of instantaneous individualist acceptance of the Atonement, by a pure act of faith, came the whole system of appeals on which this form of Christianity relied. That was why it was so easy, so personal…that was why [in *Pilgrim's Progress*] the *whole* of Christian's burden fell off at the foot of the Cross. There were no degrees of sin or details of penance, because works were not in question at all. That is why they needed no Confessor or Sacrament of penance, because there was nothing they could do to diminish sins either hopeless or already abolished or ignored. That was why it was wicked to pray for the dead, for the dead could not be anything but instantly beatified by dogmatic faith alone, or lost for the lack of it. That was why there could be…no Purgatory…[119]

The key question to raise here is: has Chesterton adequately understood the Protestant view of salvation? While allowing for some minor differences in his language or undue stereotyping, I think the fair-minded answer to that question is: Yes. If that is a fair conclusion (drawn from the previous three extensive quotations), then any saved person is likely to become disturbed about GKC's approach to this essential issue.

Just as GKC molded Father Brown in fiction, so the real "Father Brown" (Father John O'Connor) also molded GKC in real life to some extent. Here is what O'Connor said (approvingly about Thomas Carlyle's ideas):

---

[119] Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 185.

> The two arms of the Cross by which alone is salvation are the Obedience unto death and regard for the poor.
>
> …God came to earth to teach us obedience by object lesson. …It is obedience that…has to be supplied from the Infinite Obedience of the Divine Sonship.
>
> The other arm of the Cross of Salvation is regard…for the poor. It is the whole business of the new life to which we are born of water and the Holy Ghost…The only Son of our common Father warns us that excess of penury will more certainly than anything else bring us to dwell with everlasting burnings.[120]

Any Protestant should observe that the Catholic priest indicates that salvation comes "alone" through obedience (admittedly "supplied" from Christ's obedience) and compassion for the poor. He says that these are "the whole business of the new life"! (Admittedly concern for the poor is a *part* of the *outworking* of the new life; see Gal 2:10.) Interestingly also, while—on the Catholic approach—one can't be certain about personal salvation, one can "certainly" be assured of hell if one hasn't adequately cared for the poor!

The same Catholic priest who guided GKC wrote: "It is on the whole balance of good and evil in a man's career that his eternal destiny depends."[121] Could there be any clearer statement of salvation by good works? GKC himself once spoke of a young man-turned-monk who "knew as well as I do that he could save his soul by normal living."[122]

In all GKC's approximately 100 books one will find few clearcut references to belief and saving faith. Once he remarked of Martin Luther: "It is only fair to him to say that he was a Christian, in the sense that he believed nothing could be done except in the strength of Christ."[123] In light of previous statements, however, one would wonder how GKC could afford to make this claim. In *Orthodoxy* he attempted "an explanation not of whether the Christian Faith can be believed but of how he [GKC] personally has come to believe it."[124] Once he said he

---

120 O'Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 58-59.
121 Ibid., 75.
122 Ward, *Chesterton*, 598.
123 Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 27.
124 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, xxiii.

"believed in Christ…"[125] One biographer believes that GKC's Catholic friends, the Wards, thought his wife Frances to be a woman who believed in "justification by faith and not by works."[126] In short, it is impossible for anyone who believes in justification by faith in Christ alone to justify GKC's overall views about how to enter a relationship with God.

A logical concomitant of the Catholic understanding of salvation by faith-plus-works necessitates that there can be no certain assurance about one's salvation. GKC called attention to the Anglican Prayer Book which teaches one to pray: "Suffer us not, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee."[127] He then sarcastically called this prayer "so very *Roman.*"[128] He also admitted elsewhere: "The essence of Calvinism was certainty about salvation; the essence of Catholicism is uncertainty about salvation."[129]

H. THE CHURCH

For the later Chesterton the Catholic Church was the true Church. GKC had little sympathy with an independent Baptist or Plymouth Brethren group. In his first letter to Chesterton after GKC had become a Catholic (in 1922), his great friend Hilaire Belloc wrote to him of "the Infallibility of the Catholic Church."[130] GKC wrote: "The motto emblazoned round the great dome [of St. Peter's in Rome] is not, as a very thoughtful Unitarian once complained that it should be, the words of Peter acknowledging Christ [in Matthew 16], but the words of Christ establishing Peter."[131] Indeed, it is this intriguing insight which raises the principal problem for the perceptive Protestant—namely, Peter and the popes are promoted to the extent that Christ seems demoted. Instead of Christ alone forgiving sins, GKC's biographer, Maisie Ward, speaks of "the Catholic Church who could forgive sins and offer the Holy Sacrament…"[132]

GKC said (through a fictional character) that "when we belong to the Church, we belong to something that is outside all of us, which is outside …the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to

---

125 Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 15.
126 Ibid., 221.
127 Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 49.
128 Ibid.
129 Chesterton, *Irish Impressions*, 204.
130 Ward, *Chesterton*, 474.
131 Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 81.
132 Ward, *Chesterton*, 615.

them. If we all fell dead suddenly, the Church would still somehow exist in God."[133]

In one of GKC's fictional pieces a character named Syme says, "I knew my intuition was as infallible as the pope."[134] "Is it not saner," asked GKC, "to ground our faith on the infallibility of the Pope, or the infallibility of the Book of Mormon…?"[135] He also wrote, "It is believed, somewhat inaccurately, that there is a conviction among Catholics that the Pope cannot possibly be wrong."[136] One wonders: Can we have papal infallibility with a pope who can "possibly be wrong"? Is GKC talking about the doctrine of speaking ex cathedra? GKC affirmed that "the Pope is the Vicar of Christ…"[137] He asserted that the Pope "might be enthroned on the top of St. Peter's with the population lying prostrate round it for miles, and I should still know that there was not in him any shadow of pride?"[138] But if the pope could "be wrong," could he not be guilty of the sin of pride?

On the doctrine of the virgin Mary, GKC penned: "That strange mania against Mariolatry…the cult of Mary…that apparently presumes her to be perpetually and secretly encroaching upon the prerogatives of Christ…all that I have never…understood."[139] GKC stated: "The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered [Mary]…"[140] He spoke positively of "the cult of Mary"[141] and of her as the Mother of God. In one poem GKC rhymed:

> …St. Joseph, when he saw
> Christ asleep upon the straw,
> In great love he worshiped there
> Mary and the Child she bore…[142]

---

[133] G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and The Cross* (Beaconsfield, England: Darwin, Finlayson, 1963), 60.

[134] Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1986), 104.

[135] Chesterton, *G. F. Watts*, 43.

[136] Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 144.

[137] Ibid., 155.

[138] Ibid., 295-96.

[139] Chesterton, *The Wells and the Shallows*, 173.

[140] Ibid., 176-77.

[141] Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin*, 97.

[142] Ibid.

If the plain grammar is to be taken at face value, Joseph worshiped Mary! In one place GKC quoted Swinburne's poetic line from a pagan poem as paralleling Mary, when he penned: "Goddess and maiden and queen…"[143] GKC was in Rome for the festival of the Immaculate Conception where (he said) "the doctrine is not in question…"[144]

In connection with the use of images, GKC asked: "Was I worshipping the image? No. Oh no. Only with dulia. Not with latria," acknowledging that he was "quite well acquainted…with the fact that Protestantism forbids idolatry."[145]

Said Chesterton: "Even the High Church Party [in Anglicanism]… confronts a particular heresy called Protestantism…It defends ritual rightly or even sacramentalism rightly…"[146] "I…go to Mass," owned GKC.[147] Father O'Connor spoke of conversing with GKC about "the cumulative evidence for the Real Presence [of Christ in the Mass]…"[148] He wrote: "A Puritan may think it blasphemous that God should become a wafer…Why a man should accept a Creator who was a carpenter, and then worry about holy water…I never could understand…I can only attribute it to Superstition."[149] (Protestants find such statements amazing and amusing.) In *The Ball and the Cross* the fictional Madeleine Durand urges a man before a duel "to go to Mass before dying." He thinks God false and a fable, replying that there is no God. She retorts: "Why, I touched His body only this morning [at Mass]."[150]

GKC intimated that "thousands of Christians" during the late Renaissance would have been shocked "if one of the Popes had…said there was no such thing as Purgatory. They would have felt pain…if a Pope had [spoken against]…talking nonsense about prayers for the dead or praise of the Blessed Virgin."[151] But why should such people be shocked if the last sentence of the next GKC quotation is true? "Romanism is supposed [to many Protestants] to be made up of Popery and Purgatory and the Confessional…and rosaries and images of saints.

---

143 Chesterton, *The Well and The Shallows*, 175.
144 Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 309.
145 Ibid., 306.
146 Maisie Ward, *Chesterton*, 458.
147 Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 159.
148 Ibid.
149 Chesterton, *The Thing*, 62-63.
150 Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, 146-47.
151 Chesterton, *Chaucer*, 41.

But these are often the things most important to Protestants, not most important to Catholics…"[152]

Many more Catholic-oriented quotes could be extracted from GKC's writings, especially from *The Thing*, *The Well and the Shallows*, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, and *The Resurrection of Rome.*

I. LAST THINGS

Last on the list is GKC's doctrine of last things. Apparently he expected no end-times Antichrist, for he acknowledged: "According to most legends Antichrist was to come soon after Christ. One has only to suppose that Antichrist came shortly before Christ; and Antichrist might very well be Caesar."[153]

GKC employed analogy and humor (in 1899) with reference to his (later) belief in purgatory by inquiring: "Why should we object to be boiled? Potatoes, for example, are better boiled than raw; why should we fear to be boiled into new shapes in the cauldron [of purgatory]?"[154]

GKC seemed to stand by the supernaturalism of Christ's Second Coming, for he believed in "God making Man, in God being made Man, [and] in God made Man coming in the clouds of glory."[155] He affirmed that there is "truth in the doctrine of hell."[156] Father Brown warned the silverware thief in the story entitled "The Queer Feet:" "I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched."[157] In another story when an Anglican curate who has committed murder attempts to commit suicide, Father Brown exclaims: "Not that door. That door leads to hell."[158]

On heaven Chesterton could say, "We forget that the base proposition of an eternity of happiness is by its very nature 10,000 times more optimistic than 10,000 pagan saturnalias."[159]

---

152 Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 190.
153 Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 150.
154 Ward, *Chesterton*, 110.
155 Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 82.
156 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 214.
157 Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 62.
158 Ibid., 191.
159 G. K. Chesterton, *The Twelve Types*, 70.

IV. CONCLUSION

The literary legacy of G. K. Chesterton has provided a rich database for writers and speakers due to his fecundity of thought and felicity of expression. Thank God for those who take the biblical narrative seriously. Praise God for those who champion classic orthodox Christology and biblical supernaturalism.

However, evangelical evaluators have either been unwillingly ignorant of or they willingly ignore another side of Chesterton—his soteriology and ecclesiology. Unquestionably he traversed a dangerous field of agnostics' and heretics' landmines in his spiritual pilgrimage. There is no question that he fully subscribed to the orthodox view of the person of Christ. Yet—despite his prolificness in publication—one almost looks in vain for any biblical explanation of how to receive eternal life. When he does speak more explicitly to the subject of salvation, his comments are cumbered by Catholic content (works, anti-Protestant spoutings, anti-Calvinist tirades, etc.). Whether people are rich young rulers or not, they still need to know how to enter eternal life. GKC once said somewhere that Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, but not tried because it was found hard. But how hard is John 1:12 or John 3:16 or Acts 16:31? Admittedly there is a paradox within Christianity of the "yoke" that is "easy" (Matt 11:30), but one has to come into the door before assuming the yoke (Matt 11:28, "Come to Me…and I will give you rest").

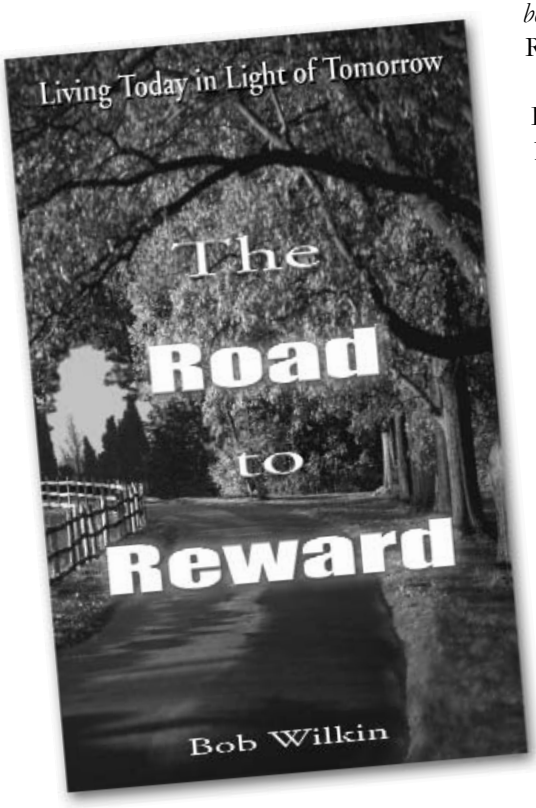
I can only conclude that GKC who "saved [Philip Yancey's] faith" did so because Yancey was saved in the first place.[160] Chesterton can give an individual a most enriching grasp of the lavish décor and splendid furniture within the mansion of Christianity, but (for a man of his size!) he was very unclear about how you get through the door.

---

[160] Editor's Note: If Philip Yancey says that one as unclear as GKC saved his faith, then we might legitimately wonder what Yancey believes concerning the gospel.

The Road to Reward: Living Today in Light of Tomorrow

There is no doctrine that the Lord Jesus and His apostles used more frequently and powerfully to motivate believers to endure in good works than the potential of reward in His coming reign in the climax of earth's history. And there is no one more capable of handling the subject with clarity and faithfulness to the Scripture than Robert Wilkin. All believers will profit significantly from The Road to Reward.



Earl D. Radmacher
President Emeritus Western Seminary

Bob has treated the church to a biblical, comprehensive, and masterful discussion of rewards. This book should place this neglected subject back on the front burners of theology and the Christian life where it belongs. Bob has shown how a biblical view of rewards prevents confusion over the condition for eternal salvation and the motivations for godly living. But wise Christians will also heed its message to live in light of eternity.

Charlie Bing
Executive Director of GraceLife Ministries

In The Road to Reward, *Dr. Wilkin has given the Body of Christ a unique tool for understanding the imperative of walking in holiness today with eternity in view. Many of the "tough texts" of the Scriptures are examined in-depth elucidating fresh new insights for motivating Christians to a deeper love, service, and walk with Jesus. The result of this work is a systematic study of sanctification or discipleship, which will draw each of us into more effective service of our Lord.*

T. Kem Oberholtzer
Professor of Biblical Literature
Houston Seminary

Ordering Information: *The Road to Reward* is due out soon. For a discounted presale copy, please call us at 972.257.1160 or visit us on the web at http://www.faithalone.org/bookstore.

BOOK REVIEWS

Full Pardon: The Harry L. Greene Story. By Larry L. Greene and Robert C. Larson. Richmond, VA: Good News Publishing, 2001. 183 pp. Cloth. $14.95.

Harry Greene is a former felon who received a full pardon and now heads one of the largest prison ministries in the world, Good News Jail & Prison Ministry (GNJPM). This book tells both his story and the story of GNJPM.

Of special interest to me is the fact that Dr. Bill Simmer, a personal friend, was the founder of GNJPM and he is the one who led Harry Greene to faith in Christ while he was in jail awaiting sentencing that sent him to two years in state prison. Bill led Harry and others to faith in Christ by repeatedly being there for them and sharing the message of the love of God in Christ and the free gift of eternal life. As much of the book deals with Bill's ministry to Harry, it was a pleasure to read this book about a personal friend.

Even though I've spoken in two state prisons and have a number of former felons as friends, I was challenged to be more responsive to recently released felons. Greene and Larson convey the need to reach out to these people and to incorporate them into the local church family. The book also gave me a greater appreciation for those who devote their lives to minister behind prison walls to prisoners and to prison officials.

The gospel is repeatedly mentioned in this book. For example, "He actually wonders if he would ever *have come to faith in Christ* had he not been placed behind bars" (p. 91). "I received my cherished eternal life in Christ solely because of what my Savior did for me on the cross: He died in my place, so that I might gain eternal life" (p. 146).

However, sometimes the evangelism language in this book is a bit fuzzy. We find vague expressions such as "he accepted Christ" (pp. 78, 79, 87, 153, 154, 167), "he invited/asked Jesus to come into his life" (pp. 79, 80, 172), or "he gave his heart/life to Christ" (pp. 108, 170).

JOTGES readers who are interested in prison ministry will want to add this book to their personal library.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Dictionary of Premillennial Theology. By Mal Couch ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996. 448 pp. Cloth. $23.99.

Published in 1996, this book continues to be a handy resource for anyone seeking to understand dispensational theology. Indeed, it might well be re-titled, "Dictionary of *Dispensational* Theology." Fifty-six scholars contributed more than 180 articles on such topics as the Rapture, Hermeneutics, the New Covenant, the Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom, Faith, and Salvation. The articles are concise yet informative and each article is followed by a helpful bibliography.

The book is laid out in an easy to use format similar to an encyclopedia. Not uncommon with a first printing, the observant reader will notice several typographical errors—some of them rather obvious. For instance, in the list of contributors, one contributor's name is misspelled and in the transliteration guide, the Greek letter *chi* is omitted.

Each contributor seems to answer the unstated question: what do Premillennialists believe about _____. When there are varying viewpoints within Premillennialism on a particular doctrine, each viewpoint is mentioned, usually with a proponent cited. As you might expect, non-dispensational views on major doctrines are also addressed and critiqued within each article. However, articles on more obscure doctrines tend to address only dispensational views. For instance, Rodney Decker of Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, writes a helpful article on the New Covenant in which he superbly compares the dispensational understanding of the New Covenant to the amillennial view. By contrast, the article on the Marriage Supper of the Lamb focuses mainly on the dispensational understanding. In general, the manual serves more as a practical guide to dispensational theology than an exhaustive defense of it.

The articles on Salvation and Faith were of particular interest to this reviewer. Elliott Johnson, professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, contributed the article on "Faith." Though brief, it adequately refutes the common, though inaccurate charge that Dispensationalism teaches two different ways of salvation: one in the OT and another in the NT. Johnson correctly affirms that the requirement for salvation in every age is the same: faith.

Roy Beacham, who contributed the article on "Salvation," concurs: "In each era of history, people were expected to believe God's revelation…and recognize the complete inability of humankind to live up to the established criteria of God's stewardship. People…were expected to acknowledge their insufficiency and cast themselves, by faith, wholly on the mercy of God." Both of these articles were faithful to the clear biblical teaching that salvation is by grace through faith alone. One wonders, however, if we should question the content of the OT saving faith specified by Beacham. Eternal life has always been conditioned upon faith in the Messiah, not faith merely in the "mercy of God" (Gen 15:6; John 8:56; Rom 4:1-5; Gal 3:6-14).

In addition to theological entries, the book also contains numerous articles on key current and historical figures within Premillennialism. For instance, John Hannah, Chairman of the Historical Theology Department at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes excellent biographical entries on such notable figures as Lewis Sperry Chafer and C. I. Scofield. Longer than most entries in the book, these two articles alone make the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* well worth the investment. Other noteworthy biographical entries include articles on Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, George Ladd, John Nelson Darby, H. A. Ironside, Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, and J. Dwight Pentecost.

As with any theological book—especially one with multiple contributors—each reader will no doubt find some viewpoints with which he or she disagrees. And some readers might correctly point out that much more could be said about certain topics. Nevertheless, the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* is a worthwhile resource for Bible students.

J.B. Hixson
College of Biblical Studies
Houston, TX

Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. By David A. DeSilva. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000. 460 pp. Paper. $40.00.

This is a book that can most aptly be described as a "glorious ruin." It is "glorious" because it attempts to interpret the book of Hebrews both from a perspective that is exegetical, and one which also reveals vital information from the first century regarding the rhetorical and social styles of communication. Dr. DeSilva, associate professor of NT and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary, provides a wealth of background information as well as the normal discussion and debate regarding the author of Hebrews. However, at this point, Dr. DeSilva moves on to fresh territory that is often uninhabited by commentators on the Book of Hebrews. This commentary contains a wonderful explanation of first century rhetoric and the strategies of communication under the rubric of socio-rhetorical analysis. DeSilva pays homage to Ben Witherington III for leading the way in this new field of study in his commentaries on Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, and the Book of Acts.

By the author's own admission, the commentary itself is highly dependent and indebted to the massive works produced by William Lane, Harold Attridge, and Paul Ellingworth. Each of these commentators have written magisterial commentaries on the Book of Hebrews. It is from their baseline of study that DeSilva makes an original contribution of the socio-rhetorical devices utilized in Hebrews. In this vein the author provides an excellent definition and description of the three genres of oratory, the five stages of speech making and the three kinds of proof, as well as the classical structure and outline arrangement of speech found in rhetorical genre. Hence, his conclusion is that the Book of Hebrews follows a deliberative rhetorical pattern that not only is attributed to the divine author but clearly reflects the human author and perhaps more largely the socio-rhetorical community in which the author of Hebrews was entrenched.

There is also a section on the persuasion and motivational aspects of speech and rhetoric which are only natural in a "brief word of exhortation." Some of this ground has been anticipated by Johnson in his work on the *Pilgrim Motif in the Book of Hebrews*. But there is no slight in saying that DeSilva, although having built from the groundwork of

many authors, has constructed a masterpiece of commentary literature on Hebrews. Standing on the shoulders of giants, one can truly see farther.

Although the book is glorious in many respects, it is unfortunate that it can also be defined as a "ruin." Unfortunately, DeSilva attempts to walk both sides of the street, although not very convincingly, in regard to the theology of the book. In his description of the "warning passages" he attempts, via the language of the text, to leave open the possibility of believers being able to fall or apostatize. However, in the details of his text he clearly aligns himself with the typical Reformed theological interpretation with its attending "perseverance of the saints" doctrine. (This seems to follow the classic experimental predestinational reflex reaction so aptly described by R. T. Kendall in *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*; *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, by Charles Bell; as well as by Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Doctrine of Assurance*.) Although the book pushes for the perseverance of the saints throughout all five warning sections, it is still valuable.

The author seems to be somewhat unfamiliar with the wealth of literature that has been written both at the scholarly and lay levels regarding the view that the audience in the warning passages are believers. The fine works of Robert Govett, G. H. Lang, R. E. Neighbor, and Philip Mauro, as well as contemporary authors including, Zane Hodges, Earl Radmacher, Jody Dillow, Bob Wilkin, and Charlie Bing seem to elude DeSilva. However, the author is familiar with one "grace" advocate, Dr. Kem Oberholtzer. DeSilva interacts quite extensively (seven pages total) with five articles that were written by Dr. Oberholtzer (*Bibliotheca Sacra* Jan-Mar 1988 through Jan-Mar 1989). Although this reviewer does not agree with DeSilva's methodology or his conclusions, the fact is that he is at least willing to engage in discussion and debate with the traditional grace position. Unfortunately, the author does not deal with the nature of the term "salvation" nor with the concept of the *metochoi* found repeatedly in the book, nor even with the concept of "the house of God" found in chapters 3, 8, and 10.

This book is well indexed both by Scripture and extra-biblical sources required by a work of this nature. There is also an excellent author index. This commentary is essential for those who desire to understand the Book of Hebrews with its rich backdrop of rhetorical and sociological information. It is also essential in helping to understand the Reformed position from a slightly different angle, as well as the

discussion and defense against the grace position by those who hold to Reformed Theology based on its latest scholarship.

Fred Chay
Phoenix Seminary
Phoenix, AZ

Totally Saved: Understanding, Experiencing and Enjoying the Greatness of Your Salvation. By Tony Evans. Chicago: Moody Press, 2002. 384 pp. Cloth. $19.99.

Totally Saved serves as a catalog of Dr. Evans's belief on salvation and its related subjects. We are not just saved from "the lake of fire and eternal darkness" but we are also saved from "the lake of confusion and earth's temporary darkness." When a person believes on Jesus Christ, Dr. Evans says that person is totally saved.

Those familiar with Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship will immediately recognize in this book two of Dr. Evans's strengths, he is a master of illustrations and he has the ability to make the complex simple. Dr. Evans's illustrations are clear visual aids to the subject presented. On page 68, he explains propitiation: "We have nothing to offer that would satisfy God's righteous anger against mankind's sins." How did God handle this dilemma? "He took the initiative and provided His own sacrifice." Dr. Evans suggested that we stop reading at that point and "have a praise service." God's holy character demanded a sacrifice that was impossible for us to provide. Dr. Evans drew an illustration from his own life; while a student, he owed Dallas Seminary a debt that was impossible for him to pay. He called it a "righteous economic demand." "That meant that Dallas Seminary either had to overlook our bill, which it couldn't do and still meet its own bills, or I had to drop out of school. But while the Evanses were still financially helpless, the propitiation was made. Someone must have looked in our checkbook, because I went to my campus mailbox one day and found a letter that said that Dallas Seminary had awarded me a full scholarship for the cost of my education. In other words, the school was paying its own bill..." (p. 68).

Why is there a need for another book on salvation? Because many Christians feel "as if church professionals have so mixed up and complicated the issues that no one can get them straight anymore" (p.

12). Too many of those who communicate "the wonder of the unspeakable gift of salvation" (p. 12) have failed to use "language the everyday person can relate to" (p. 12). Man is "totally lost" therefore he needs to be "totally saved" (p. 12). Man needs to know when "he believes in Jesus Christ," he is "totally saved" (p. 12). "When God saved you the batteries were included" (p. 114).

Dr. Evans shows how "every facet of human nature has been polluted, defiled, and contaminated by sin" (p. 23) and God does everything for the sinner when he or she believes in Jesus Christ. Dr. Evans deals with every doctrine of salvation, why each one is needed and how the sinner receives it, by trusting Christ alone.

When I read anything to do with salvation, I am interested in what the author says is necessary for salvation and how the author deals with the unsaintly saint. What about the believers who commit the "filthy five," or the "nasty nine," or the "dirty dozen?" Dr. Evans says "sometimes it's hard to tell the saints from the 'ain'ts' because some lost people live exemplary lives, while genuine believers can be capable of some really heinous behavior" (p. 189). Dr. Evans warns of two extremes, teaching that one can lose salvation because of sin, and teaching that good works are proof that one is saved. We are saved when we believe in Jesus. For the believer, a fruitful life is not a salvation issue, but a fellowship issue. The person who places his faith in Jesus Christ is eternally secure. Dr. Evans makes a riveting observation: "If eternal security is not true, then we cannot fully obey the biblical command, 'Be anxious for nothing' (Phil 4:6)" (p. 262).

You may not *agree* with everything Dr. Evans says but you will *understand* everything he says. This stimulating and encouraging book will be a great resource for everyone who is serious about his or her faith.

Ralph Grant
GES Board Member
Dallas, TX

This Was Your Life! Preparing to Meet God Face to Face. By Rick Howard & Jamie Lash. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998. 191 pp. Paper. $9.95.

The back cover reads, "Imagine yourself face to face with the Lord. No secret remains hidden; even the thoughts and intentions of your heart are laid bare. Do you yearn to hear Christ say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'? *This Was Your Life!* offers rare teaching on the judgment of believers and on how to get prepared."

The book contains exactly what is promised on the back cover. In a time when many "Christians" look to their works to see if they are going to heaven or hell, the issue of eternal rewards is too many times thrust aside and ignored. Either people say that it is selfish to desire rewards (we shouldn't care about reward since we'll be in heaven) or, that heaven itself *is* the reward.

Rick and Jamie do a good job of bringing to light the importance of looking forward to and preparing to meet Christ at the Bema. *This Was Your Life!* is one of only a handful of books on eternal rewards written from a Free Grace perspective. It is different than other books on rewards such as Dillow's *The Reign of the Servant Kings* and Hodges's *Grace in Eclipse.* While many Scripture references are used, the primary focus of the book is practical, not exegetical. This makes *This Was Your Life!* truly unique.

Two statements made early on set the tone and hook the reader. "In the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, there were things in my life I did not want there, and other things not in my life I did want there," (p. 22) and "Not a day goes by that I do not think of the Judgment Seat of Christ. It really is going to happen!" (p. 23). They are right, the Judgment Seat of Christ really is going to happen, and *This Was Your Life!* tells us how to get ready for it.

Before they start warning about loss of eternal reward, the authors are sure to state that eternal life is a free gift, something that cannot be earned and something that cannot be lost. They give an excellent example of the foundation (Jesus Christ) spoken of in 1 Cor 3:9-15. When buying insurance for a house, it isn't necessary to buy enough insurance to cover the full price of the house. Only about 80% of the value should be covered because the land and the foundation are both permanent. Even if the house burns to the ground, the land and foundation are still there to rebuild upon. They go on to say, "If we have

trusted Christ as Savior, He Himself is the foundation of the building. A fire is coming to test what we build on the foundation, but the foundation itself is not burnable!" (p. 24).

They make a very clear distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment, stating that: "The Judgment Seat of Christ is only for judging believers…the purpose of the Judgment Seat is not to punish sin. Instead, God will be looking for things to reward! Unbelievers…will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment" (p 24). To restate their belief that eternal life is a free gift, the authors write, "If you want to make sure that you will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ rather than at the Great White Throne Judgment, please read Appendix A, 'Are you Good Enough to Go to Heaven?'" (p. 26). Clearly, the purpose of this book is to explain the doctrine of eternal rewards, but a secondary issue is to not confuse rewards with heaven itself. Distinguishing between *gift* and *reward* is a noticeable objective of the authors.

Ways to grow in your walk with the Lord and therefore enhance your eternal experience with Him are elaborated on throughout the book. One of my favorite chapters is titled "Stay Out of His Chair" (Chapter 10) and deals with humans who exalt themselves rather than exalting God. These are the people who try to take control of and be the judge of everything rather than yielding to the Father. Once again, practical stories, analogies, and applications are utilized to help us pull ourselves out of that sin so that we can stand unashamed before Christ on that day, which *is* coming soon.

Possibly the most powerful statement of all is in reference to the words spoken by Jesus to the man ("fool") in Luke 12 who invested his life in temporal things to achieve success. This sentence follows the passage: "When I stand before God face to face, I do not want to hear that particular greeting, do you? Jesus wants us to be rich toward God. He warns us against selfishness and exhorts us to "live with eternity in mind" (p. 48). If I had to sum up the purpose of this book in one sentence, it would be exactly that; live with eternity in mind.

The book is complete with a helpful study guide that would be useful for a variety of audiences from singles to Bible study groups.

While there is almost nothing but good to say about *This Was Your Life!*, I can't review the book without mentioning one problem that I found consistently throughout the pages. Though Rick and Jamie were sure to stress the freeness of eternal life, the wording of how one gains

eternal salvation was not consistent. There seemed to be some confusion on what it means to "trust Christ as Savior."

For instance, they seem very clear on the gospel when they say: "Another reason people do not look to Christ and accept the free gift of eternal life is that they look elsewhere for salvation, especially to themselves. They believe the idea that 'good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell,' and then they try to make themselves good enough to go to heaven. Their trust is in *themselves*." (p. 156). In another place they write, "We can place our trust in Jesus as payment for our sins…" (p. 158). And again they note, "When we put our faith in Christ for salvation rather than in ourselves, God not only forgives us; He also imparts His own righteousness to us!" (p. 26).

However, they turn right around and say contradictory things such as, "It's your choice…God gave you free will. He gave you the freedom *to follow Him or go your own way*" (p. 158, italics mine), "Those *who repent and put their trust in Christ* rather than in themselves receive forgiveness and the free gift of righteousness" (p. 27, italics mine).

Rick Howard gives his own testimony in the book and it reflects even more confusion. He says, "I broke down like a little child as she [his surrogate grandmother, Mrs. Shipton] led me to the altar. *I repented and surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ*" (p. 18, italics mine).

In addition, the suggested sinner's prayer is far from clear. It contains nothing regarding believing in Jesus for eternal life. The prayer reads: "Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me so much that You were willing to be punished on the cross for my sins so I could be forgiven. *I open my heart to You and I invite you to be my Savior. I acknowledge that You know what is best for me. Teach me to please You in every part of my life.* Thank You for Your forgiveness and for the gift of eternal life" (p. 158, italics mine).

So, while they insist that eternal life is a free gift, they are not always clear as to how one goes about receiving that gift.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book. It opened my eyes to things that I should probably think about much more than I do now. I trust that upon reading *This Was Your Life!* anyone would be fired up for Christ, ready to go earn some eternal reward for themselves, and encourage others to do the same! It is as easy as living with eternity in mind. Remember, it really is going to happen.

I recommend this book to all who have a firm understanding of how one receives eternal life (by simply believing *alone* in Jesus Christ *alone* for it).

Jason Hyde
Summer Intern
Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

PERIODICAL REVIEWS

"Sanctified Entirely: The Theological Focus of Paul's Instructions for Church Discipline," Stacy R. Obenhaus, *Restoration Quarterly* (First Quarter 2001): 1-12.

Restoration Quarterly is a publication of Abilene Christian University, which is sponsored by the Churches of Christ, an unashamedly Arminian denomination. Obenhaus is a member of the Skillman Church of Christ in Dallas, TX where he serves as an adult Sunday School teacher and youth leader.

I found much of value in this article. The author looks at four passages in Paul: 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2 and 7, and Galatians 6:1-2. He draws some interesting conclusions.

First, Paul was not here or elsewhere writing a formal discussion of church discipline. His purpose in each case was to maintain the health and purity of the church. Thus we don't find any step by step approach to church discipline (e.g., p. 11). General principles are given and that is all.

Second, while Paul had concern for the erring brothers, his primary concern evident in these texts was for the church as a whole. The health of the body was of primary importance for Paul (e.g., p. 2).

Third, the death of Christ is prominent in each of these passages. Thus the loving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the motivational basis for the church to maintain its purity and to exercise church discipline (e.g., pp. 10, 12).

Fourth, he seems to imply that the reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:20 ("we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God") primarily concerned reconciliation of the believers in Corinth with the apostle Paul. Others were leading the believers in Corinth to question Paul's apostolic authority. Giving in to that thinking led to a need for reconciliation with Paul and hence with God whom Paul represented (p. 12).

The strength of this article is that it sees the key to church discipline as the health of the church body. The weakness is the author's statement that Paul was not primarily concerned with restoring the fallen believers.

One need not set these as conflicting goals. Church discipline is designed to help both the individual and the church.

I highly recommend this article. I think the author is right that Paul and the NT as a whole do not give us a detailed procedure to follow when exercising church discipline. Instead we find we are to admonish errant believers and if they don't respond in a reasonable amount of time we are to excommunicate them from the church body until such time as they repent.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

"Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," Michael A. Grisanti, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (December 2001): 577-98.

Michael Grisanti is an Associate Professor of Old Testament at the Master's Seminary, a seminary that although is enamored with Lordship Salvation, nevertheless is committed to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. That is the issue dealt with in the article.

Grisanti is firmly committed to inerrancy but he notes that in defining our view of inerrancy, the tendency is that this be "…defined primarily from a NT perspective and do not give sufficient attention to some of the realities of the OT text" (p. 577). He is referring to what we mean by "autographa." We have defined our doctrine of inerrancy as being applicable only to the original autographs that were penned by the original authors. We do not claim such verbal inspiration for copies or translations. However, this very definition, technically, is only applicable to NT books, all of which were written within one generation. However, the OT was written over a one-thousand year period. It is obvious that there are updatings within the OT text. These updatings were not part of the original autograph but were penned by a later hand. If we continue to define verbal inspiration and inerrancy from the perspective of the autographa only, then we would have to conclude that these updatings themselves were not inspired. In fact, some Evangelicals whose loyalty

to fundamentalism is impeccable, such as Geisler do take that position. Such a conclusion makes Grisanti and this reviewer very uncomfortable.

Because the OT was written over a thousand year period, Grisanti notes that "During that millennium, there were multitudes of linguistic, cultural, and geographic changes, to name only a few" (p. 579). That led to his question: "Did this long compositional history and the many changes in the world of the Bible impact the process of the completion of the OT canon?" He answers the question positively noting "that the time span between the initial composition of certain biblical books and the close of the OT canon occasioned the need for various editorial revisions, although on a relatively small scale." In other words, the actual autograph that Moses produced is not word for word what we have in our canon today. Subsequent to what Moses actually completed, there were some editorial updates as well as an addition, such as Deuteronomy 34. If we limit our definition of verbal inspiration only to the autographa, then we would have to conclude that although these updates and additions are a part of our Hebrew canon, they were not really verbally inspired and therefore not necessarily inerrant. However, if we broaden our definition of verbal inspiration to include the time span from the actual composition of a book until the actual close of the OT canon, then these updated editions are verbally inspired and inerrant.

Thus, the author calls for making a distinction "between the preliminary and final canonical form of a biblical book" (p. 580). By the term "preliminary," the author means that the book has "a canonical status that *has not yet been finalized*." Thus, the actual autograph that Moses produced without the updates and additions was already canonical and was so recognized by the believing community. Later on when the writings of Moses underwent updating, these updatings themselves were equally inspired since God Himself superintended these updatings and additions. Grisanti refers to this as "the process of its inscripturation" (p. 580). The process of inscripturation includes the whole period of time from the preliminary stage to the final canonical form of the book. In his own words this means, "…the initial composition of a biblical book *and* any editorial revisions of a biblical book before the finalization of the OT canon are part of God-breathed Scripture…Their inerrancy, canonicity, and 'autograph-like' status derive entirely from divine inspiration" (p. 580). The author then expands the definition of "autographa" by not limiting it to the "preliminary canonical form" which first came from the hand of a writer like Moses, but rather to the "final canonical form" as it

appears in our text today. Again, inspiration covers the whole process of inscripturation, and not merely the original document which was written. Furthermore, any of these updatings and/or additions would themselves be done by "prophetic figures whose adjustment of the biblical text would have been accepted by the Israelite community of faith…" (p. 580).

The entire proposition is well summarized in the following paragraph: "Here is the essential refinement proposed by this paper. Within the canonical process, and subsequent to the initial writing of a biblical book or books, a God-chosen individual or prophetic figure under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit could adjust, revise, or update pre-existing biblical material in order to make a given Scripture passage understandable to succeeding generations. Those revisions, which occurred within the compositional history of the OT, are also inspired and inerrant" (p. 582).

The article goes on to give eight examples of such updatings and additions. He then draws the following conclusion: "These eight examples of textual updating suggest that the original form of a biblical book was not transmitted absolutely unchanged from the time of its original composition. Although limited in scope, important changes took place from the time of a biblical book's initial composition to the time when it reached its final canonical form. Those changes were 'maintenance changes,' done to make a given text more intelligible to a later generation of readers. Once again, I contend that these changes were made by a prophetic figure and are part of the process of inscripturation" (p. 588).

I believe the author is correct in his contention and support his position. It is time that we do not limit our definitions of "autographa" and "canonicity" strictly from a NT perspective. We need to redefine it from a wider biblical perspective that takes "into account realities of the OT text" (p. 598). That would alleviate trying to defend the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy 34 in which Moses recorded his own death and the hiding of the body. The original document that Moses produced ended with Chapter thirty-three. Later on, some prophetic figure, perhaps Joshua or Phinehas, was inspired by God to add the concluding chapter. Still later, within the body of the Book of Deuteronomy, a prophetic figure added the various updates as in Deut 2:10-12 and 3:8-11. The process of inspiration of a specific book was complete when it reached

its final canonical state and the term "autographa" should be applied to the book in its final form.

Grasanti's proposition maintains a high view of Scripture, and his proposed solution is firmly within the parameters of verbal inspiration and not an attempt to get around it.

Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum
Ariel Ministries
Tustin, CA

"Reflections on Dispensationalism," John F. Walvoord, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April-June 2001): 131-37.

In his article Dr. John F. Walvoord does an excellent job of addressing some of the major points of interest within the dispensational system. Considered one of the most respected scholars in the area of prophecy (cf. *Every Prophecy in the Bible*, 1999), Walvoord is the most appropriate man to do so. He has published numerous works that have helped many students of theology understand the Bible holistically and realize how God relates to man throughout history. He does this through the system we call Dispensationalism.

Walvoord first points out that dispensationalists do not exclusively use the term "dispensation." Pointing out that 50 of the 100 scholars he researched, including Charles Hodge (postmillennial) and Louis Berkof (amillennial), recognize that there are biblical dispensations. Referring to Ryrie, he points out that the term "dispensation" or its equivalent ("administration," "economy," "stewardship," "job," "commission") is used 20 times in the NT.

Relating dispensations to progressive revelation, Walvoord states, "acknowledging the presence of dispensations is not limited to a single theological system. Instead, such acknowledgment is based on progressive revelation, the fact that God continued to reveal Himself to humankind throughout biblical history" (p. 131-32). He goes on to clearly explain how dispensationalism recognizes this and bases its understanding of human responsibility accordingly. Describing what many normative dispensationalists consider clearly revealed, Walvoord explains the seven administrations of God, showing their progression throughout the Bible, and relating the dispensations to each other.

Since dispensationalism is often thought of as a newly formed theological system, he explains the influence of the *Scofield Reference Bible* and points out one of the common misunderstandings associated with that camp—the idea that John Nelson Darby invented dispensationalism. The fact is theologians have recognized dispensations throughout history. Pierre Poiret, Jonathan Edwards, and Isaac Watts (to name a few) recognized biblical dispensations as far back as the 1600s.

Charles C. Ryrie, a highly respected scholar in the area of Bible and theology, teamed with Walvoord in describing and teaching dispensationalism. Although Ryrie recognizes the seven dispensations, he emphasizes the three most extensively discussed in Scripture, that of law, grace (church), and the kingdom (millennium). Ryrie describes these three as Paul mentions them in the NT: Eph 1:10 refers to the future period; Eph 3:2 refers to the current dispensation of grace; and Col 1:25-26 refers to that which preceded the grace state. In *Dispensationalism*, Ryrie stresses, "There can be no question that the Bible uses the word dispensation exactly the same way the dispensationalist does" (p. 27).

Dispensationalism is most often associated with premillennialism and pretribulationalism. This is due to the clear teaching they find with a consistent use of a normal-historical, grammatical interpretation throughout all of Scripture. The use of this hermeneutic also leads us to the distinction made between Israel and the Church. Walvoord points out that one of the most accurate and brief descriptions of this system is found in the doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Walvoord mentions the recent developments of a view known as Progressive Dispensationalism (cf. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 1993). The primary difference between normative and progressive dispensationalists is that progressives believe that Jesus is now on the Davidic throne and has inaugurated the millennial kingdom. However, they too hold that Christ will physically reign over Israel in His thousand-year rule on earth as the complete fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

Walvoord closes with the salvation message: "In every dispensation salvation is by grace through faith, made possible by the death of Christ" (p. 137). This is something all grace people affirm, especially in relation to the previous dispensation of law that eternal life was by faith in God who would send the coming Messiah!

If you want encouragement as a dispensationalist, this brief article is for you. As Walvoord states, "Those who claim that they are not dispen-

sationalists are actually rejecting the wrong view of dispensationalism. For everyone is a dispensationalist—to a degree—whether he or she recognizes it or not" (p. 137).

G. Brian Stone
Dallas, TX

"A Critique of Free-Will Theism Part One," & "A Critique of Free-Will Theism Part Two." Robert A. Pyne and Stephen R. Spencer, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-Sept/Oct-Dec 2001): 259-86/387-405.

In this two-part article, Robert Pyne and Stephen Spencer offer a thorough, yet succinct response to Free-Will Theism. Anticipating that many readers may be unfamiliar with this fairly recent theological development, the authors present the foundational views of Free-Will Theism's primary proponents (Boyd, Pinnock, and Sanders), immediately followed by responses from a Classical-Theist approach.

Classical-Theism, in the line of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards proclaims that while humans truly are responsible for their choices, God exercises meticulous providence and possesses exhaustive foreknowledge. In contrast, Free-Will Theism denies that divine meticulous providence and exhaustive foreknowledge can be reconciled with true human freedom. Therefore, they reject the former and exalt the latter, proclaiming a God whose knowledge is limited to the knowable—past and present actualities. While God has the ability to determine the future exhaustively, out of love He limited Himself by creating humans with libertarian freedom (choice of a variety of options) to interact with Him in a "give-and-take" relationship to bring about God's desired ends. For Free-Will Theists, such an arrangement provides a better explanation of difficult biblical texts, an internally consistent philosophical system, and a more satisfying answer to the problem of evil.

Yet, as Pyne and Spencer convincingly demonstrate in the first part of their article, Free-Will Theism actually falls short of Classical-Theism in each of these areas. First, by extending the Free-Will hermeneutic to its logical conclusions, they show the potential for absurdity in taking anthropomorphic descriptions of God in a literal manner. Furthermore, an extended section of the first article looks at the OT and NT portrayals

of the death of Christ as an overwhelming support for the Classical approach and a serious liability to the Free-Will approach.

Second, they analyze the antinomy between human freedom and divine providence inherent in Classical Theism to show that it is both biblically necessary and philosophically acceptable.

Third, the authors make a convincing case that the Free-Will answer to the problem of evil is actually far less comforting than the Classical answer (God never causes evil, but allows it and plans to use it for good).

In the second article, after an extended discussion of theological method and the place of tradition in determining orthodox belief, the authors compare the tenants of Free-Will Theism to a wide variety of church creeds, from the early ecumenical councils to the later Reformation creeds. From this comparison the authors conclude that Free-Will Theism is a substantial departure from orthodox belief and would have been deemed heretical by the vast majority of historic Christendom. While Free-Will proponents dismiss this as a liability, claiming that the Church's view of God was corrupted early on by Hellenistic philosophy, Pyne and Spencer question the validity of a theological system which is at variance with the broad span of Christian historic belief. While the historic creeds are not an infallible guide to biblical truth (many of them stand in opposition to the very biblical truth of justification by faith alone), a theological position in opposition to a central tenet of the vast majority of these creeds should at a minimum caution any theologian evaluating the debate.

Finally, the authors present an extended analysis showing the logical connection between Free-Will Theism and inclusivist soteriology. While not all Free-Will Theists are inclusivists, its major proponents are. For the evangelical community, this serves as further warning of the divergence between Free-Will Theism and orthodox Christian belief.

This reader found this article both useful and enjoyable. Despite its brevity, it both summarized the Free-Will position adequately and fairly and provided a convincing response from a Classical-Theist position. Lay persons new to this debate and well-versed scholars alike will find the article helpful for weighing in on this challenging but very relevant debate.

Blake Jennings
Dallas, TX