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ROMANS 8:16 AND ASSURANCE

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In Rom 8:16, Paul makes the statement that, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Many feel that this verse is saying that we are able to gain assurance of our eternal salvation from the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit tells our spirit that we are God's children.

If this is the case, we must conclude that such assurance is very subjective. How do we know if it is the Spirit of God "speaking" to us, or if it is our own spirit? Couldn't we even wonder if an evil spirit is communicating to us in order to deceive us?

This issue is of extreme importance. If assurance of salvation comes from such a subjective source, can we ever be certain? Maybe one day we feel that the Spirit is telling us we are children of God. But on another day, perhaps a day in which we have failed badly, we do not "hear" this testimony. Or, perhaps, we feel the exact opposite is the case. The Spirit is telling us that we are not children of God. At face value it seems that we could never have assurance of salvation. In this article I will argue that Rom 8:16 is not telling believers that they gain assurance of salvation from a subjective witness of the Holy Spirit within them.

II. SUPPORT FOR THE SUBJECTIVE VIEW

In the writings of many Evangelicals, one can find support for the view that assurance comes through the subjective witness of the Holy Spirit. This is seen in most commentaries. In addition, both grammatical and lexical arguments are used to argue the same thing.

A. The Commentary Tradition

Many conservative Bible scholars take Rom 8:16 to mean that believers find assurance of salvation from an inner testimony of the Spirit of God. Newell says that the Holy Spirit produces, within the believer, a "consciousness" of being born of God and being a part of His family.[1] However, the Spirit does not say this "to" our spirit, since the spirit of the believer already knows that he is a child of God. The Spirit of God joins "with" our spirit in declaring the truth.[2]

Newell, however, recognizes the subjective nature of this testimony of the Spirit and tries to alleviate it. He says that the assurance it brings is not a "feeling." Instead, it is an unconscious certainty. At the same time, the Holy Spirit bears witness of these realities with the consciousness of the believer. All of this is a "profound mystery."[3] One wonders how something can be an unconscious certainty and how such an unconscious witness is made to the consciousness of a person.

That Newell recognizes that there is no complete assurance with this testimony of the Spirit is seen in the fact that the believer must test to see if the testimony he thinks he is receiving is true. He says that the book of 1 John gives us tests by which we can assure ourselves that we are children of God.[4] But it is clear that these tests involve works. Some days we will think we have passed the test, and on others we will feel we have not.

Moo also takes the verse in this way. He says that the Spirit of God makes the believer aware that he is the child of God. He tells the believer this in the innermost part of his being. Moo says this is something the Spirit probably does "to" our spirit, not "with."[5]

Boice explicitly states the subjective nature of this assurance. After saying that the Holy Spirit witnesses to believers that they are sons of God, he calls this an "experience" of the Spirit. Such an experience can be an overwhelming sense of God's presence. Or, the Holy Spirit

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[1] William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-By-Verse*, Reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1994), 313.

[2] Ibid., 314.

[3] Ibid., 313-14.

[4] Ibid., 314.

[5] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1–8*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 539-40.

gives us a "spiritual whisper" of who we are. At the same time, however, there can be counterfeit experiences. Boice also recognizes that some Evangelicals will feel uncomfortable with finding assurance of salvation in emotional experiences and that such language can lead to excesses.[6]

Those who seek for complete assurance might be encouraged by the fact that Boice says we must go to the Scriptures for our primary source of assurance, and not a subjective experience. But even here he does not offer such confidence. Regarding Romans 8, Boice believes that Paul says we find assurance if we pass the tests. These tests involve the good works of walking by the Spirit.[7]

According to MacArthur, the assurance that the Spirit gives to the believer is a constant inner testimony. But this testimony also involves a work of the Spirit in the life of the believer in which He produces a longing for communion with God and sanctification in the life of the child of God. The Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in such a life and compels the believer to love God, hate sin, reject the world, long for Christ's return, love other Christians, and long to be more like Christ. This testimony and work of the Spirit is one of His most precious ministries. However, it is subjective.[8] Like others, MacArthur is saying we can test the testimony of the Spirit by our works.

When it comes to the issue of whether the Spirit testifies *to our spirit* or *with our spirit*, Cranfield seems to have influenced many others. He says that our spirit cannot testify that we are children of God. Therefore, the Spirit of God testifies *to our spirit*. The Spirit enables the believer to believe the good news and then testifies to the believer that he is eternally saved.[9]

Morris is an example of those influenced by Cranfield. He quotes from Cranfield and says that the Spirit of God testifies to our spirit, even though the usual meaning of the verb would be to testify "with"

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[6] James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: The Reign of Grace*, Vol 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 843-44.

[7] Ibid., 844.

[8] John F. MacArthur, *Romans 1–8*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991), 438-39.

[9] C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:402-403.

our spirit. Morris maintains that without this witness of the Spirit we could not testify that we are children of God.[10]

Finally, Schreiner disagrees with Cranfield and says that the Spirit of God testifies *with the spirit* of the believer. However, he agrees with Cranfield and others that this is a subjective experience. He calls it a religious one. But this religious and mystical experience is one that is given to all believers, without exception. It begins at the moment of conversion.[11]

While there is disagreement as to whether the Spirit testifies *to* our spirit or *with* our spirit, there are areas of agreement between all these writers. This testimony of the Spirit can be described as a mystical experience that is impossible to quantify.[12] As such, it is subjective and therefore it can be said that complete assurance is not possible. The same arguments are sometimes made from both grammatical as well as lexical standpoints.

B. The Greek Grammar of Romans 8:16

There are two main grammatical/lexical issues in Rom 8:16 when it comes to the role of the Spirit of God in assurance of eternal salvation. One is the meaning of the dative *tō pneumati hēmōn* ("with our spirit"). The other is the meaning of the verb *summarturei* ("bears witness").

1. Dative of Association?

The word *spirit* in the phrase *with our spirit* is in the dative. A common use of the dative in Greek is one of association. The word in the dative indicates a person or thing associated with another person or thing. It is often translated by the English word "with." An example of this use is 2 Cor 6:14, in which Paul says that believers are not to be unequally yoked "with" unbelievers. He is saying that believers should not be in close association with unbelievers.

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[10] Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 316-17.

[11] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 426-27.

[12] Editor's Note: Mormons also use Rom 8:16 and Luke 24:32, along with Doctrine and Covenants 9:8, to support their teaching that the Spirit "will cause your bosom [to] burn within you" as a means of assurance. See https://www.lds.org/manual/new-testament-student-manual/romans/chapter-36-romans-4-8?/ang=eng.

Another common use of the dative is the indirect object of a verb. This is most often translated by the word "to." The question in Rom 8:16 is whether the word "spirit" is one of association, or whether it is an indirect object. If the former, the Holy Spirit testifies "with" our spirit that we are children of God. If the latter, He testifies "to" us. If it is a dative of indirect object, Wallace maintains that the believer receives the testimony of the Holy Spirit that he is a child of God and is in this way assured of eternal salvation.[13]

An important part of this discussion is the verb "bears witness" (*summartureō*). It has a Greek prefix *sun*. This prefix has the basic meaning of "with" and suggests that the dative that follows it has an associative idea. This is certainly the way that the NKJV, as well as most other versions of the Bible, translate it (e.g., KJV, NASB, NIV, HCSB, ASV, CEB, ESV, RSV, NRSV, GNV, MEV).[14]

But Wallace points out that a verb with this prefix does not have to carry with it an associative idea. He recognizes that most of the time when such verbs are followed by an indirect object, the indirect object is an impersonal noun, but there are a few examples where the indirect object is a personal noun.[15] Here in Rom 8:16, the word spirit is a personal noun.

Following the view of Cranfield, Wallace says that the context does not favor the idea of association. Such a context does not support the idea that the spirit of the believer testifies that he is a child of God. Quoting Cranfield, Wallace says, that the spirit of the believer "has no right at all to testify to our being sons of God."[16] The Holy Spirit alone testifies to these spiritual realities.

2. Lexical Argument

Wallace maintains that while *sumartureō* once did signify association, through time it came to mean simply "to testify." The prefix only adds emphasis to the basic verb. The loss of an associative idea with the verb happened as early as the sixth century BC.[17]

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[13] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 159.

[14] The two that translate *summarturei* as "bears witness to" are NET and LEB.

[15] Ibid., 160. He cites 1 Cor 4:4 and Acts 6:9 as examples.

[16] Ibid. See Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:403.

[17] Ibid.

The verb only occurs one other place in the NT with the dative. It is in the form of a genitive participle. It is found in Rom 9:1 in which Paul says, "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit." The dative in this case is the word "me." Wallace says that the verb simply means "to testify" and there is no associative force present.[18] Paul testifies in his conscience that he is not lying. He testifies "to" himself ("me"), which does not require association with somebody else.

3. Summary

Based upon these two arguments, Wallace states that Rom 8:16 seems to be "secure" as a text that teaches us that the assurance of eternal salvation comes from the inner witness of the Spirit.

He takes this a step further. The objective data, by which he means the Scriptures, are helpful, but they cannot by themselves give assurance of salvation. The Christian, if he wants such assurance, also needs an "existential and ongoing encounter with the Holy Spirit."[19] In other words, assurance is also an ongoing process. It is easy to see that, as Wallace states, this has profound implications on the doctrine of soteriology.[20] On that point, it seems all would agree.

C. Conclusion

If the assurance of salvation is based upon the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, there are indeed many profound implications. As the writers in this section indicate, such assurance is subjective. The promises of the Lord in such verses as John 3:16 and 5:24 are not sufficient. We need to look elsewhere.

These writers recognize such implications. For them, assurance is based upon some mystical experience. It is mysterious, an ongoing process, and is built upon emotions. Not surprisingly, they recognize that such statements will make many conservative Evangelicals uncomfortable. It certainly would be uncomfortable to somebody looking for assurance!

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 161

[20] Ibid.

Anybody considering these things will conclude that assurance is impossible. Even if we test the supposed testimony of the Spirit by doing good works, complete assurance will always be out of the believer's grasp because we all fail these tests on occasion.

The subjective nature of such testimony is easily seen in the fact that even cult members will claim to have the same testimony. Mormons repeatedly appeal to the "burning in the bosom" which confirms that Joseph Smith has given them the truth about what it means to be children of God. Catholics will proclaim similar feelings when they take communion or go through Catechism as a means of salvation. So will almost all believers who are trying to earn eternal salvation through works such as baptism. We often hear of testimonies about how God has revealed to them that they are doing the work of God. Jehovah's Witnesses also claim that God has told them they are on the right path. Clearly, many people are misinterpreting the "whisper" of the Holy Spirit.

Fortunately, assurance is not based upon such subjective evidence. Paul is not teaching such subjectivity in Rom 8:16.

III. ANSWERING THE GRAMMATICAL ARGUMENTS

The grammatical and lexical arguments, on closer inspection, do not support the view that the Holy Spirit testifies to the inner spirit of the believer that he is a child of God. This is seen by looking at the meaning of the verb, the dative that goes with it, as well as the use of words with the prefix *sun* in Romans 8.

A. The Meaning of "Bears Witness"

Wallace argues that the verb simply means *to testify* and does not have an associative aspect to it, even though the prefix *sun* (*with* in Greek) is attached to the verb. He points out that this is seen in Rom 9:1, the only other occurrence of the verb with the dative in the NT. Paul's conscience testifies to himself that he is not lying.

However, a closer look at Romans 9 argues for the exact opposite conclusion. In Rom 9:1 Paul says that he is not lying. Then he says that his conscience also "bears witness." This bearing witness makes more sense if taken in an associative way.

Paul is saying that he is not lying to the Christians in Rome. He has a great sorrow in his heart for Israel (9:2). Then he says that his conscience bears witness of the same thing. In the Greek, the word *me* is in the dative. What Paul is saying is that he bears witness that he is not lying and that his conscience bears witness "with" him of the same fact.

The indirect object here is not the word *me*. The indirect object is implied. It is the Christians in Rome. Paul, and his conscience with him, bear witness *to* the Roman Christians of the truth of his statement. If we conclude that Rom 8:16 follows the same pattern, it would mean that the spirit of the believer testifies with the Holy Spirit to someone (God) that the believer is a child of God.

Wilkin points out that Paul uses the verb with the word *conscience* only one other time. This other occurrence is also in Romans (Rom 2:15). In that verse as well, the conscience bears witness *with* the person involved.[21] The conscience, along with the discussions that people have had with others, shows that they knew the works of the Law. The important thing to see is that in Romans 2 the verb has a strong associative idea.

There are many similarities between Rom 2:15 and Rom 9:1. The verb is the same. Both are genitive participles. Both use the same word "conscience." And, it may be concluded, both have an associative idea. The prefix on the verb carries with it its most common connotation.

B. Dative Personal Nouns and *Sun* Verbs

Wallace argues that the dative in Rom 8:16 can be an indirect object because there are examples of non-associative datives with *sun* verbs in the NT. The two examples he gives are 1 Cor 4:4 and Acts 6:9. He admits that usually such verbs are associative.[22]

It appears, however, that these are not good examples. In the case of 1 Cor 4:4, the *sun* verb is *sunoida*. The word can mean to be aware of something.[23] The dative noun here is "myself." But the noun is not

[21] Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 223. Wilkin, who edited the book, makes this observation in footnote 13.

[22] Wallace, *Grammar*, 160.

[23] BDAG, 973.

an indirect object. It is probably a dative *incommodi*, or a dative of *disadvantage*.[24] Paul is not aware of anything *against* himself.

However, one could argue that the verb *sunoida* is also associative in nature by its very meaning. The only other time it occurs is Acts 5:2, in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Sapphira is aware (or conscious) of the price of the field, But implied in the statement is the fact that she has this knowledge *with* her husband. They were both conscious of the price. BDAG also sees an implied associative idea.[25]

Even in the case of 1 Cor 4:4 there can be an implied associative idea. Paul knows with himself. He is conscious of nothing against himself because there is a self sharing! Moulton and Milligan take the verb to mean to be conscious of something, which means to "share knowledge with."[26]

In Acts 6:9 the *sun* verb is *sudzēteō* ("to argue").[27] The dative is the word "Stephen." It seems that this is a strange example for Wallace to use. The word "Stephen" is not an indirect object. It is an associative noun. The Jews of the synagogues were arguing *with* Stephen.

It appears, then, that Wallace does not give a single example in which a personal noun in the dative acts as an indirect object of a *sun* verb. This should give us pause when suggesting that Rom 8:16 does use the dative in this way.

IV. ANSWERING THE COMMENTARY TRADITION

As mentioned above, many Evangelical writers appeal to Rom 8:16 to argue that assurance of eternal salvation is subjective. In addressing this issue, the grammatical and lexical arguments of the verb and the dative noun are enough to refute that notion. However, we can look at the context as well.

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[24] Wallace, *Grammar*, 142-43.

[25] BDAG, 973. In the case of 1 Cor 4:4, it says that Paul shares the information with himself.

[26] James Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 611.

[27] This is indeed a *sun* verb. The final "n" of the prefix is dropped when it is added to the verb for ease of pronunciation.

A. What Is the Indirect Object?

Even those writers who take the verb and dative noun in an associative sense usually do not address who the indirect object is. To whom do the spirit of the believer and the Spirit of God testify that the believer is a child of God? Most seem to indicate that there is not an indirect object. Wallace points this out. He says that if the verb is associative, the one that receives the testimony is unstated. It could be God or it could be other believers.[28] Perhaps this is another reason Wallace rejects the associative idea. In his opinion, if we do not know to whom the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the believer are testifying, the meaning of the verse is very vague.

However, the context of Romans 8 makes it clear that God is the indirect object of the testimony of the believer and the Holy Spirit. Both testify to God that the believer is a child of God.

Even the writers mentioned above recognize in the context that the Spirit of God is speaking to God the Father. This is seen in Rom 8:26-27. Newell says that the context speaks of the Holy Spirit's interceding to God on behalf of the believer. The Father "searches" to see what the Holy Spirit in the believer is saying.[29]

Moo agrees and says that the Holy Spirit prays to the Father on behalf of the believer because the believer often does not know what to pray for.[30] Boice says the Spirit pleads the case of the believer to the Father.[31]

MacArthur says that the Spirit takes the needs of the believer to the Father. He adds that if this ministry of the Spirit were to cease, the believer would be eternally lost.[32] Of course, for MacArthur, this is an impossibility, and a "true" believer cannot lose eternal salvation. However, it is another indication that the believer's assurance is based upon an ongoing work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.[33]

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[28] Wallace, *Grammar*, 160.

[29] Newell, *Romans*, 326-27.

[30] Moo, *Romans*, 561-62.

[31] Boice, *Romans*, 889.

[32] MacArthur, *Romans*, 467-69.

[33] Of course, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is wonderful beyond description. We can also agree with Wallace that this ministry is neglected in evangelical studies (see Wallace, *Grammar*, 161, footnote 57). But both MacArthur and Wallace make this ongoing "process" of the work of the Spirit either part of obtaining eternal life or any assurance that goes with it. Once again, in this view, assurance of

Schreiner and Morris also believe that Rom 8:26-27 refers to the Holy Spirit's speaking to God the Father for the believer. The Holy Spirit is in the believer and has an ongoing ministry of interceding for the believer.[34]

Even though all these writers recognize that in the context Paul says the Holy Spirit speaks to God, they do not see that as occurring in Rom 8:16. Instead, in that verse, the Holy Spirit is involved in telling the believer that he is a child of God. This leads to a subjective view of assurance. However, if we look at Romans 8 more closely we will come to another conclusion.

B. Considering the Other Words That Begin with *Sun* in the Context of Romans 8

If one looks at the context of Rom 8:16, he finds that there are a number of Greek words that have the prefix *sun*. Counting the verb "bears witness" in 8:16, there are *nine* such words in 8:16-29! All of the others carry an associative meaning. Of the nine words, seven are verbs and two are nouns.

1. "Joint Heirs" with Christ; "Suffer with Him;" "Be Glorified Together" (v 17)

The words "joint heirs" are all one noun in the Greek. The NKJV adds the word "with" with the word "Christ" which is in the genitive case. This clearly has an associative idea. Paul is speaking of believers who will reign with Christ.

In this verse there are also two verbs with the *sun* prefix. The first is the verb "suffer with." The believers who suffer with Christ are the ones that will reign with Christ. When they do so, they will "be glorified together." The associative idea is clear here as well. The suffering believer will share in the glory of Christ's reign with Him. The reason is that they suffered together as well.

What we see is that in the verse immediately after v 16 there are three words with a *sun* prefix that clearly have an associative idea. Since this is the usual meaning of such words, and if it makes sense in v 16, one should be hesitant to deny an associative idea in v 16.

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eternal salvation is not found once for all by simply believing in the promises found in Scripture. Clearly they are mixing up obtaining eternal life and the role of the Spirit in sanctification.

[34] Schreiner, *Romans*, 444; Morris, *Romans*, 328-29.

2. "Groans Together;" "Labors with Birth Pangs Together" (v 22)

In v 22 there are two more *sun* verbs. Both speak of the fact that all the parts of God's creation are longing for the day when the consequences of man's sin are taken away. Together, they all are "groaning" for that day to come and are going through the "labor" that the birth of the Kingdom of God requires. Both these verbs also are associative. The NJKV adds the word "together" to bring this out.

3. "Helps" (v 26)

This verb is also associative. In the midst of our weaknesses, the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray. When we pray, He prays with us. The believer and the Spirit both pray.

4. All Things "Work Together" (v 28)

The strong associative idea of this verb is brought out once again by the addition of the word "together," even though no such separate word appears in the Greek, it is implied by the prefix *sun*. The verb "work together" appears five times in the NT. It always involves more than one party working together. BDAG defines the verb as "to engage in cooperative endeavor."[35]

All of creation works together with the believer who is suffering. When the Christian suffers for Christ, he is working together with all of creation (which is also suffering) to produce the good of the coming reign of Christ.[36]

5. "Conformed" (v 29)

This word in v 29 is another noun with the *sun* prefix. The suffering believer will be conformed to the image of Christ. As with the other words looked at in the context, this too has a strong associative meaning. BDAG lists the definition as having "a similar form" with something or someone else.[37]

The believer who suffers with Christ will share the image of Christ in the sense that he will reign with Him (Rom 8:17). Christ will be

[35] BDAG, 969.

[36] Hodges, *Romans*, 237.

[37] BDAG, 958.

the "firstborn" in the Kingdom. He will rule over it. However, many brethren will as well. These are the ones who suffer with Him.

C. Conclusion

There are a number of verbs in the immediate context of Rom 8:16 that also have a *sun* prefix. All of them have a clear associative meaning. In other words, the whole context speaks of different groups doing or experiencing things *together*. The different groups can be believers and creation, believers and Christ, or believers and the Holy Spirit. It should not surprise us if the verb with the *sun* prefix in v 16 also carries with it an associative idea. If so, the Holy Spirit does not testify to the believer; He testifies with the believer. This, in turn, impacts assurance of eternal salvation.

V. AN ASSOCIATIVE MEANING OF ROMANS 8:16

If the verb "bears witness" in Rom 8:16 has an associative meaning, Paul's point is fairly straightforward. The NKJV takes it this way by adding the word "with" after the verb. The verse is saying that both the Spirit of God and the spirit of the believer testify to God. This certainly fits the context, as both the believer and the Holy Spirit are seen in vv 26-27 as speaking to God through prayer and intercession.

Others have seen this to be the case. Fitzmyer points out the obvious. He says that the believer calls God "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). He does this in prayer, and the reason he does so is because he knows that he is a child of God. The Spirit of God does the same thing when the believer prays. He joins with the believer in proclaiming that the believer is a child of God. The cries of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the believer are the same.[38]

When the believer prays to God and calls Him *Father*, by these words he is saying that he is part of God's family. Only a person who knows he is a child of God would call God his Father. When the Holy Spirit intercedes for the believer, He says that same thing: "This is your child."[39] The Spirit says it *with* the believer.

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[38] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 501.

[39] Hodges, *Romans*, 223.

This is the opposite of a subjective assurance of eternal salvation. As seen above, the context of Romans 8 is one of suffering. Paul is encouraging believers who go through difficulties. Part of that encouragement is that the believer has complete assurance of his standing before God. When he prays, not only he bears witness that he is a child of God, so does the Spirit of God within him. He knows that God will hear his prayers, even when he doesn't know what to pray (vv 26-27).[40] In that case as well, the Spirit of God is praying with the believer.

In the midst of suffering, the last thing Paul would want to say is that the believer is left with a subjective view of his relationship with God. In fact, Paul is saying that the believer can endure such suffering because he knows he is a child of God. The believer is not left to a mystical feeling of assurance, or trying to hear the whisper of the Spirit of God. Nor does he have to pass a series of tests to see if he is a believer. If we take the promise of Christ at face value—that all who believe in Him have eternal life—we already know it. That is why we call God Father when we pray.

VI. CONCLUSION

Many find a subjective view of assurance in Rom 8:16. In today's Evangelical climate that is not surprising. Most Evangelicals do not have assurance of eternal salvation. It is common to hear them say that believers must test themselves to see if they are believers or not. These tests usually involve obeying certain commandments found in the Bible. In Rom 8:16 there is supposedly another test. The believer can listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in him to see if he is a child of God.

With all of these tests, it is clear that assurance of salvation will always be elusive. We will pass the tests some days and fail them on others. On some days we will feel confident the Spirit is giving us assurance, and on other days we will be convinced that He is not. This lack of assurance is exactly what we find among many churchgoers today.

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[40] Ibid., 224.

It is somewhat ironic that Fitzmyer, as discussed above, did not see Rom 8:16 that way. It is ironic because he was a Catholic priest (1920-2016). In Rom 8:16, at least, he offers more assurance than many Protestant writers. That is a sad commentary on the doctrine of assurance among Evangelicals.

Jesus offers the believer eternal life at the moment of faith (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26). He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). We have His word that at the moment of faith we become the children of God. As a result, we can boldly call God our Father, just as He did (Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15). We also know that when we pray, the Holy Spirit says the same thing about us. These words from the Word of God are better than the shifting sand of any mystical experience we might try to find.

DOES FREE GRACE THEOLOGY DIMINISH THE GOSPEL? A REVIEW OF WAYNE GRUDEM'S, *"FREE GRACE" THEOLOGY: 5 WAYS IT DIMINISHES THE GOSPEL*, PART 3

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Associate Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In Parts 1 and 2 we considered the first four chapters of Dr. Wayne Grudem's recent book, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, in which he argues against Free Grace Theology (FGT).

In Part 3 we will consider his interpretations of eleven tough texts which he considers in Chapter 5. After four chapters with very little, if any, exegesis, I was looking forward to how he actually interprets the Word of God.

In his final chapter, Grudem makes the odd claim that FGT diminishes the gospel because it holds what he calls *unlikely interpretations*. This is an odd claim. Unlikely according to whom? Did Luther and Calvin diminish the gospel because their interpretations were considered very unlikely by nearly all the theologians and priests of their day?

I'll grant that Grudem's interpretations of these eleven passages are consistent with those of the majority of Calvinist scholars today. But that does not matter because truth is not determined by consensus.[1] What matters is which interpretation makes best sense of Scripture. So I will evaluate his interpretations based on the words of Scripture.

[1] If truth was determined by consensus, then Christianity would not be true. For every person on earth today who identifies himself as a Christian (31.5%, which is surely more than actually are born again) there are a little over two people who identify themselves as non-Christians, including Muslim (23.2%), Irreligious (16.3 %), Hindu (15%), Buddhist (7.1%), Folk Religion (5.9%), and Other Religion (1%).

II. SOME EXAMPLES OF UNLIKELY INTERPRETATIONS

Grudem's selection of passages includes one from the Synoptic Gospels, one from John (which he split into two separate discussions), three from Acts, two from Paul's epistles, and three from James.

Surprisingly, Grudem cites only one FGT author in ten of the eleven passages, namely, Zane Hodges. Chapter 5 should be entitled, "Some Examples of Unlikely Interpretations by Zane Hodges." Since this is a book about FGT, why doesn't he discuss the views of Jody Dillow, Dave Anderson, Charlie Bing, Charles Ryrie, Tom Constable, John Hart, R. B. Thieme, Fred Chay, Earl Radmacher, Gary Derickson, Elliott Johnson, or me?

While I agree with most of the interpretations of Zane Hodges, a book on FGT should not focus only on his views, any more than a book on Calvinism should focus solely on Grudem's views.

A. Luke 16:30

> "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'"

Grudem's interpretation. Grudem says that this verse "implies that the brothers need to repent in order to be saved" (p. 120).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. Grudem mentions that Zane Hodges argues the rich man was incorrect. Thus the FGT view (assuming there is but one FGT interpretation of this view, which is false) is that the rich man mistakenly believed the condition of everlasting life is repentance.

Grudem responds to the view of Hodges:

> But that understanding of the verse is certainly wrong, for in the next verse Jesus himself assumes that the brothers need repentance, when he has Abraham say[2] that they would not even be convinced "if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Jesus's [sic] argument about their culpability would not be

[2] Jesus does not "have Abraham say" anything. Grudem calls Luke 16:19-31 "Jesus's [sic] parable" (p. 120). Thus he thinks Jesus made up this whole story. He thinks it never happened. Yet neither the Lord nor Luke call it a parable. And no other parable gives a proper name. This account has two proper names, Lazarus and Abraham.

> persuasive unless the reader assumes that they needed to be "convinced" of the thing that has just been mentioned, the need to repent (pp. 120-21).

Grudem's reasoning is hard to grasp. Abraham was not talking about the rich man's statement that his brothers would repent if someone came back from the dead. Before the rich man's comment, Abraham had said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). Notice the words, "let them hear them." Hearing Moses and the prophets would mean believing what they wrote about the Messiah, that is, about Jesus.

After the rich man's comment Abraham said again, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

Abraham was talking about the need to *believe* the witness of Moses and the prophets concerning *Messiah*, that is, *Jesus*. Three times Abraham spoke of believing in Jesus: "let them hear them" (v 29), "If they will not hear Moses and the prophets" (v 31a), and "neither will they be persuaded [to believe in Jesus] though one rise from the dead" (v 31b). *Hearing* and *being persuaded* are synonyms for believing.

Abraham spoke of *believing*; the rich man spoke of *repenting*; and then Abraham again spoke about believing.

Abraham said nothing about repenting. He pointed to God's Word and the witness to Jesus that is found there. Let them hear that witness, that is, let them believe in Jesus in light of the witness of Moses and the prophets. Yet Grudem thinks that Abraham was discussing repentance, not faith. Are we to understand that the unregenerate man got it right, and the regenerate man—the great patriarch of the faith, Abraham—got it wrong?

Grudem's understanding of Luke 19:16-31 is not consistent with the text. Abraham did not validate what the rich man said; he corrected him.

It is Grudem's view, not the view of FGT, which is an unlikely interpretation.

B. John 15:1-2

> "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away [or He lifts up], and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Grudem's interpretation. He says, "This passage creates a difficulty for the Free Grace position because it shows that if someone's life is unfruitful, that person will be taken away from Christ, who is the true vine" (p. 121).

What does he mean? What does *being taken away from Christ* mean?

Grudem seems to be saying that the correct interpretation of John 15:1-2 is that if a believer's life is unfruitful, then he will lose everlasting life. What else could Grudem's phrase *taken away from Christ* mean, since only a believer is *in Christ*? Since an unbeliever is not *in Christ*, he cannot be *taken away from Christ*.

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. Grudem wrongly suggests that it is the uniform view of FGT that what is in view here is the lifting up of the unfruitful branch, not its being taken away. *Some* do hold that view (e.g., Radmacher and Derickson).[3] However, others think this could be teaching what John 15:6 says (i.e., that it refers to temporal judgment—God's discipline and judgment in this life). It is not essential to FGT to take *airō* as *lift up* in John 15:2. Hodges, for example, did not take it that way.[4]

It is quite surprising that Grudem does not mention how Hodges takes this passage. He cites Hodges as his only source in all of the other ten passages,. Here, however, he doesn't mention his view.

Grudem argues that unfruitful branches were never *lifted up*. He suggests that they were *taken away* to be burned and that burning refers to eternal condemnation.

His discussion of this subject is imprecise. For example, see note 5 on page 122. Grudem says that pruning weak, broken, or diseased

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[3] See Earl D. Radmacher and Gary W. Derickson, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis Press, 2001).

[4] See Zane C. Hodges, "1 John," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 2:888-89). See also Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvatio*n, Second Edition (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 118-21.

branches "is the opposite of saying that branches that do not bear fruit are 'lifted up' so that they may bear more fruit." The opposite? The two ideas are unrelated. Branches which are not bearing fruit can be healthy, unbroken, and not diseased. Pruning is not the same as lifting up.

Strangely, Grudem does not discuss the very next verse, John 15:3, in which the Lord says, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Doesn't that verse mean the disciples, to whom He is addressing this discussion of fruitfulness, were eternally secure? If not, why not?

The Lord had already promised the eleven that they would sit on thrones and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (with Matthias taking Judas' place). Thus this cannot be a warning that *they* would be eternally condemned.

Can *anyone* who is a branch and is connected to the vine, which is Jesus, be eternally condemned? No. But Grudem says he can. How does this fit his Calvinism?

Why would the Lord only give one option for dealing with unfruitful branches? If it is possible to stimulate unfruitful branches so that they might become fruitful, would that not be desirable and wise?

Grudem seems to be saying that it is impossible for unfruitful believers to become fruitful. Is it not possible for God to turn an unfruitful branch into a fruitful one?

It is hard to see why Grudem discusses John 15:1-2, given the fact that he also discusses John 15:6, which he interprets as saying the same thing.

The interpretation of Grudem on John 15:1-2 is more than unlikely. Loss of everlasting life is impossible. Compare John 5:24; 6:35; 11:26; 15:3.

C. John 15:6

> "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."

Grudem's interpretation. Grudem admits he interprets this verse the same as he did John 15:1-2: "This passage continues Jesus's [sic] *same teaching* about vine and branches…" (p. 123, emphasis added).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He has two paragraphs about Hodges's interpretation of John 15:6. He says that Hodges understands the burning to refer to temporal judgment, not eternal condemnation.

It is true that Hodges says that the burning in John 15:6, "portray[s] divine chastening as a fire."[5] But Grudem fails to mention that Hodges also said that believers who ceased to abide in Christ "would be separated from their experience of fellowship with Him."[6] Readers should take the time to read what Hodges actually said about this passage.[7] Grudem rejects as out of hand the idea that temporal judgment is in view here.

Grudem says that being thrown into the fire and burned is a "picture of final judgment" (p. 123). Hence, Grudem understands the Lord to be warning Peter, James, John, Matthew, and the other disciples—and all disciples of Christ—that they might be sent to the lake of fire.

Grudem suggests that the burning of vegetation in Scripture is *always* total and *must* refer to eternal condemnation. He mentions one NT and ten OT passages to support his conclusion. However, he does not quote them, or discuss them, and if you look them up you will find they do not support his claim at all.

In Matt 3:12, the Lord refers to "unquenchable fire" and uses a stronger Greek word that means "burn up." Whereas John 15:6 has *kaiō* ("they are burned"), Matt 3:12 has *katakaiō* ("He will burn up"). While Hodges discusses the difference between these two Greek words, Grudem does not.

Grudem inexplicably cites Isa 9:18, which says, "wickedness burns as the fire; it shall devour the briers and thorns…" That is a reference to the destructive nature of wickedness. It is not a reference to the lake of fire.

Another puzzling proof text he cites is Lev 6:12, which says, "the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it." That fire stopped in AD 70. In any case, that verse has nothing to do with John 15:6.

I urge interested readers to look up all the passages Grudem mentions. He gives examples of the burning of wooden idols, embers on

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[5] Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 121.

[6] Ibid., 120.

[7] Ibid., 118-23.

an altar, chariots, the wood of the vine, and branches. But these all illustrate temporal judgment, not eternal condemnation. In other words, he actually is arguing *against his own position* with these proof texts. The more you look up, the weaker his case becomes (e.g., Lev 13:52, 57; Deut 7:5; 12:3; Josh 11:6; Jer 4:2, 22 [neither of which even mentions fire]; Ezek 15:4-6; 19:12).

Grudem's interpretation that born-again people (i.e., clean people, John 15:3), will be eternally condemned if they fail to produce enough good works is not just unlikely, but impossible. No believer will be judged regarding his eternal destiny as the Lord clearly promised in John 5:24 ("he shall not come into judgment"). Believers are eternally secure.

D. Acts 11:18

> When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Grudem's interpretation. He says, "People become Christians through 'repentance that leads to life'" (p. 125).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He claims that Hodges teaches that "repentance leads to some additional level of fellowship or discipleship after salvation" (p. 125). He does not reference Hodges to support that claim. Indeed, Hodges said nothing about "some additional level of fellowship or discipleship after salvation." That is a misrepresentation. Hodges did not believe or teach that there are levels of fellowship. One is either in fellowship with God or not. As cited above, Hodges wrote, "If they failed to 'abide' in Jesus, they would be separated from the experience of fellowship with Him."[8]

Nor did Hodges ever say that there are "*additional* levels of discipleship."

Hodges cited the prodigal son and Rom 8:13 and said that "'coming to life' is always the end result of repentance, whether it be the repentance of a Christian or the repentance of the unsaved."[9] Hodges spoke of the unsaved repenting and coming to life. Grudem

[8] Ibid., 120.

[9] Ibid., 136.

said that Hodges was only talking about a Christian's super level of fellowship or discipleship. That is incorrect.

Personally, I am not yet convinced what Peter's companions meant. It is possible that Hodges is correct; however, I think another view is even more likely. Peter's companions might well have been saying that repentance leads to *everlasting life*. Grudem fails to mention my view, which is in print.[10]

Peter's friends were likely saying that repentance can be a way in which a people come to faith in Christ for everlasting life. By turning from one's sins, he becomes more open to going to church, prayer, listening to another Christian, etc. Repentance can be a step toward God that ultimately results in faith in Christ for everlasting life.

Luke was not citing Peter's companions in order to contradict what Peter said to Cornelius, i.e., to believe in Jesus (Acts 10:43; 15:7-11).[11] Peter did not call upon Cornelius to repent. Grudem seems to think he did.

Grudem's main support amounts to circular reasoning: "the entire structure of the book of Acts" teaches that repentance is a condition of everlasting life (p. 125). Grudem cites Acts 1:8 (p. 125) and Acts 11:14 (p. 126) to support his claim. However, it is hard to see how either Acts 1:8 or 11:14 supports that.

What about Acts 16:30-31? When Paul was asked, "What must I do to be saved?" his answer was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved…" He did not mention repentance. Why not?

What about Acts 10:1-47? Peter speaks of faith in Christ as the condition (Acts 10:43), without mentioning repentance.

What about Acts 15:7-11? At the Jerusalem Council, Peter summarizes his experience with Cornelius; he speaks of faith in Christ and does not mention repentance.

What about Acts 13:46, 48? The issue in Paul's first recorded sermon in Acts is faith in Christ, not repentance, which he doesn't even mention.

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[10] Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 117-18.

[11] It is possible that Peter's companions were wrong when they said that repentance is the condition, or a condition, of everlasting life. In that case, I would think Peter would have corrected them on the spot. Compare Acts 15:7-11 in which Peter retells this incident with Cornelius.

Although Grudem thinks the FGT interpretations are unlikely, his are out of step with the Word of God.

E. Acts 17:30

> "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent…"

Grudem's interpretation. He understands Paul to say that repentance is "necessary to escape final judgment" (p. 127).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. Grudem cites Hodges as saying that repentance is necessary "to enter into harmonious relationship with God" (p. 126).

According to Grudem, "Acts 17 is a summary of Paul's initial gospel proclamation to the philosophers in Athens. And in this initial gospel message, the one and only thing he says that God commands is that they repent" (p. 126).

The first half of Acts 17 concerns Paul's ministry in Thessalonica and Berea, not in Athens as Grudem mistakenly says. Even Acts 17:16-21 says nothing about Paul's gospel proclamation in Athens.

Grudem evidently means that Acts 17:22-34 (and more particularly, Acts 17:30-34), is a summary of Paul's "initial gospel message" (p. 126).

What do "initial gospel message" and "initial gospel proclamation" mean? Are there different saving messages? Did Paul preach an *initial saving message* only to later come back with a different one?

I think what Grudem means is that Paul was doing *pre-evangelism* here. He was pointing people to Jesus and telling them that Jesus will judge the world on some future day. Repentance is all that is mentioned. Paul doesn't mention faith in Christ, the new birth, everlasting life, justification, the cross of Christ, or anything else associated with his normal preaching.

If so, I agree this is pre-evangelism. We are told by Luke in Acts 17:34 that "some men joined him and believed." Luke did not say, "some men believed and joined him." The message in Acts 17:30 generated interest. Some people said, "We will hear you again on this matter" (Acts 17:33). They heard more from Paul when they joined him, and as a result, they believed. It was then that Paul preached the message of life, and they believed.

It is odd that Grudem does not comment on Acts 17:33-34. Why does Luke say that "some men…*believed*"? Shouldn't he have said, "Some men…*repented*"? If repentance is the condition of eternal life, then why mention faith and fail to mention repentance? Notice that Paul did not say, "God has commanded all men everywhere to repent *so that they will have everlasting life*." Nor did he say, "the one who repents has everlasting life." Grudem said that, but not Paul. Did the men in Acts 17:34 also repent? Possibly. But Luke does not tell us.

So why does Paul say that God has commanded all men to repent? Because God commanded it. Paul's ministry was not merely one of evangelism. It also included calling unbelievers and believers to turn from their sins and to follow Christ in discipleship.

F. Acts 26:19-20

> "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."

Grudem's interpretation. "That is Paul's summary…of his entire preaching ministry both to Jews and to Gentiles" (p. 127). He then concludes from that statement that "repentance [is] a necessary part of the initial gospel message" (p. 127).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as suggesting that Paul "is explaining how to live a life of holiness and good works *after* one is saved" (p. 127). Yet the quote from Hodges which Grudem provides does not say anything about *after one is saved*. Hodges was merely saying that Paul was seeking to turn people to God and to do good works.

Grudem's position is unlikely in the extreme. Are we to understand that an accurate summary of Paul's entire preaching ministry would leave out calling people to faith in Christ? How does Grudem explain Acts 20:21, "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"? Is that not a summary of Paul's entire preaching ministry?

No one disputes that Paul, the other Apostles, and the Lord Himself all called people to repent. But that does not establish that

repentance is the condition for everlasting life. We are called to do many things that are not conditions of eternal salvation.

Acts 26:19-20 does not mention salvation, everlasting life, or faith in Christ. If this is Paul's summary of his entire preaching ministry, wouldn't it be odd for him to leave out the call to faith and the promise of everlasting life?

G. Romans 10:9-13

> That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, *"Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."* For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "*whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (emphasis added).

Grudem's interpretation. He says that the salvation in vv 9, 10, and 13 is eternal salvation from hell, not deliverance from God's wrath in this life.

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as saying that "calling on the name of the Lord to be saved (v 13) does not mean calling out to gain eternal salvation, but calling out 'to obtain His aid and deliverance in daily life'" (p. 129).

Grudem fails to explain *why* Hodges takes that interpretation or *how* Hodges defends his view.

If v 13 refers to an *unbeliever* calling out to the Lord for everlasting life, then what does v 14 mean? There Paul writes, "How then shall they call on Him *in whom they have not believed?*" Paul is not saying that *unbelievers* can call upon the Lord. He is saying that *believers* call upon Him. Notice that each of the three questions in v 14 states an effect and then the prior cause. The effect of "calling on Him" is based on the prior cause of believing in Him: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not [already] believed?" In other words, belief precedes calling. Hence the ones doing the calling in v 13 are *believers*, not *unbelievers*. And if they are believers, they are already eternally saved. Thus the salvation of v 13 is not salvation

from eternal condemnation (since believers are already delivered from that).

Grudem does not mention or discuss the fact that the quote in v 13 is from Joel 2:32. Is he suggesting that Joel 2:32 is an OT evangelistic verse? Actually, Joel 2:32 deals with the Tribulation and states that believing Jews who call on the name of the Lord will be saved from dying.

Grudem also fails to explain how confessing Christ, calling on His name, can be a requirement for everlasting life. This is not a requirement he has mentioned before. So now the conditions for having everlasting life are repentance, heartfelt trust, personal encounter, *and public confession of Christ?* Is that list complete? Are there more requirements Grudem has not yet mentioned?

H. 2 Corinthians 13:5

> Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

Grudem's interpretation. Grudem understands this verse to be a call for the readers to "examine themselves to find out if they are really born again or not" (p. 131). For evidence he cites the words "in the faith" and "that Jesus Christ is in you" (pp. 131-32).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as saying that the issue is not whether they are born again, but "whether they are 'living in a dynamic, faith-oriented connection with Jesus Christ'" (p. 131).

Grudem fails to notice or discuss the elephant in the room. Second Corinthians 13:5 is part of a context that runs from vv 1-6. In v 3 Paul says, "you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me." When he comes to v 5, Paul turns the tables on the readers who were questioning whether he speaks for Christ. The word *yourselves* is first in the Greek sentence for emphasis: *Yourselves examine!* But note, they were questioning his apostleship, not his eternal destiny. Likewise, in turning the tables, Paul is not asking them to question their eternal destiny, either. He has a different question in mind. But what?

Grudem fails to mention or discuss the Greek words *dokimos*, *adokimos*, and *dokimazō* which appear in vv 5-7. "Test yourselves" is from *dokimazō*. At the end of that same verse Paul says, "unless you are disqualified." *Disqualified* translates the related adjective, *adokimos*, failing the test. Disqualified from what test? The test is whether or not a born-again believer has lived a life worthy of the Lord's approval and reward.

Verse 6 picks up on the theme of vv 1-4, "But I trust you will know that we are not disqualified." Again, the word *disqualified* is the related adjective *adokimos*.

Then in v 7 the adjective *dokimos* occurs ("not that we should appear approved") and its antonym, *adokimos* ("though we may seem disqualified").

None of this is mentioned or discussed by Grudem. His interpretation ignores the context and is inconsistent with it.

I. James 2:14-17

> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Grudem's interpretation. He understands James to be saying that "genuine faith will always result in good works," and that unless we add faith to our works we cannot be saved from eternal condemnation (pp. 133-34).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as saying that those addressed here are born-again and thus that the salvation in view is salvation from temporal judgment, not salvation from eternal judgment (p. 133).

The evidence Grudem cites to support his position are 1) James is not addressing most of his readers, just "'someone' who may be in a different situation than most of the readers" (p. 133), and 2) the salvation here must be salvation from eternal condemnation since "*sōzō*…always refers to eternal salvation except where the context

specifies a situation of rescue from physical danger or healing from physical sickness (as in James 5:15 or Matt. 8:25; 9:22, for example)" (pp. 133-34).

The problems with Grudem's view are legion.

First of all, it is forced to suggest that James doesn't have all his readers in mind when he says, "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12). The same speaking and doing command is found in 2:14 ("If someone says…but does not have works [i.e., does not do]") and 2:16 ("One of you says…but you do not give them the things which are needed").

Second, he fails to recognize or comment on the repeated phrase *ti to ophelos*, which starts v 14 and ends v 16. "What does it profit?" or "What use is it?" is the question James has in mind, but Grudem does not.

Third, Grudem only discusses two of the uses of *sōzō* in James (2:14; 5:15) here.[12] Grudem concedes that 5:15 refers to physical salvation. What about 1:21; 4:12; and 5:20? Grudem does not mention or discuss James' three other uses of *sōzō*. They all refer to saving one's physical life from death. And all three are addressed to believers.

Finally, Grudem is wrong to say that *sōzō* in James (and elsewhere) always refers to eternal salvation from hell *except* when the context indicates that healing or temporal deliverance is in view.[13] That is not a safe assumption. And the context *does* indicate that all five uses of *sōzō* in James refer to temporal deliverance. Grudem cannot see that because his theology will not allow it.

J. James 2:26

> For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Grudem's interpretation. He suggests that faith without works is "dead faith" and not really faith at all. Hence the person who has

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[12] He does discuss Jas 5:19-20 later in the chapter. However, he does not mention that or summarize his findings here. See below for a discussion of his interpretation of Jas 5:19-20.

[13] For an excellent refutation of Grudem's claim, see Joseph Dillow, "Can Faith Save Him?" *A Defense of Free Grace Theology*, ed. Fred Chay (N.P.: Grace Theology Press, 2017), 151-55.

faith without works is not born again because he is an unbeliever (pp. 134-36).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as saying that faith without works is faith which "has lost all of its vitality and productiveness" (p. 134).

To support his view, Grudem leans heavily on two things: 1) the entire passage is about salvation from eternal condemnation (see esp. Jas 2:14), and 2) dead faith is non-faith, faith that never has existed.

As discussed above, Grudem is wrong that the salvation in 2:14 refers to salvation from eternal condemnation.

In addition, he is wrong that "faith without works is dead" means "faith without works is not faith." That is illogical.

Faith is faith. Faith without works is still faith. When James says that faith is *dead*, he clearly means it is *unprofitable* as shown by the twice repeated question, "What does it profit" (2:14, 16). To say that faith without works is not really faith is to contradict what James says and to miss his point.

The Lordship Salvation understanding of Jas 2:26, that is, Grudem's understanding, is illogical and contrary to the context.

K. James 5:19-20

> Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Grudem's interpretation. He suggests that James is saying that a Christian can save a straying brother *from hell* by bringing him back from the spiritual far country (p. 137).

Grudem's explanation of the FGT interpretation. He cites Hodges as saying that a Christian can save a straying believer *from premature physical death* by bringing him back from the spiritual far country (p. 137).

Grudem only devotes two short paragraphs to both discuss the FG view and explain his own. This is far less than he did on the other ten passages.

Grudem is convinced that salvation from eternal condemnation is in view in the closing verses of James, but he does not discuss what James means when he says, "he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." Isn't he a bit concerned about saying that we can save our fellow brothers and sisters from hell? If they are believers, then they are already saved once and for all. They can't lose everlasting life, and we can't do anything to keep them saved. They are already secure. That is what ever-lasting life means (cf. John 5:24; 11:26).

Notice the text does not speak of something the *straying* believer does for another. James is talking about *another believer* (someone) who turns the straying believer back to the Lord.

Grudem again relies on the fact that physical death is not mentioned directly. However, that is clearly what is in view. Believers cannot save fellow believers from hell, but we can save one another from the temporal judgment that will fall if our beloved friends who have strayed do not repent.

Grudem's interpretation is not only unlikely, it is impossible.

III. CONCLUSION

In Chapter 5, Wayne Grudem fails to show that FGT diminishes the gospel. Indeed, his exegesis of these eleven passages is so questionable that *his* interpretations should be called *unlikely*. Chapter 5 undermines his efforts to promote Lordship Salvation

Instead of hurting the movement, I believe Grudem's book will actually move people to accept the Free Grace position.

UNIVERSAL SIN AND SALVATION IN ROMANS 5:12-21[1]

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the more prominent doctrines in systematic theology is the doctrine of "inherited sin."[2] A great deal of speculation has taken place regarding the cause, transmission/imputation and consequences of inherited sin. It is commonplace to cite Rom 5:12-21 as the foundational text for this doctrine.[3] The present essay intends to question this standard practice. It is granted that several related issues of systematic theology will surface, which cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of this article. The focus will rather be one important exegetical issue involved in the common reading of Romans 5, namely, what does Paul mean by *eis pantas anthrōpous*?[4]

In reading the provocative words of Paul found in Rom 5:12-21 (especially vv 12, 18-19), one cannot help but wonder if the standard reading of this section reads too much into the passage. Have interpreters gone off the path by reading this as an exposition on the concept of original or inherited sin? Not only might one question

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[1] This article first appeared in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol 42/3, September 1999. It is slightly edited for stylistic purposes. Used by permission.

[2] Following Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 494.

[3] Examples of this reading are legion. See e.g. Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News: Toward an Understanding of Biblical Universalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 9-16; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 631-32; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 494; Douglas Moo, *Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 321-29; John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 148-62.

[4] Editor's Note: The words mean "upon (or 'for') all men."

whether this is Paul's intention and main point, it might be asked if this concept is in view at all. The following essay suggests that such an understanding leads to unacceptable conclusions. If the present passage is read as an explicit statement about inherited sin (on the basis of 5:12, 18), then consistency would seem to require that it also be read as an explicit statement of Universalism.[5] If Paul says in v 18 that all *without exception* are sinners (as a *direct* consequence of Adam's sin), then he is also maintaining that all *without exception* are saved from their sin.

But this, we maintain, is mistaken on two counts. First, it is not Paul's intention to speculate on the transmission or imputation of human sinfulness.[6]

His point is related, but significantly different. Second, a misplaced emphasis on this alleged speculation obscures the primary intention of Paul. He does indeed wish to treat the issue of the universality of sin and salvation, but in a different sense. Paul is speaking of universality in the sense of "without ethnic distinction,"[7] not in the sense of "without exception."

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[5] See the detailed argument advanced by Punt, *Universal Good News* 9-20. Punt argues that whatever group is in view in 18a is also meant in 18b. Although we disagree with the conclusion he reaches concerning the scope of Paul's universalism, we agree that *eis pantas anthrōpous* refers to the same group in each case. See also M. E. Boring, "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul," *JBL* 105 (1986): 283-92.

[6] Although it is easily demonstrated that some such speculation is present in Jewish literature, contemporary to Paul, this does little to prove that Paul was so engaged. For discussion of the relevant Jewish literature, see e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38A; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 272; J. Cambier, "Péchés des Hommes et Péché d'Adamen Rom. v. 12," *NTS* 11 (1965): 219-22. See also Stanley Porter, "The Pauline Concept of Original Sin in Light of Rabbinic Background," *TynBul* 41 (1990): 3-13, 30. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 147-48.

[7] We are using "without ethnic distinction" in the sense of "without partiality." In other words, Paul means Jews and Gentiles alike when he says "all men." A key text for this reading is Rom 3:21-26 where Paul argues that the righteousness of God is available through faith for "all who believe," *because there is no distinction, because all sin* and are thereby justified by his grace. For a similar conclusion regarding "all men" in Romans, see N. T. Wright, "Towards a Biblical View of Universalism," *Themelios* 4 (1979): 55-57.

II. INHERITED SIN?

As already noted, systematic theology has taught us that humankind has been tainted by "inherited sin." Adam's sin is seen as somehow transmitted or imputed to all humankind. The central passage used in support of this doctrine is Rom 5:12-21.[8] For example, Erickson writes,

> All of us, apparently without exception, are sinners. By this we mean not merely that all of us sin, but that all of us have a depraved or corrupted nature which so inclines us toward sin that it is virtually inevitable. How can this be? What is the basis of this amazing fact? Must there not be some common factor at work in all of us? It is as if some antecedent or *a priori* factor in life leads to universal sinning and universal depravity. But what is this common factor, which is often referred to as original sin? Whence is it derived, and how is it transmitted or communicated? We find the answer in Romans 5.[9]

Despite great respect for the work of systematic theologians, it is doubtful whether Rom 5:12-21 can be made to sustain the weight of this argument. Romans 5:12 reads, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."[10] The Augustinian reading of *eph hō* "in whom" (cf. "because," RSV) made it quite clear that he took Adam's sin to be that which contaminated all men.[11]

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[8] So Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 494-96; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 631- 32. Cf. comments of L. Sabourin, "Original Sin Reappraised," *BTB* 3 (1973): 67-70, 74-77.

[9] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 631 (although he also speaks of the "conditional imputation of guilt" [p. 639]); Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 494-96; Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin," 18-30. Although Porter acknowledges that Paul did not conceive of his understanding of original sin in "traditional categories of Systematic Theology" (p. 30), he elsewhere describes 5:12*ff*. as an "explicit theory" of the concept (p. 20) and concludes that Paul's understanding seems to be most like the "federalist view" (p. 30). Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 321-28.

[10] Unless otherwise noted, all translations will follow the RSV.

[11] For discussion of this point see Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community*, 109-110; Cambier, "Péchés des Hommes," 242-51; Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin," 22-24; Moo, *Romans*, 321-329; Karl Kertelge, "The Sin of Adam in Light of Christ's Redemptive Act According to Rom 5:12-21," *Communio* 18 (1991): 503-505. See also Sabourin ("Original Sin Reappraised," 72-81) for discussion of the development of the doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church and a summary of the position of many of

But most modern exegetes reject this rendering of *eph hō* and accept in its place something like "because."[12] This understanding of *eph hō* suggests Paul's emphasis is not so much on inherited sin, but on "original death."[13] In other words, Paul does not speculate on how Adam's sin is transmitted/imputed to every person. Rather, he wishes to demonstrate that sin always results in death.[14] So far, so good. But Paul also says "all sinned" (*pantes hēmarton*). This statement, in conjunction with Paul's further discussion of Adam (vv 18-19), has led many to conclude Paul intends some relationship between Adam's sin and "universal condemnation."[15]

Those who see inherited sin in view appeal to v 18, "Then as one man's trespass leads to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."[16] Here it seems even more clearly stated that Adam's sin is the cause of condemnation

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the Greek fathers. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Consecutive Use of *eph' o* in Romans 5:12," *NTS* 39 (1993): 321-39.

[12] So for example, Käsemann, *Romans*, 147-48; Moo, *Romans*, 321-22; Dunn, *Romans* 1: 273-74; Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community*, 109-110. Cf. Fitzmyer, "Consecutive Use," 322-29; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 273-77.

[13] So Moo, *Romans*, 322-23; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:273.

[14] Moo, *Romans*, 323. It must be noted that to argue here that Paul is not teaching "inherited sin" as commonly understood does not require a Pelagian perspective. Paul may be saying that once the power of sin was unleashed into the world, it is inevitable and inescapable that "all sin" and therefore, "all die." See e.g. Käsemann, *Romans*, 150. Schreiner's translation "…and so [death] spread to all people, and on the basis of this death all sinned" (*Romans*, 270) admits the reality of universal sin without the need to posit the transmission of a corrupted nature (275).

[15] So e.g. Moo (*Romans*, 323) who notes that although v 12 can be understood to mean everyone is subject to death because of his or her own sin, this "individualistic" understanding may conflict with the "corporate" explanation present in vv 15-19. Furthermore, some (e.g. Stott, *Romans*, 150-53) argue Paul must have "inherited sin" in mind because he says in vv 13-14 that although sin was in the world before the law was given, sin was not counted where there was no law. Even still, death reigned from Adam to Moses. This reign of death, says Stott, must be due to the sin of Adam, since sin was not reckoned apart from the law. Put differently, if people died before the coming of the law, it must be because they were guilty due to Adam's sin. This position, however, overlooks at least two crippling objections. First, Paul himself has already argued that no one has an excuse because God has sufficiently revealed himself through creation. Failure to acknowledge God in response to this revelation, which is apart from and prior to the law (ever since the creation of the world, 1:20), is sufficient to establish the guilt of all. Second, Stott's reading overlooks texts such as Genesis 6 where the wickedness of mankind is judged by death (so also Genesis 19). In other words, these OT texts speak of judgment against sin which leads to the death of those who are wicked, not those who are guilty due to Adam.

[16] E.g. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 632.

for all men; therefore, it would seem, some idea of inherited sin must be in mind for Paul to make this statement. For instance, Douglas Moo suggests v 12 read in an "individualistic sense" creates a conflict with v 18, understood in a "corporate sense." This alleged conflict surfaces when one tries to reconcile the assertions "each person dies because *each person* sins [in the course of history]" and "*one man's* trespass led to condemnation for all people" (v 18a).[17] His resolution is to reject the "individualistic" reading of v 12 in favor of the "corporate" reading of v 18.[18] If we are correct in suggesting "all people" (*pantas anthrōpous*) should be read in a sense other than "each individual person without exception," this apparent conflict between "individual" and "corporate" readings disappears.

There is, we suggest, significant difficulty with the conclusion that Paul intends some statement regarding inherited sin (due to his use of *pantas anthrōpous*). If Paul's statement is to be taken at face value and interpreted to mean that Adam's sin and consequent guilt are applied to *all men* (without exception as would seem to be required for the idea of inherited sin to survive), then it seems necessary that Christ's act of righteousness must also be applied to this same group. In other words, since Paul is at pains to argue that the effect of Christ's act surpasses the effect of Adam's trespass (*ei…pollō mallon*; vv 15, 17), and in light of the exact parallel in language between 18a and 18b (esp. *eis pantas anthrōpous*), it seems that an insistence on inherited sin requires a conclusion of absolute Universalism. If sin is universally applied (every human being without exception), then so must salvation be universally applied.[19]

Our argument and suggested reading of this passage hinges on the wording of vv 18-19. If *eis pantas anthrōpous* in 5:18a means "all men without exception," then how can we make the same phrase denote something different in the very next clause? If there were solid contextual clues for this change in designation, it would not be problematic. But such contextual clues are lacking. It seems rather that

[17] Moo, *Romans*, 323.

[18] Ibid., 326.

[19] Punt, *Universal Good News*, 9-16; Boring, "Language of Universal Salvation," 284-86.

Paul intends the force of the phrase to be the same in each clause (as well as in 5:12).[20]

The plain reading of this text seems inescapable; whomever Paul sees as affected by Adam's sin is also affected by Christ's act of righteousness. The group affected by Adam's sin is brought under judgment and death. The group affected by Christ's righteousness is pardoned and receives life. Thus if Paul's point is that every single human being is condemned by Adam's sin, then it follows that every single human being is pardoned and receives life. Such is the plain reading of the text, if we see inherited sin in this picture.

This same conclusion is supported by Paul's use of *hōs...hōutōs* in 5:18. The use of this phrase in Paul frequently denotes similarity of means or manner.[21] Thus in Rom 5:18 Paul's comparison of the results of *henos paraptōmatos* (one offense) and *henos dikaiōmatos* (one righteous act) would require that they be applied through similar means or manner. If the result of the first is applied to all men without any conscious participation, then so must the results of the second (that is, without conscious participation). If, on the other hand, the application of the results of the second is based on some form of active participation (the exercise of faith), then it would seem the application of guilt must also be based on active participation.

III. UNIVERSALISM?

The doctrine of absolute Universalism (the salvation of all without exception), however, runs aground almost immediately.[22] Unless we assume Paul was incoherent and quite inconsistent in his theological thought (an unfair assumption about any author, much less one who has proven himself to be quite sophisticated in his theological reflection), we must reject Universalism. Throughout Romans the death knell of Universalism is sounded. For example, Paul clearly teaches that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ (e.g. 1:16; 3:22;

[20] Ibid., 17-20. It is interesting to note that Stott, who wishes to modify v 18b on the basis of v 17, elsewhere affirms, "it is a right principle of interpretation that the *same phrase in the same context bears the same meaning* (*Romans*, 170, emphasis added).

[21] See e.g. Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 5:3; 7:17; 2 Cor 1:7; 7:14; Eph 5:24; 1 Thess 5:2.

[22] It is not our purpose to present a detailed refutation of Universalism in Romans. Rather, we will merely state our conclusion and present cursory evidence that Paul does not teach a universal salvation in the absolute sense.

5:1; 9:32; 10:9).[23] It is those who call upon the name of the Lord who will be saved (10:13).[24] Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that he understands only a remnant will be saved (9:27; 11:5). He likewise speaks of a hardening which has come upon part of Israel (11:7, 25), which in turn means some of Israel does not come to faith. It seems inescapable that Paul envisages two distinct groups of people: those who exercise faith in Jesus and those who do not.[25] These groups do not enjoy the same eschatological fate. Those who have faith will live, those who do not, will not. Simply stated, Universalism cannot be sustained.[26]

If Universalism is to be dismissed, and we maintain in light of Paul's argument throughout the text of Romans it is, then how are we to account for the language of vv 18-19? An interesting and insightful attempt is found in Nygren. He attempts to show that

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[23] Editor's Note: Rapinchuk understands salvation (*sōtēria*) in Romans to refer to regeneration, as most commentators do. And he understands the condition for regeneration to be faith alone in Christ alone. However, Hodges and others have argued that salvation in Romans is deliverance of the believer from God's temporal wrath (not from eternal condemnation) and that the condition is ongoing faith and calling on the Lord (e.g., Rom 10:9, 10, 13). See Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013) and René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005). Rapinchuk's argument concerning Rom 5:12-21 is effective whether *sōtēria* refers to deliverance from eternal condemnation or from temporal wrath.

[24] This "requirement" itself may not be sufficient ground for rejecting Universalism. It could, of course, be argued that all will eventually "call upon the name of the Lord." It is beyond our intention to engage in the debate on the concept of *apokatastasis*. For a critical discussion of this concept see e.g. Richard J. Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," Themelios 4 (1979): 48-54. For a positive assessment see Esteban Deák, *APOKATASTASIS: The Problem of Universal Salvation in Twentieth-Century Theology* (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Christian Thought, University of St. Michael's College, 1979), 1-19, 209-362. See also Käsemann, *Romans*, 157.

[25] His comments in 9:1-3 would seem to be meaningless if Paul thought in terms of universal salvation (without exception).

[26] Even the mild or suggestive form such as that found in e.g. Cranfield (*Romans*, 121), who quite possibly presents this possibility because he recognizes the force of Paul's language in vv 18-19, yet is unwilling to abandon inherited sin. See also Kaylor, *Covenant Community*, 114; Dunn, *Romans*, 297. See also, Sabourin, "Original Sin Reappraised," 70. Likewise, the nuanced version espoused by Punt (*Universal Good News*) fails to persuade, although he attempts to qualify universalism by acknowledging the "restricting" texts. Punt's universalism, although not absolute (all without exception), is based on a reading of "all men," which he attempts to qualify from the context of scripture as a whole, rather than from the immediate literary context. Boring ("Language of Universal Salvation," 292) admits the presence of "limited-salvation" texts, but asserts that Paul affirms both "universal salvation" and "limited salvation" without any attempt to reconcile the apparent conflict.

Paul's real intention is to contrast the ages or epochs of Adam and Christ. As Adam was the initiator of the age of sin and death, so Christ is the initiator of the age of righteousness and life.[27] While there is a great deal of insight in this suggestion and undoubtedly an equal measure of truth, it still does not entirely satisfy the language of vv 18-19. Where, we might ask, does Paul use this language (*pantas anthrōpous*) to denote the citizens of an epoch, either Adam's or Christ's? Conceptually this may be argued, but where does Paul explicitly use this description? Furthermore, while it is a small step to see "all men" denoting all those who are under the sway of Adam and death, it is much more of a leap to see "all men" in v 18b as denoting only those who are in Christ. Once again, it would seem that without explicit modification or stronger contextual clues "all men" in vv 18a and 18b denote the same group.[28]

Some appeal to v 17 which reads, "much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" as a way out. Here, it is argued, Paul makes it clear that it is those who "receive the free gift" who also "live." Therefore, it is maintained, v 18b must be read in light of v 17. As a result, "all men" must mean "all those who receive the free gift."[29] For example, Cranfield maintains Paul's point was that "what Christ has done he really has done for all men, that a status of righteousness the issue of which is life is truly offered to all" (emphasis added).[30]

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[27] Nygren, *Romans*, 210-24. See also Dunn, *Romans* 1:272-77; Moo, *Romans*, 343-44.

[28] Of course, there are some who conclude Paul is simply confused or self-contradictory. For instance, Sanders writes, "Thus he means really neither 'all . . . all' nor 'many . . . many,' but 'all. . . many.' The Adam/Christ analogy does not permit this last formulation, however, and Paul has allowed the form and force of his argument to lead him into a confusing statement" (E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977], 473).

[29] It must be acknowledged, however, that such a reading does not necessarily follow from 5:17. Paul says those who receive the gift (p) receive life (q). This does not require that those who have life (q) receive the gift (p) [if p, then q; but q does not imply p].

[30] Cranfield, *Romans*, 121. So also Moo, *Romans*, 343-44 (although carefully nuanced). Moo argues that Paul's point is not so much the identity of the groups as it is the affirmation that Christ affects those who are his just as certainly as Adam affects those who are his. As a result, Moo concludes that since all without exception are in Adam, the universalism of v 18a is indeed without exception, but the universalism of 18b is tempered by the reality that not all are in Christ and therefore only those who believe fully benefit. See also Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin," 29, where the "all men" of v 18 is seen as qualified by v 17. This conclusion implies the presence of the qualifying

Others would justifiably cry foul. This appears to be a theologically determined reading.[31] Since it is assumed that Paul cannot mean Universalism, we are allegedly justified in importing a qualification into the text which is not actually present (namely, the "truly offered to all"). We might well ask if this were Paul's intention, why did he write v 18 the way he did?[32] If his point were to say, "Just as Adam's sin led to condemnation and death for all men (without exception), so also Christ's righteousness leads to pardon and life for all who believe," why did he not say so? In fact, Paul does not say the effect of Christ's righteousness is offered to "all men;" he indicates it is effective for "all men."

Furthermore, if v 17 is so easily permitted to modify v 18b, why can this not apply in reverse? Paul says those who have received the gift receive life (v 17). He then says "all men receive life" (v 18b). Therefore, Paul could as easily be saying that all men will eventually receive the gift. This argument appears to be more logically valid than the one which rejects Universalism on the basis of v 17.[33] The explicit universalism of 18b must be addressed. If 18a means all men without exception, then it seems 18b must as well.

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language of "in Adam" and "in Christ," which is not there. This language is found in 1 Cor 15:22, but rather than importing this qualification from 1 Corinthians (which is not entirely free from difficulty with respect to apparent universalism—it says "in Adam all die, in Christ all will be made alive," not all "who are in Adam" die, all "who are in Christ" will be made alive) we wish to allow the context of Romans to be determinative. Schreiner also concludes that "the *polloi*, and *pantes* who have been affected by Christ are not coterminous with the *polloi* and *pantes* affected by Adam's sin" (*Romans*, 292). Cf. Boring ("Language of Universal Salvation," 285) who argues against "all" = "those in Christ."

[31] This critique is found e.g. in Punt, *Universal Good News*, 10-20. See also Brendan Byrne, "Universal Need of Salvation and Universal Salvation by Faith in the Letter to the Romans," *Pacifica* 8 (1995): 129.

[32] We recognize the tenuous nature of such questions and arguments, but the language of v 18 is so clearly and intentionally parallel that it cannot be so easily dismissed.

[33] Those who use v 17 to modify 18b argue something like this: Paul says those who receive the gift receive life (v 17). He then states all men receive life (v 18b). Therefore, he must intend to qualify "all men" to mean "all men who receive the gift." However, the use of v. 17 does not require this conclusion (see note 28 above). Those who argue for Universalism construct the argument as follows: If all who receive life receive the gift (v 17), and "all men" receive life (v 18b), then "all men" receive the gift.

IV. SUGGESTED SOLUTION

The presumption that Paul expresses the view of inherited sin in Rom 5:12-21 seems to lead to a significant problem, namely, absolute Universalism. How then do we avoid this difficulty in light of the fact that Paul clearly says Adam's sin affects "all men," and likewise Christ's righteousness affects "all men?" We suggest that in keeping with one of Paul's primary points of emphasis throughout Romans, and one explicitly expressed in 3:21-24 (cf. 10:11-13), we should read "all men" in the sense of all men *without ethnic distinction*, that is, Jews and Gentiles alike. Thus when Paul says the sin of Adam brings condemnation and death to "all men," he means Jews and Gentiles alike are affected by sin and death. Likewise, when he states that the righteousness of Christ leads to pardon and life for "all men" he means to say that salvation in Christ is available to all men without distinction. Jews and Gentiles alike may accept the free gift; it is not limited to any one group. This reading thus accounts for the language of vv 18-19 and also maintains continuity with Paul's teaching on salvation by faith in Jesus. In this sense, those who point to v 17 as the qualifier are not entirely wrong. It is indeed those who accept the free gift of grace who also receive pardon and life. But Paul's point is that "all men," whether Jew or Gentile, may receive this gift of life.

Thus the notion of inherited sin is not really in view here. Paul is talking about the universal nature of sin in that it affects all peoples.[34] It is not his concern to speculate about the transmission or imputation of Adam's sin to all men *without exception*.[35] Neither is it his intention to suggest that all men *without exception* will receive the benefits of Christ's righteousness. Rather, Paul is talking about people groups, with "all men" being inclusive of all such people groups.[36] Dunn

[34] In fact, this has been a major point of Paul's argument in 1:18–3:26.

[35] Thus observations about the presence of such speculation in Jewish thought are interesting but beside the point. See also, Porter, "Pauline Concept of Original Sin," 30.

[36] Kaylor (*Covenant Community*, 104, 114-115), Dunn (*Romans*, 285) and Cambier ("Péchés des Hommes," 222-223, 229, 254), come close to this view but do not carry it through to this conclusion in their discussion. N. T. Wright ("Biblical View of Universalism," 54-56) reaches a similar conclusion with respect to Paul's use of "all men" throughout Romans. Interestingly, Schreiner observes that Paul uses universal language with respect to Christ's work "to signify that all people without distinction (both Jews and Gentiles) are recipients of God's work" (*Romans*, 292), but he does not appear to accept the implications of this observation for v 18a.

has observed in his comments on 5:19, "the universalism therefore is in part at least a way of denying the limited nationalism of normal Jewish hope—'all' = Gentiles as well as Jews." This statement is, we maintain, substantially correct.[37]

1. *All Men*. In support of this we offer a brief look at Paul's use of *pas* and his argument throughout the book of Romans. The 70 occurrences of *pas* in Romans seem to fall into three basic categories:

a. all—denoting every single component of the group (without exception). For instance, 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every (*pan*) mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God." In 14:11-12 we find, "for it is written, 'As I live says the Lord, every (*pan*) knee shall bow to me and every (*pasa*) tongue shall give praise to God.' So each (*hekastos*) of us will give an account of himself to God." And 14:23 states, "But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever (*pan*) does not proceed from faith is sin."[38]

b. all—denoting every manner or kind. For example, in 1:18 Paul writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed against all (*pasan*) ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth." In 1:29 we find, "They [those whom God has given up to improper conduct] were filled with all manner (*pasē*) of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice." Likewise 8:28 says, "We know that in everything (*panta*) God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."[39]

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[37] Dunn (*Romans*, 285) fails to apply this observation throughout the passage. As a result, he is compelled to leave the door open for possible universalistic readings and suggests Paul could hardly have complained if his readers read vv. 18-19 in this sense (p. 297).

[38] For other texts which display this sense we suggest 8:22 (the whole creation has been groaning in travail); 9:17 (my name might be proclaimed in all the earth); 10:18 (their voice has gone out to all the earth); 11:10 (and bend their backs forever [through everything]); 11:36 (to him are all things); 12:4 (all members do not have the same function); 15:11 (Praise the Lord all Gentiles, let all the people praise him); 15:13 (all joy and peace in believing); 15:14 (filled with all knowledge); 16:4, 16 (all the churches); 16:15 (all the saints); and possibly 8:37 (in all things we are more than conquerors).

[39] For other texts with this sense we suggest 3:2 (much in every way); 7:8 (all kinds of covetousness); 8:32 (give us all things); 14:2 (one who believes may eat everything); 14:5 (another man esteems all days); and possibly 8:37 (in all things we are more than conquerors); 14:20 (everything is clean); 15:14 (filled with all knowledge).

c. all—denoting all men without distinction (this may be considered a subset of #2). For instance, 1:16 reads, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone (*panti*) who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (see also, 4:11-12). In 2:9 we find "there will be tribulation and distress for every (*pasan*) human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek" (see also 2:10). In 3:9 Paul asserts, "What then? Are Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all (*pantas*) men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (see also 3:12, 22-23). And in 4:16 we read, "That is why it depends upon faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all (*panti*) his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all (*pantōn*)."[40]

It seems clear that Paul uses *pas* in a variety of ways. It does not always mean "everyone/everything without exception." In fact, he has explicitly modified it many times with the mention of Jew and Gentile in order to clarify his intention (e.g. 1:16; 2:9; 3:9, 29; cf. 4:11-12).

Additional support for our suggestion of "all men without distinction" as opposed to "all men without exception" may be found in a look at the use of *pas* plus *anthrōpos* throughout Biblical Greek. The combination of *pas* with *anthrōpos* occurs 75+ times in the LXX and an additional 26 times in the NT. Although there is no precisely or rigidly defined usage pattern, and it may go too far to suggest that some grammatical or lexical "rule" is at work, the general tendency seems to be to denote "all men without exception" with the singular forms of *pas*+*anthrōpos*.[41] For example, in Gen 6:13 God

[40] Among the texts which we suggest also display this sense are 1:7 (to all God's beloved in Rome); 1:8 (for all of you); 3:4 (though every man be false); 8:32 (he gave him up for us all); 9:5 (God over all); 10:4 (Christ is the end of the law that all who have faith may be justified); 10:11 (all who believe in him are not put to shame); 10:12 (no distinction between Jew and Greek, . . . he bestows his riches on all who call on him); 10:13 (all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved); 11:32 (have mercy upon all men); and possibly 12:3 (I bid everyone among you); 12:17 (noble in the sight of all); 12:18 (live peaceably with all); 13:1 (let everyone be subject to governing authorities); 13:7 (pay all of them their due); 14:10 (we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God); 15:33 (God of peace be with you all); 16:19 (obedience known to all); 16:26 (made known to all nations).

[41] See the related comments of M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 61; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of*

declares that He has determined to make an end of all flesh (*pantos*; *anthrōpou*) through the flood, and Gen 7:21 (*pas anthrōpos*) speaks of everyone who was not on the ark being destroyed (without exception). In Gal 5:3 Paul declares that everyone (*panti anthrōpō*) who receives circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law. And 1 Macc 5:42 reads, "permit no man (*panta anthrōpon*) to encamp, but make them all enter the battle." In each of these cases the sense seems to be all without exception.[42]

The use of the plural form, however, frequently denotes a more generalized or representative sense.[43] For example, in Acts 22:14-15 Paul says, "And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men (*pros pantas anthrōpous*) of what you have seen and heard." In 1 Cor 7:7 (with respect to being unmarried) Paul writes, "I wish that all (*pantas anthrōpous*) were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." In 2 Cor 3:2 Paul says he has no need of "letters of reference" because, "You yourselves [the Corinthian assembly] are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men" (*pantōn anthrōpōn*).[44]

In each of these texts it seems likely that Paul does not intend "all men" to denote "all men without exception."[45] There seems to be solid support for reading *pantas anthrōpous* in a sense other than "all men without exception."

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the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 771.

[42] E.g. *pas anthrōpos* Gen 7:21; Lev 16:17; 21:18; 22:3; Deut 4:3; 27:26; Ezra 6:11; Esth 4:11; Ps 39:5 [38:6 LXX]; 39:11 [38:12]; 64:9 [63:10]; 116:1 [115:2]; Job 21:33; 36:25; 37:7; Isa 2:17; Jer 10:19 [28:17]; 51:17 [28:17]; Sir 13:15; 1 Macc 2:41; John 2:10; Jas 1:19; *pantos anthrōpou* Gen 6:13; Job 12:10; 37:7; Tob 4:14; *panti anthrōpō* 1 Kgs 8:38 [par. 2 Chr 6:29]; Sir 8:19; cf. Esth 6:9, 11; Gal 5:3; *panta anthrōpon* Job 28:21; Jer 30:6 [37:6]; Tob 6:13; 1 Macc 5:42; John 1:9; Col 1:28. In the OT the "exceptions" all appear in Wisdom and poetic literature. The NT use does not seem quite as consistent as the OT. In other words, there are instances where the singular forms appear to be used representatively (non-distributively).

[43] Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 188; BDF, 144.

[44] Other examples include *pantes anthrōpoi* Wis 13:1; *pantōn anthrōpōn* Num 16:29; 2 Macc 7:34; 4 Macc 1:11; Sir 44:23; Rom 12:17, 18; 1 Cor 15:19; 2 Cor 3:2; 1 Tim 2:1; 4:10; *pasin anthrōpois* Phil 4:5; 1 Thess 2:15; Titus 2:11; *pantas anthrōpous* Isa 53:3; *pantas anthrōpous* 3 Macc 3:18; 7:6; 1 Tim 2:4; Titus 3:2.

[45] In fact, it may be questioned whether any of the 16 plural NT usages of *pas anthrōpos* can be read as "all men without exception."

One additional observation may be in order. There appears to be a consistent pattern when one wishes to express "all men without exception" which applies to both singular[46] and plural[47] constructions, namely, *pas* + article + *anthrōpos*. In each of the occurrences of this construction in biblical Greek, the sense seems to be "all men without exception."[48]

If what we have outlined above is accurate, there are good reasons for reading *pantas anthrōpous* in Rom 5:12, 18 in a sense other than "all men without exception." In light of this, we suggest the following summary of 5:12-21:

> Sin became active after the disobedience of Adam. As a result of the introduction of sin into the world, death also entered the world and spread to all men because sin affected everyone (both in commission and consequence). Sin was not a result of the law. The law neither caused nor can it cure sin. Sin was in the world before the law and as a result of its presence in the world death reigned. Death reigned over all men, whether their sin was like Adam's (direct disobedience to God's command; e.g. Jews) or different in kind (e.g. Gentiles). There is good news. The free gift is not like the trespass. The trespass does not have power over the free gift. If Jews and Gentiles both died as a result of one man's sin, which brought sin and death into the world, much more will Jews and Gentiles alike enjoy the benefits of Christ's gracious gift. Put differently, the gift is unlike the trespass because a single act of disobedience brings death to all (without distinction), yet the obedience of Christ is sufficient to undo the disobedience of many. If such is true, then since death reigned as a result of a single sin, then those who receive the free gift will reign in life through Christ. In the same way that Adam's sin led to death for both Jews and Gentiles, so also will Christ's obedience lead to pardon and life for Jew and Gentile alike. Now law increased the trespass, it did not undo it. Even still, where sin increased because it spread to all

[46] Eccl 3:13; 5:19; 7:2; 12:13; Luke 6:36; 13:4.

[47] Gen 20:8; Exod 9:19; Num 12:3; 16:32; Judg 16:17; 1 Kgs 4:31 [5:11]; Jer 42:17 [49:17]; Ezek 38:20; Dan 2:30; 4:24 [21]; 6:26 [27]; Zech 8:10; 1 Esdr 3:18.

[48] Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 188; Robertson, *Grammar*, 772.

> (both Jew and Gentile) and all sinned, grace increases because Christ's act is sufficient to undo the power and penalty of sin. Therefore, as death reigned after the introduction of sin into the world, life will reign as a result of the corrective and overcoming power of righteousness in Christ Jesus.

2. *The Argument of Romans*. Given what we have so far seen, it is possible to read Rom 5:12-21 in this way. The key issue, however, is whether this reading is consistent with Paul's argument throughout Romans. Not only is it consistent, we believe Paul's argument virtually demands that 5:12-21 be read in this light.[49]

After his introduction, Paul makes a thematic statement in 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also the Greek." This statement, we suggest, is one of three key statements for proper understanding of the point Paul wishes to make in 5:12-21, namely, salvation is available to all, whether Jew or Gentile.[50]

In 1:16 Paul sets out a basic theme of his message in the letter to the Romans. All who believe, whether they be Jew or Gentile, are saved by the power of the gospel. The universal nature of salvation is explicitly stated. The gospel saves all without distinction, whether Jew or Greek; salvation is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Immediately after this thematic declaration, Paul undertakes to show the universal nature of sin and guilt. In 1:18-32 Paul shows how the Gentile is guilty before God. Despite evidence of God and his attributes, which is readily available to all, they have failed to honor God as God and have exchanged his glory for idolatrous worship and self-promotion. As a consequence, God has handed them over in judgment (1:18-32). Paul moves to denunciation of those who would judge others while themselves being guilty of the very same offenses (2:1-5) and argues that all will be judged according to their deeds (2:6)—not because

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[49] The summary of Paul's argument that follows has been influenced by what I hope is a cautious acceptance of certain aspects of the so-called "new perspective" on Paul (e.g. Sanders, Dunn). Although important questions and cogent criticisms have been raised regarding the "new perspective" (e.g. Schreiner, Moo), I am persuaded there is much truth and helpful insight in this reading of Paul. Perhaps Paul's argument and language are patient of a mediating position.

[50] The other passages are 3:21-26 and 10:11-13.

of Adam's sin. This judgment applies to all, namely, Jew and Greek (2:9-10). This section serves as somewhat of a transition in Paul's argument. He has highlighted the guilt of the Gentiles (1:18*ff*) and will shortly outline the guilt of the Jew (2:17-24). The universal statement of 2:1-11 sets the stage for Paul's rebuke of Jewish presumption. It is not possession of the Law which delivers; it is faithful obedience. It is better to have no Law and yet to obey the essence of the Law (2:12-16) than to have the Law and not obey (2:17-3:4). Paul then defends the justice of God's judgment (3:5-8), which leads to the conclusion that all (Jew and Gentile) are guilty before God (3:9).

The Law does not protect the Jew; all are under the power and the penalty of sin. If such is the case, what hope is there for anyone? Paul provides the answer to this in 3:21-26.[51] God has solved the problem of sin through the death of Christ Jesus. God has Himself paid the penalty for sin, which is death (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). Because of this, God is righteous in forgiving sinners who have faith in Jesus (3:25-26). The necessary consequence of this statement is that all grounds of boasting in the Law and the markers of Judaism have been removed. No longer can the Jew boast of his special status; God is indeed the God of all, Jew and Gentile (3:29).

To support his argument Paul turns to the example of Abraham (4:1-25). Abraham clearly demonstrates that salvation, or being reckoned righteous, is not a product of the Law or distinctives of Judaism. It is, rather, the result of faith. Abraham believed and so was reckoned righteous. If Abraham was considered righteous apart from the Law (outside of the Law), then salvation cannot be restricted to those under the Law. Abraham is in fact the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile (4:11). Salvation is available to all.

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[51] In addition to providing the answer to this important question, 3:21-26 also demonstrates that Paul's universalism is not absolute. Rather, Paul is thinking in terms of "all" denoting Jews and Gentiles. Paul's argument is clear. God's righteousness is revealed apart from the law. It is revealed through Jesus Christ and it is for *all* who believe, because there is *no distinction*, because *all* sin. Furthermore, 10:11-13 reads, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame, because there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord of all (*pantōn*) makes rich all (*ploutōn eis pantas*) who call on his name, for *all* (*pas*) who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." In other words, Paul establishes that "all" refers to Jews and Gentiles (all without distinction) and not all men without exception. In fact when he wishes to make a "universal" statement ("everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved") he uses the singular form of *pas*. We should read 5:12-21 in light of 1:16-17, 3:21-26, and 10:11-3 and not under the influence of some external consideration.

Paul next moves to a description of the benefits of this universally available salvation (5:1-5). By faith we have peace with God (5:1), access to this grace (5:2) and the hope of glory (5:2). Furthermore, we are now able to rejoice in suffering, which leads to endurance, development of character, and hope which does not disappoint (5:3-5). The gracious nature of God's gift is spelled out in 5:6-11. We did nothing to earn this. Because God has acted so graciously while we were enemies, we may have confidence now that we have been reconciled. Paul then moves to his famous comparison between Adam and Christ (5:12-21).

Adam's sin has affected all men and has brought death to all men, Jew and Gentile. In the same way, the righteous act of Christ has brought pardon and life to all men, Jew and Gentile.[52] This emphasis has been dominant throughout Paul's early discussion. From Chaps. 1-5, the thrust of the argument has been the non-distinction between Jew and Gentile. All are guilty before God, all sin, and all are saved through faith in Jesus. Whether this can rightly be extended to all men without exception is outside the scope of Paul's discussion. His main purpose is to establish the universal (without ethnic distinction) problem of sin and the universal (without ethnic distinction) solution.

This part of Paul's discussion moves somewhat into the background for a few chapters, but it remains an important presupposition in what follows. Paul's emphasis on unity in Christ, our status as slaves of righteousness, and our freedom from bondage to the Law presupposes the unity of believers based on the universal nature of salvation. What Paul says about believers applies to all who believe, Jew and Gentile. This also stands behind Paul's contrast of the two eras of Adam and Christ (7:7-25).[53] All men, Jew and Gentile, are part of the age of Adam. As such we are subject to the frailties and shortcomings of this age of sin. But all who believe, both Jew and Gentile, have been redeemed from this age and are participants in the age of Christ. For the time being, we struggle as we are caught between the

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[52] The point here is similar to that made by Jesus in John 12:32, all men without ethnic distinction, but not all men without exception. On this reading see e.g. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 442-44. See also his critique of the use of texts such as 1 Tim 2:3-4, Titus 2:11, and 2 Pet 3:9 to argue God loves all without exception in *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 287-89.

[53] E.g. Dunn, *Romans*, 398.

ages. As members of the kingdom, we know what we ought to do. As members of Adam's age, we fail to do it. But as children of God and joint heirs with Christ, we are compelled to walk in the spirit and not in the flesh. We are to live according to what we truly are and what we will be, sons and daughters of God, rather than what we once were (8:1-39).

This reading of 5:12-21 also has implications for Chaps. 9–11. Because Paul has argued that salvation is universal in intention, he must deal with the apparent rejection of the gospel by the Jews. It seems on the face of things as if the Jews have rejected the gospel and in turn have been rejected by God. How could this be if the gospel of salvation in Christ is indeed universal? Paul deals with this question, and other important questions as well, in Chaps. 9–11.

In summary, Paul argues that it was a mistaken notion to think that salvation was the prerogative of the Jew only. This presumption is wrong for two reasons. First, it leads to the mistaken assumption that *only* Jews are eligible for this vindication (Paul has already dealt with this misunderstanding in Chap. 4 where he demonstrates that Abraham was justified by faith independently of the Law and is therefore the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike). Second, it leads to the equally mistaken conclusion that *all* who are Jews are guaranteed of vindication. Paul demonstrates how this perspective, which would call God's integrity into question since Paul is assuming many Jews will not experience this vindication, is misguided. He does this by demonstrating that it was never the case that *all* physical descendants of Israel (Jacob) were likewise recipients of the promise. In the past (9:6-33) as in the present (11:1-10), only a remnant is preserved and only a remnant will experience vindication. Paul also argues that the unbelief of Israel (the non-remnant) has the purpose of extending the compass of salvation. The unbelief of one group makes the universal scope of the gospel possible. This universalism is itself intended to bring about the vindication of the unbelieving group (11:11-16). As a result of faith, all (Jew and Gentile) can be branches of the olive tree (11:17-24). Since faith is necessary to remain grafted into the tree, no one can boast of his position. All, Jew and Gentile alike, are dependent upon the mercy and grace of God. As a result of God's mysterious plan, He will bring about the vindication of His people (11:25-27).

Paul finishes this section with an important comment, "for God has consigned all men to disobedience, that He may have mercy upon all men" (*tous pantas*, 11:32). This, we suggest, is exactly his point in 5:18. All men have been "consigned" to disobedience (Jew and Gentile alike have been under the power and penalty of sin and death) so that God could show his mercy to all men (both Jew and Gentile). God's gracious salvation is not restricted; it is universal. All men without ethnic distinction can enjoy the benefits of Christ's obedience and righteousness.

Having argued his case for the universal nature of God's salvation, Paul moves to a practical application of this truth. Because *all* were under the power of sin and death, because *all* were rescued from this death through the blood of Christ, it follows that *all* should live accordingly (12:1-2). Paul therefore moves to discuss how the body should be unified in its diversity of members and gifts (12:3-8). The implications of the Jew-Gentile perspective should be obvious. Since sin condemned *all* and since *all* were delivered from this condemnation on the same basis, *all* should live as one body.

Chapters 14–15 make this point abundantly clear. No one should look down upon another because the other has a different background or antecedent religious sensibilities (14:1-23). Since all were once in the same boat, a boat destined for destruction, no one should presume to be better than another. Rather, all should support one another in imitation of Christ (15:1-13).

Paul can therefore be bold in his proclamation of the gospel (1:16; 15:14-21). Because all were in need of salvation from the consequences of their sin, and all were rescued on the same basis, namely faith in Christ Jesus, Paul can appeal to all to be supportive of his ministry and mission (15:22-33).

V. CONCLUSION

It seems reasonable to conclude that a major emphasis of Paul throughout Romans is the universal nature of sin and salvation. But this universal nature is defined as *without ethnic distinction* rather than *without exception*. When Paul speaks of "all men" he speaks in the sense of both Jews and Gentiles, not in the sense of every individual. This understanding of "all men" is not only consistent with

the use of *pas* and *anthrōpos* in Biblical Greek, it is entirely consistent with the flow of Paul's argument and emphasis in Romans.

We suggest it is time to move beyond an insistence on reading Romans 5 as an exposition of original/inherited sin,[54] which leads to unnecessary hermeneutical maneuvering to avoid absolute Universalism. It is time we let Paul say what he intended to say, no more and certainly no less.[55] Sin is a universal problem; it affects both Jew and Gentile. But God, in Jesus Christ, has provided the solution which is available to all.

[54] Whether this requires we dismiss the traditional idea of original sin is beyond the scope of this article. I would, for many reasons, hesitate to abandon this concept too quickly. However, in light of what has been suggested above, I do think it is proper to reinvestigate and perhaps redefine the concept.

[55] The words of J. I. Packer ("Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*; ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992], 328) are worth noting: "Evangelicalism's theology, with all its local and in-house variants, is (at least in intention and idea, if not in perfect achievement) a body of tenets, attitudes, and approaches drawn from the biblical documents *by allowing them to speak for themselves in terms of their own interests, viewpoints, and emphases*; in other words, by a method that is thoroughly and consistently *a posteriori*. The method has been called "grammatico-historical," as a pointer to the techniques involved; it could equally well be called the *a posteriori* method, in virtue of its purpose of reading out of Scripture what is there in each author's expressed meaning and of *avoiding reading into it at any point what is not there in that sense"* (emphasis added).

MATTHEW 25:31-46: SALVATION BY WORKS?

JOHN CLAEYS

I. THE CHALLENGE OF MATTHEW 25:31-46

Does Matt 25:31-46, which describes the judgment of the "sheep and goats," teach salvation by works? According to NT scholar D. A. Carson, most Bible teachers would answer that question with an unhesitating "yes." Carson claims that "the great majority of scholars understand" the judgment described in Matt 25:31-46 to determine "the basis of acceptance into the kingdom," determined by "deeds of mercy and compassion" to those "who are hungry, distressed, needy."[1] Clearly, this "majority" view promotes salvation by works, a position Carson also holds.[2]

Carson seems to be correct in his assessment of the number of leading evangelical leaders and teachers who view Matt 25:31-46 in that way. Among the many seeing it as a works-salvation passage is popular award-winning author and speaker John Piper,[3] who has had a significant influence on the church.[4] Also, count Brian McLaren

[1] D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984): 8:519. While Carson believes this judgment represents the final judgment to ascertain who enters the kingdom, he simply takes exception to the view of "the great majority of scholars" that this assessment is based on compassion "to all who are hungry, distressed, needy"; instead, Carson believes "the fate of the nations will be determined by how they respond to Jesus' followers" (Carson, 520).

[2] In defense of his view, Carson explains that "good deeds done to Jesus' followers, even the least of them, are not only works of compassion and morality but reflect where people stand in relation to the kingdom and to Jesus himself" (Carson, 8:520). See also R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 355.

[3] See http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/doing-mercy-to-the-brothers-of-jesus-and-the-broken-neighbor. Accessed March 5, 2011.

[4] Piper's influence was displayed by a Festschrift published in his honor, *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, including contributions from D.A. Carson, John MacArthur, Wayne Grudem, Thomas Schreiner, William Mounce, Mark Dever, Albert Mohler, and G.K. Beale.

among this majority assemblage,[5] a prominent Christian pastor, author, activist, speaker, and leading figure in the emerging church movement who believes that one's eternal destiny hinges on performing works of love and mercy toward others.[6] In addition, the Roman Catholic Church, which influences a billion Catholics, sees Matt 25:31-46 in this same way.[7] Even dispensationalists tend to fall into the works-salvation trap on this passage.[8]

But does Matt 25:31-46 truly teach a works-based salvation? This is a serious and critical question. For *if* Matt 25:31-46 teaches a works-based salvation, all of us in the free-grace community need to re-think our view of the gospel, and we need to abandon any notion of assurance of eternal life.

Fortunately, a proper understanding of Matt 25:31-46 will show that this passage does *not* teach a gospel of works. In addition, correctly viewing Matt 25:31-46 will clarify critically important issues, such as the gospel, eternal reward, eternal justice, and the prominence of Israel to God's kingdom plan. Because of its critical nature, the Enemy seeks to blind people to the true message of Matt 25:31-46. However, comprehending what God is seeking to communicate to us through this vital passage is critical to Free Grace Theology, and it is paramount to enhancing, enabling, and even empowering our ability to faithfully participate in God's kingdom plan. Thus, it is imperative that we take another well-deserved look at this most misunderstood passage.

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[5] See, for example, Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 348-52. Though Albright and Mann maintain that Mt 25:31-46 does not portray the final judgment, they come around to saying that it "is in anticipation of the End," and "the separation [of the sheep and goats] is final." See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 306-310.

[6] This is illustrated by Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), 204.

[7] See http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/25.

[8] For examples, see Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 2:80, where Barbieri asserts that this judgment is an assessment "to determine who will and who will not enter the kingdom"; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 157-60, where Pentecost claims the works surfaced at this judgment reveals who has believed in Jesus Christ; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 288-92; and Ray Stedman's remarks on who is an authentic Christian, based on Matt 25:31-46, at http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/matthew/the-unconscious-test. Accessed April 04, 2017.

II. THE SETTING FOR THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

Matthew 25:31-46 describes a future judgment beginning with this scene: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory."[9] It is important to note that this event occurs immediately after Jesus' return to the earth, as signaled by the phrase, *the Son of Man comes in His glory*. In comparing this expression with Dan 7:13-14 and Matt 24:29-31, we see that this scenario refers to Christ's return to the earth to establish God's kingdom.

This eschatological timing is also evidenced by the contextual flow of Matthew chapters 24 and 25 which serve as a unit, commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse. These chapters feature Jesus' response to the apostles' questions posed in 24:3[10] and provide detailed information of Daniel's seventieth week, also known as the Tribulation period. Jesus concludes the Olivet Discourse with the description of the judgment of Gentile Tribulation survivors in verses 31-46 of Matthew 25.

III. THE IDENTITY OF THOSE JUDGED

As seen in v 31, the prelude to this appraisal of the nations is the enthronement of Jesus as Judge. Then, according to vv 32-33:

> "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."

The word for *nations* can also be translated *Gentiles*.[11] In fact, Biblically, from the time of Abraham onward, the *nations* have re-

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[9] The word *then* points out to us that it will not be until His return to the earth that He will *sit on the throne of His glory*. In other words, He will not rule till *then*. In the meantime, He is seated *at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2; also, 1:3; 8:1; 10:12).

[10] Zane Hodges, *Jesus: God's Prophet* (Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, Inc., 2006), 5. See, also, Barbieri, "Matthew," 76.

[11] See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), "*ethnos*," 218. This is also true for the Hebrew word for *nations*. (See Gerard

ferred to *Gentiles*. It is also important to understand that the *nations* always refer to people who are concurrently alive on the earth.[12] Since Jesus' return follows the Tribulation period,[13] this judgment of the nations, then, is an assessment of Gentiles who survive that horrific seven-year period.

IV. THE BLESSED: BELIEVING GENTILE SURVIVORS

Following this gathering before the King, Gentiles are separated into two groups for judgment. The first assemblage (the *sheep*) is gathered to the right of Jesus, the place of honor. To members of this group He proclaims: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

The word *blessed* in this verse is a participial form of *eulogeō*. Since Matthew is a distinctively Jewish Gospel[14] which relies on the Hebrew Scriptures for its foundation, the Septuagint usage of *eulogeō*[15] can inform its meaning in Matthew.

Interestingly, *eulogeō* is grouped with *kataraomai* ("cursed") in Matt 25:31-46. *Kataraomai* is the same term with which *eulogeō* is grouped in almost every OT and apocryphal text.[16] This combination of terms generally refers to individuals being *blessed* or *cursed* based

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Van Groningen, "*goy*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), 153-54.

[12] Biblically, a nation refers to a people tied to specific, physical boundaries upon the earth. See the discussion by Hans Bietenhard, s.v. "*ethnos*," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 2:790-95.

[13] See Matt 24:29-31.

[14] The writing style, thought patterns, and vocabulary (terms such as *kingdom of heaven*, *holy city*, *righteousness*, *the law*, *defilement*, *the Sabbath*, *Messiah*, etc.) of Matthew clearly demonstrate a Jewish orientation and show a reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures. Examples of scholars who view Matthew in this way are: Barbieri, "Matthew," 16-17; Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 15-18; France, *Matthew*, 17-18; W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), LIV-LXII; and D.A. Carson, "Matthew," 8:17-25.

[15] There are 450 occurrences of this term in the Septuagint.

[16] Hans-Georg Link, "Blessing, Blessed, Happy," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 1: 207.

on their obedience or disobedience to God,[17] which comports with the usage of these terms in Matthew 25.

The reason these *sheep* in Matthew 25 are *blessed to inherit the kingdom* is because they were attendant to Jesus' needs—feeding Him when He was hungry, giving Him drink when He was thirsty, clothing Him when He was in need of clothes, attending to Him when He was sick, and visiting Him in prison. In fact, Jesus proclaims: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

V. CLARIFYING THIS JUDGMENT: ENTRANCE VS. INHERITANCE

By the awarding of *inheritance* in the kingdom, many understand Jesus to be promising this group *entrance* into the kingdom.[18] However, Jesus does *not* declare: "*Enter* the kingdom." Instead, He proclaims: "*Inherit* the kingdom!" There is the greatest of differences between those two statements.[19]

Entering the kingdom no more means *inheriting* the kingdom than *entering* a house means *inheriting* a house.[20] One can certainly *enter* a house without *inheriting* that house, which refers to *possessing* or owning it. In fact, "possessing, owning, or ruling over" is the principal meaning of *inheritance* in the OT.[21]

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[17] Ibid.; H.W. Beyer, "*eulogeō*, *eulogia*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 275.

[18] See, for examples, Carson, "Matthew," 521-22, and Barbieri, "Matthew," 81, who states that "the basis of their entrance [into the kingdom] is seen in their actions, for they provided food, drink, clothing, and care for the King."

[19] See the excellent discussion of this distinction in Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Miami: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992), 43-91. See, esp., 77-78 for Dillow's specific statement showing agreement with this writer's position.

[20] See Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1985), 69-71.

[21] Since Jesus' use of *inheritance* stems from the OT, understanding its use there clarifies its usage in Matt 25:34. For example, in Ps 2, God the Father announces to the Son that He will give to Him "the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps 2:8). This verse employs synonymous parallelism, substituting *possession for inheritance*. Regarding laws of slavery, the Lord announced to Moses: "And you may take them as an *inheritance* for your children after you, to *inherit* them as a *possession*; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children

There is no doubt that, in Matt 25:34-40, *inheriting the kingdom* results from good works, not from faith in Christ.[22] Thus, to *inherit the kingdom* is to obtain a reward for faithfulness to Christ. In fact, based on the OT usage of *inheritance*, this reward refers to *rule* in the kingdom.[23]

While vv 34-40 surface the *sheep's* good works resulting in their kingdom inheritance, it is important to understand that these good works occur during the latter half of the Tribulation period, the "Great Tribulation."[24] In addition, these good works will be performed for the benefit of "the least of these My brethren."

VI. "THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN"

The demonstrative pronoun *these* ("these My brethren") indicates there is yet another group present at this judgment.[25] But who are these *brethren* of Jesus?

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of Israel, you shall not *rule over* one another with rigor" (Lev 25:46, emphasis added). Clearly, here, *inheritance* is synonymous with *possession* and *rule over*.

[22] For excellent discussions arriving at this same conclusion, see R.T. Kendall, *Once Saved Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 119-134; and Dillow, 43-91. While some commentators, such as Barbieri, see these works as evidentiary works, they are still mistakenly making works a requirement for kingdom entrance. While some would argue that evidentiary works are not a *condition* for entering the kingdom but an *inevitable result* for entrance, Zane Hodges pointed out that those who adopt that view are "playing a word game." For "whatever is necessary to achieve a goal is also a *condition* for receiving it. To call anything an *inevitable* result is to call it a necessary result and thus to make it a *condition*" (Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* [Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1992], 40).

[23] See the excellent presentation of this concept in Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 67-81. Surprisingly, France views it this way, as well, for he associates this inheritance with "further authority" in God's kingdom, "a sharing of Jesus' authority 'in his kingdom'" (France, *Matthew*, 357).

[24] This expression for the final three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation period originates with Jesus (see Matt 24:21).

[25] *Outos* ("this"; plural, "these") most frequently appears in the New Testament referring to someone or something actually present and near at hand. See Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Vol. III, Syntax*, edited by James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 44; Herbert Weir Smith, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard, 1980), 307; BAGD, "*outos*," 596; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament,* trans. by Robert W. Funk, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 151; and H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 127. Thus, "the least of these" refers to a group standing nearby.

As mentioned earlier, "the great majority of scholars understand 'the least of these brothers of mine' to refer to all who are hungry, distressed, and needy,"[26] while other commentators limit "My brethren" to believers in Christ,[27] and a few specify the identification as Jewish believers in Christ during the Tribulation period.[28]

As noted, both groups to be judged at this assessment are Gentiles. In fact, since these two groups—the *sheep* and the *goats*—represent all of the Gentile Tribulation survivors, the demonstrative pronoun "these" *must* consist of Jews,[29] as there is no other alternative.[30]

Since Jesus refers to them as His *brethren*, it would make sense that they are His *brethren* in both a physical *and* a spiritual sense.[31] This fits with the presentation earlier in Matthew where Jesus indicated that Jewish believers who are obedient to God are His *brethren*.[32] Since the assessment of Matt 25:31-46 concerns the Great Tribulation, these *brethren* are Jewish disciples of Jesus who survive that extremely difficult era. So, let us consider how these Jewish survivors relate to this judgment.

VII. "RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!"

Though the entire Tribulation period will be arduous for the world, the persecution of Jewish followers of Christ will not commence until the occurrence of *the abomination of desolation*, revealed by Jesus in Matt 24:15*ff*. This event will occur when the man of sin (the *beast* of

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[26] Carson, "Matthew," 8:519.

[27] R. T. France (*Matthew*, 357-58) is an example of this group. Though France uses the term *disciples* to refer to the identification of Jesus' *brethren*, it becomes plain in his discussion that he means all believers.

[28] Barbieri takes this view (Barbieri, "Matthew," 81), and so does Dwight Pentecost (see J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words & Works of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981], 410).

[29] Barbieri declares that this term "must refer to a third group that is neither sheep nor goats. The only possible group would be Jews, physical brothers of the Lord" (Barbieri, "Matthew," 81).

[30] Biblically, the great division of humanity consists of Jews and Gentiles.

[31] While Israel is God's son (Exod 4:22), it makes sense that Jews are considered *brethren* of the Son.

[32] See Matt 12:46-50.

Revelation) will enter the rebuilt temple of God to be worshipped as god by the world at large.[33]

Satan will empower this man to "make war" against Jewish believers in Christ and to overcome them.[34] Upon abominating the temple, this "man of sin" will issue the command for his army to desolate Jewish believers in Christ[35]—that is, to hunt them down to arrest or kill them.

In order for Jewish followers of Christ to survive, they will need to flee *immediately* upon the occurrence of *the abomination of desolation*[36]; they will not even be afforded the time to grab anything to take with them—no possessions, money, extra clothing, etc.; nor will they be able to buy or sell anything since they will not receive the mark of the beast.[37]

VIII. THE NEEDS OF "THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN"

As a result, these Jewish disciples will need others to meet their basic needs throughout the Great Tribulation. These necessities are addressed in Matt 25:35-36 in which Jesus declares His *brethren* will be *hungry*, *thirsty*, *strangers*, and in need of clothing. In addition, some will require medical attention, while others, captured by troops sent out by Satan's world ruler,[38] will need people to attend to their necessities in prison. They will be in desperate need of help!

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[33] See 2 Thess 2:3-4; also see Rev 13:4, 7, 8.

[34] See Rev 13:7, where the term *saints* ("holy ones") refers to *Jewish* believers. While Gentile believers are also "saints" (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1; etc.), Revelation's reliance on OT books such as Daniel, its focus on Israel (cf. Revelation 12), and the fact that Gentile believers are removed at the rapture indicate that "saints" in Revelation refer to Jewish believers.

[35] The two heinous behaviors of the abomination of the temple and the desolation of Jewish believers are connected, which is why they are joined together in the expression, *the abomination of desolation*.

[36] See Matt 24:15-21; cf. Luke 17:28-33.

[37] See Rev 13:17.

[38] See John Claeys, *Impending Apocalypse* (Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2014),117-22.

IX. THE REWARD FOR HELPING JESUS' BRETHREN

However, the risk for helping these followers of Jesus will be enormous! Because the beast of Revelation will seek to carry out Satan's desire to wipe out God's chosen people, particularly those who faithfully follow Christ,[39] giving aid to any of these *brethren* will be tantamount to risking one's life. For the willingness of Gentile believers to take that kind of risk for Christ's *brethren*, Jesus will greatly reward their obedience by granting them the privilege of *inheriting the kingdom* (ruling with Christ in God's kingdom).[40]

X. A MISSING GROUP: UNFAITHFUL BELIEVERS

Three groups of people are surfaced in Matt 25:31-46 who will physically survive the Tribulation period—*faithful* Jewish believers in Christ, *faithful* Gentile believers, and Gentile unbelievers. It is important to note that unfaithful believers will *not* survive the Tribulation period.

The evidence for this last statement is found in Matthew 24, part of the same discourse that runs through chapter 25.[41] Specifically, the key to this understanding is located in Matt 24:13 where Jesus reveals: "He who endures to the end shall be saved."

Three vital terms in this verse grant insight into the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25. The first is the word *endure* (*hypomenō*), often used in the NT of believers remaining faithful to Christ through difficult times (such as persecution, trials, and suffering).[42] This is how Jesus uses *endure* in Matt 24:13, as He speaks specifically

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[39] See Rev 12:1-6, 13-17.

[40] See, also, Matt 10:16-42 which portrays the same scenario as Matthew 24-25. In both passages, Jesus predicts His Jewish disciples will experience great persecution, including death (cf. 10:21-23; 24:21-22); He calls them to flee from their persecutors (10:23; 24:15-18); and He promises reward to whoever will help His *brethren* during their great persecution (10:40-42; 25:34-40).

[41] This discourse is typically called the Olivet Discourse since it was presented by Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

[42] Examples of *hypomenō* used that way in the NT include 1 Cor 4:12; Rom 12:12; 2 Tim 2:10, 12; Heb 12:7; Jas 1:12; 5:11; 1 Pet 2:20.

of remaining faithful through the Great Tribulation, the ultimate difficult period for believers in Christ.[43]

The second critical expression in Matt 24:13 is *the end*, which, in Matthew 24, refers to *the end of the age*, which is also the end of the Tribulation period.[44] Thus, Matt 24:13 refers to remaining faithful until the end of the "Great Tribulation," *not* until the end of one's life (as some teach).

The final significant expression in Matt 24:13 is *saved*, which is the same Greek word (*sōzō*) found nine verses later in v 22, announcing: "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be *saved* [emphasis added]." Clearly, Jesus' point in v 22 is that if this horrific seven-year era were much longer, no one would physically survive. Thus, v 22 informs us that the word *save* in this context refers to *physical* survival.[45]

Putting it all together, Jesus' declaration in Matt 24:13 communicates this: *Only believers who remain faithful through the persecutions of the Tribulation period will physically survive that difficult era*. While this verse does not promise that all faithful followers of Christ will survive the Great Tribulation,[46] it does unequivocally say this: *Unfaithful believers will not physically survive the Great Tribulation*. For this reason, no unfaithful believers are represented in the judgment of the nations.[47]

XI. THE CURSED: UNBELIEVING GENTILE SURVIVORS

Armed with this understanding, we are now prepared for the next declaration in the judgment of Matt 25:31-46:

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[43] See Matt 24:21-22.

[44] See Matt 24:3, 6, 14.

[45] The Greek word for *save* (*sōzō*) that appears in Matt 24:13 has a number of usages in the NT, but a primary meaning of this word is "preserve or rescue from natural dangers and afflictions," with the specific sub-meaning of "save from death" (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980], "*sōzō*," 798.)

[46] As Rev 20:4-6 shows, some faithful believers will be martyred during that time.

[47] Of course, unfaithful believers will be in the kingdom of God since kingdom entrance is not based on faithfulness to Christ; it is based solely on faith in Christ.

> "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Jesus then explains that the *goats* will receive this verdict because they turned their backs on Him in need. They respond by asking: "Lord,[48] when did we see You [in need] and did not minister to You?" His answer to them shows the basis of this entire judgment: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." As a result, "these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

XII. JUDGED FOR TREATMENT OF JEWISH BELIEVERS

It is critical to keep in mind that the assessment in Matt 25:31-46 is based on how Tribulation survivors treated Jewish disciples of Christ during the Great Tribulation.[49] The *sheep* will be rewarded for risking their lives to give aid to Jewish believers, while the *goats* will be cast "into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

XIII. ETERNAL EXPERIENCE BASED ON WORKS?

Note that Jesus does *not* say in these verses that the *goats* will enter into "the everlasting fire" *because* of their refusal to help His Jewish brethren, for, in that case, their eternal condemnation would be based on works.[50] However, Jesus clearly announced in the Gospel of John[51] that eternal condemnation is experienced *only* by those who have not

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[48] That they call Him "Lord" does not indicate that they have believed Jesus for eternal life, as Jesus points out earlier in Matt 7:21-23.

[49] See Barbieri, "Matthew," 81.

[50] This is the quagmire into which Lordship Salvationists fall—and all who see Jesus' reply to either group as a basis for getting into heaven or hell.

[51] The Gospel of John is the only book in the Bible with the stated purpose of being written so individuals will receive eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ for it (cf. John 20:31). This means John is *the* Biblical source for discovering how to receive eternal life and, conversely, how to avoid eternal condemnation.

believed in Him for eternal life;[52] one's works do *not* determine *where* one spends eternity.

However, one's works *do* determine one's *experience* in eternity,[53] which includes all relegated to the lake of fire. While all unbelievers will enter into *the everlasting fire*, their eternal *experience* will vary one from another.

XIV. WHY THE CURSED WILL EXPERIENCE ETERNAL RECOMPENSE: THE PARALLEL FACTOR

Since the *sheep* are recompensed for how they treated Jewish followers of Christ (v 34), it is only logical that, within this same judgment, the *goats* would also be remunerated for their treatment of Jesus' *brethren* (v 41). This logical relationship is also indicated by the parallelism in vv 34 and 41[54] which assigns respective eternal experiences to the *sheep* and the *goats* based on their conduct toward Jesus' brethren in time of need. This parallelism underscores the same basis of adjudication for both *sheep* and *goats*.

XV. WHY THE CURSED WILL EXPERIENCE ETERNAL RECOMPENSE: THE PURPOSE FACTOR

In addition, the purpose of this judgment demonstrates restitution for the *goats*. As we have seen, the result of this judgment for the *sheep* is recompense for their sacrificial aid to Jesus' *brethren*. This result also demonstrates the purpose of the judgment—to pay back Gentiles based on how they responded to the needs of Jesus' *brethren*

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[52] See John 3:16-18; also see John 5:24; 11:25-26; etc.

[53] Jesus revealed that certain Jewish religious leaders will experience a *greater condemnation* than that of other unbelievers because of their behavior in positions of power and influence (cf. Matt 23:14 [Majority Text]; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:46-47; etc.). In fact, *all* people will be judged by their works (Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Eccl 12:14; Rev 20:12-13), indicating that their eternal experience will be dependent, in some way, on their behavior.

[54] The parallelism is shown by: 1) the King's address to those on His right / left hand; 2) "Come"/"Depart"; 3) "you blessed"/"you cursed"); 4) the announced recompense with "'prepared for'" in the midst of the description of the recompense.

during the Great Tribulation. Like the *sheep*, the *goats* will be repaid for their response to the needs of the *brethren*.[55]

XVI. WHY THE CURSED WILL EXPERIENCE ETERNAL RECOMPENSE: THE PUNISHMENT FACTOR

Another significant clue in this passage indicates that recompense is dispensed to the *goats* for their treatment of the Jewish faithful. This indicator resides in the declaration: "And these will go away into everlasting punishment."

The Greek word translated *punishment* in v 46 is *kolasis*. According to BAGD, *kolasis* refers to "punishment." [56] Specifically, its meaning in v 46 is assigned "divine retribution."

According to J. Schneider, this retribution is allocated to those "who fail the practical ethical task."[57] Colin Brown reveals that this term was used in Greek inscriptions of "the deity punishing violations of cultic laws."[58]

Thus, Jesus is *not* using *kolasis* to simply refer to the destiny of all who never received eternal life; instead, He is announcing "divine retribution"[59] for the *goats*' failure to extend mercy to Jesus' *brethren*. Because these Gentiles turned their backs on the Lord's chosen people during a time of great need, their punishment in eternity will be greater than that of many other unbelievers.

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[55] In addressing the judgment of the *goats*, Barbieri aptly states that "the basis of their judgment will be their failure to extend mercy to the remnant of Jewish believers during the Tribulation" (Barbieri, "Matthew," 81).

[56] See BAGD, "*kolasis*," 441.

[57] J. Schneider, s.v. "*kolasis*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, edited by Gerhard Kittle and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 451.

[58] Colin Brown, "*kolasis*," *NIDNTT*, 98.

[59] Ibid.

XVII. VARYING EXPERIENCES OF ETERNAL JUDGMENT?

That truth is further displayed in the latter half of v 41 in which Jesus announces that the *cursed* will be cast "into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Jesus could have simply revealed that this group would be cast into "the everlasting fire," but He adds the description "prepared for the devil and his angels." By inserting this descriptive of the *cursed*, Jesus is revealing that their eternal experience will be the kind of "fate that was not meant to be theirs."[60] It is a way of saying the *goats* will experience a punishment more severe than that of other unbelievers,[61] one that achieves the level of punishment due "the devil and his angels."

The corollary to this is that believers will also have varying eternal experiences depending on their works (faithfulness).[62] Thus, when the *sheep* go "into eternal life" (v 46), they begin their eternal experience, but their experience will be far more fulfilling than that of many other believers.[63]

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[60] France, *Matthew*, 358.

[61] Erwin Lutzer agrees with this assertion by stating that "there are degrees of punishment in hell" (Erwin W. Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward* [Chicago: Moody, 1998], 12.) By this matter of fact statement, it appears Lutzer assumes this concept is so clear in Scripture that it would not be questioned.

[62] This is the result of each believer being judged by his works, whether "good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10), as demonstrated in passages on our future assessment, such as Luke 19:11-27.

[63] The term *dikaios* ("righteous"), describing the *sheep* in v 46, is not used in the Pauline sense; instead, Matt uses the term to refer to *faithful* believers (cf. Matt 1:19; 10:41; 13:17; etc.). In addition, *eternal life* in v 46 refers not to the gift of eternal life but to eternal reward. (While the Gospel of John presents eternal life only as a gift, received in the present simply [and only] by believing Jesus Christ for it, the Synoptics [Matthew, Mark, and Luke] *never* display *eternal life* as a gift, always as a future reward.) Thus, because the sheep invested their gift of eternal life (John) wisely—by aiding Jesus' brethren in need—they are rewarded with a significantly expanded experience of eternal life (the Synoptics). (See Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989], endnote #4, 229-31.)

XVIII. WRAPPING IT UP

By wrapping up the end of this present age[64] with this unique assessment of Gentile Tribulation survivors, Matt 25:31-46 reveals that the Lord will make all things right. He will vindicate Jewish believers. He will reward Gentile believers who risked their lives to aid believing Jews. He will bring retribution upon unbelieving Gentiles who turned their backs on Jewish believers in need. In addition, this judgment reminds us there will be differing eternal experiences for all people based on their varying responses to what is important to God.

One thing Matt 25:31-46 clearly *does not present* is salvation by works, as many unwittingly teach. *Where* one spends eternity is not determined by this eschatological assessment, as Matt 25:31-46 is *not* exhibiting the final judgment for all of mankind.[65]

Instead, this appraisal only assesses Gentile Tribulation survivors. Furthermore, Matt 25:31-46 discloses recompense for these survivors based on their treatment of Jewish followers of Jesus during the Great Tribulation.

This leads us to the emphasis of Matt 25:31-46. Here we learn how very important the Jews are to God and His plan. As a result, this passage implicitly exhorts us to provide mercy for God's chosen people. Therefore, if there is one application from Matt 25:31-46, it would be this: Extend mercy to the Jews.[66]

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[64] This present age refers to the rule of Satan over the earth (cf. 2 Cor 4:3-4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19)—from the fall of man through the Tribulation period. (Contrast "the end of the age" in Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3, 6, 13, 14; 28:20 vs. "the age to come" [the rule of Christ upon the earth]. Also, see "this [present] time" vs. "the age to come" in Mark 10:30 and compare to the parallel passage in Matt 19:28-29.)

[65] The judgment of believers occurs at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:9-10), while the "final" judgment of unbelievers takes place at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

[66] Editor's note: Another major application is more general. The judgment of Gentile Tribulation survivors to determine their eternal rewards calls us to live in light of our coming judgment at the Bema. How we treat Jewish believers (and unbelievers) is certainly important in this regard. But since our Bema judgment will consider all our works as believers (2 Cor 5:10), Matt 25:31-46 applies to how we treat our spouses, kids, neighbors, parents, relatives, coworkers, friends, strangers, and ultimately everyone. It touches on how we use our time, talent, and treasure for Christ in all our spheres of influence.

We can do so by praying regularly for the salvation of Israel, as per Rom 10:1.[67] In addition, we can apply this passage by taking the defense of Jews before those who castigate them. Finally, we should teach fellow believers the importance of Jews to God and His plan.[68]

There is immense benefit in applying the emphasis of Matt 25:31-46. Since God's heart aligns with Israel, extending mercy toward God's chosen people aligns the believer's heart with God's concern, opening him to a greater understanding of and obedience to God's word. This, in turn, prepares the believer for a greater experience in His kingdom. These benefits certainly make the emphasis of Matt 25:31-46 vital to understand and to heed.

[67] Note the blessing for praying for the peace of Jerusalem as stated in Ps 122:6. Though this essentially refers to praying for the return of Christ to establish God's kingdom on earth (as only then will Jerusalem experience peace), still, at its core, it involves praying for God's mercy for the Jews.

[68] This last point needs to be emphasized as Satan is ever seeking to deceive Christians by making them subject to replacement theology which eliminates Israel from God's present and future plan, "replacing" Israel with the Church. This evil teaching has far-reaching deleterious effects, which include blinding people to God's love, mercy, grace, dependability, and loyalty, which can adversely affect how people respond to God and His plan for mankind.

FAITH ALIVE[1]

SEAN GERETY

I. INTRODUCTION

Luther and Calvin rightly maintained that justification by faith alone is the linchpin upon which the Church stands or falls. If this doctrine is lost or even muddied, the semblance of religion remains, but the Church fades into nonexistence. That is why a clear and unambiguous definition of faith is essential. If you don't know exactly what the lone instrument in justification consists of, how can it be defended? Further, and in order to avoid equivocation, any definition of faith has to apply to all forms of faith, whether saving or not. Seems simple, right?

The problem is that in the minds of the vast majority of pastors and teachers, any time the word "saving" precedes the word "faith," then faith takes on an entirely new meaning. However, it is the contention of this article that the traditional threefold definition of faith is ambiguous at best and outright dangerous at worst, providing an open doorway for pernicious and deadly heresies that snake their way unabated into the Church.

II. GORDON CLARK'S DEFINITION

While a source of irritation to many modern Reformed pastors, it was Gordon Clark who first identified this gaping crack in the Church's foundation and correctly argued that the difference between faith and saving faith is the propositions believed.[2] In contrast, a majority of Reformed pastors and churchmen, who are blindly wed

[1] Reprinted from *The Trinity Review* (August 2016). Slightly edited. Used by permission. Editor's Note: *JOTGES* readers will no doubt disagree with some of Gerety's claims and his interpretations of certain passages, such as James 2. The value of this article is its strong rejection of the threefold distinction of saving faith. Gerety strongly defends the purity of *sola fide*.

[2] Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 1983).

to tradition seemingly for tradition's sake, maintain that the difference lies not in the propositions believed at all, but in some nebulous psychological state that when mixed with simple faith makes ordinary faith saving.

Like those who guess at the secret recipe for KFC or McDonald's special sauce, today's Reformed leaders and apologists differ widely when it comes to explaining what exactly in addition to simple faith in the gospel is needed to save a sinner.

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) pastor Andy Webb says the secret ingredient is a Harry Potter potion mingling "the emotion of love with trust, inclination, and agreement."[3] The self-proclaimed "Reformed Apologist," Ron DiGiacomo, claims the magic happens when "a disposition of commitment,"[4] whatever that might entail, is added to simple belief.

Alan Strange, who is an Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) minister and professor of church history at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, says the alchemy that makes simple belief alone in Christ alone saving is a "mystery." Strange warns that any attempt to define what it is that makes ordinary belief saving is like peering into the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation and is "not amenable to rationalistic reduction."[5] For Strange, what makes ordinary belief saving is beyond human understanding or definition. According to Strange even the words *faith* and *belief* differ, despite being translations of the exact same Greek word in Scripture and "justifying faith is something more than merely belief: not something less, but something more."[6]

The central error in all this is that faith is belief, nothing more, nothing less. Consequently, and when you come right down to it, none of these men really believe in justification by faith alone. They just pay it lip service. No wonder the Federal Vision continues to spread unabated, and the PCA is now a safe haven for the Federal Vision. Such is the state of the Reformed and Presbyterian Church today.

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[3] "On Saving Faith," Providence PCA Mission Church, September 11, 2002. See http://www.providencepca.com/essays/savingfaith.html. Accessed June 18, 2016.

[4] "Justification by Belief." See https://greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2014/07/30/justification-by-belief/. Accessed June 18, 2016.

[5] See "A Qualification," May 17, 2014, Comment 214, https://greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2014/05/17/a-qualification/ #comment-117810. Accessed June 18, 2016.

[6] See previous footnote, comment #51.

III. REFORMED THEOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Am I saying the vast majority of Reformed churchmen don't believe in justification by faith alone? Well, yes and no. Yes, because they add to saving faith that which is absent from faith simpliciter and end up equivocating, even contradicting themselves, when explaining what exactly the alone instrument of justification is. No, because while confused and mired in meaningless religious jargon, metaphors, and word pictures, they don't add works as that which completes faith making it somehow "saving." They at least attempt to draw a distinction between God's once and for all declaration of righteousness the moment a person first believes, with works done in sanctification as the result of this faith. They differ, albeit ever so slightly, with the Federal Vision men who profess, "the faith which is the sole instrument of justification can be understood as...a living, active, and personally loyal faith."[7] This is admittedly very similar to DiGiacomo's "disposition of commitment."

Perhaps the best example demonstrating the inability of the defenders of the traditional threefold definition of faith[8] to safeguard against the deadly errors of heretics like those in the Federal Vision (as well as the encroaching tentacles of Romanism), came during the final days of a yearlong debate between Lane Keister and Federal Visionist Doug Wilson. At that point the discussion turned to the nature of saving faith and the questions concerning the "aliveness" of faith in justification. Keister wrote:

> Contrary to the criticisms of FV proponents...I know of *no* Reformed scholar who says that we are justified by a dead faith. I know of no Reformed scholar who even hints at this. I know of dozens of Reformed scholars who say the aliveness of faith is not what

[7] "A Joint Federal Vision Profession," 2007, page 6, http://www.federal-vision.com/resources/joint_FV_Statement.pdf. Accessed June 18, 2016.

[8] Editor's Note: It is common within Reformed circles to see three aspects of saving faith expressed in three Latin words: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. The first refers to understanding the basic information that a person needs to know in order to receive eternal life. The second means to believe that information is true. The third involves an element of trust, including an internal change and some would say a commitment. The bottom line is that according to this definition, "simply" believing the promise of eternal life through Christ alone is not saving faith.

> justifies us. The best way I can put this is to say that the aliveness of faith is a sine qua non, but is not part of the inherent structure of justification. Of course the person who stretches out his arm to catch a ball has to be alive to do that. But his being alive is not an action inherent in stretching out his arm. Maybe I can put it this way: states of being are distinct from actions, just like verbs of being are distinct from verbs of action. We must distinguish then between the state of being alive and the verb of action of what faith does in laying hold of Christ's righteousness. To put it another way, our aliveness can have no object. It is inherently reflexive. But faith's action in justification takes a direct object: the righteousness of Christ. I really think this is as clear as I can be. I don't see any reason why Doug should disagree with this, either. I suppose I will have to enact a qualification of this, nevertheless, lest people think I am making faith active. When I am referring to "faith's action" I do not mean that we are doing a work. I mean only that faith is doing something in justification. And this is what it is doing: it is "accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification" (*Westminster Confession*, 14.2).[9]

Before unpacking this tragically confused paragraph, the central thing to recognize is that both Keister and Wilson are operating from the exact same definition of saving faith. Both believe that faith can be either "alive" or "dead," which means, when stripped of its metaphorical trappings, that a person can believe the truth of the gospel, assent to it, yet still be lost. In order to be saved and for faith to be effectual, something in addition to belief is needed. I can't tell you how many times over the years I've had Reformed pastors tell me that simply believing the gospel and Christ's finished work on the cross on account of sin is not enough to save anyone.

So much for the idea that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." But, then, almost in the same breath, they identify Christians as "believers," blissfully unaware of the contradiction right under their noses. This is also why Reformed Christians who refuse

[9] Lane Keister, "One Last Word." See https://greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2009/02/06/one-last-word/. Accessed June 18, 2016.

to accept contradictions or so-called "paradoxes" in Scripture are routinely attacked and routinely banned from blogs and discussion groups by men for maintaining that sinners are justified by belief alone.

Keister begins by saying that he knows of "*no* Reformed scholar who says that we are justified by a dead faith." But, then he says the aliveness of faith is "not part of the inherent structure of justification." So, which is it? If we are not justified by dead faith, wouldn't it follow that we're saved by a faith that is "alive," whatever that might mean? He then adds this "aliveness" is a "sine qua non," that which is indispensable or essential to something, just not to justification. Again, how can that be? If faith is the alone instrument in justification, then it would seem it is very much "inherent to the structure of justification." If it is not, by what means can a sinner be justified?

The tragedy is that Keister is far from alone, and his confusion is endemic to virtually all Reformed pastors today who cannot clearly define the difference between faith and saving faith without equivocating or just speaking nonsense. This is why they identify faith as something that can be either "alive" or "dead." In fact, Keister takes a pointed jab at the late John Robbins, writing, "Robbins and his crowd seem to me to be in danger of denying that justifying faith is alive, which is what the Confession says. Now, they may say that assent is alive."[10]

First, as one who identifies with "Robbins and his crowd," I do deny that saving faith is "alive" simply because it is a metaphor that is misapplied to saving faith. Besides, in order for any metaphor to make sense it has to be first explained in literal language. Now, it could be said that saving faith is evidence that a person has already been translated from death to life in regeneration, but beyond that it is completely irrelevant to the question of the role faith plays in justification. This is an important point, because as Dewey Roberts observes, Federal Visionists like Wilson deny God's grace in regeneration.[11]

Second, the *Westminster Confession* nowhere says that "justifying faith is alive." Concerning faith in justification the *Confession* states,

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[10] "One Last Word," comment #2.

[11] See Dewey Roberts, "The Federal Vision and Grace." See http://theaquilareport.com/the-federal-vision-and-grace/. Accessed June 18, 2016. This article is excerpted from Dewey Roberts, *Historic Christianity and the Federal Vision* (Destin, FL: Sola Fide Publications, 2016), 59-63.

> "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love" (11:2).

Keister is mistaken simply because that which accompanies something, in this case saving faith, is not part of the essence of saving faith, but rather results from it. That should have been obvious to Keister, and the clue is the phrase "works by love," but more on that later.

B. B. Warfield said,

> The saving power of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty Savior on whom it rests.... It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith....[12]

If one were to follow Warfield and focus on the "object of faith," then he would be forced to agree with Clark and admit that the difference between faith and saving faith lies in the propositions believed and not in some psychological quality or disposition residing in the one who believes. Had the opponents of the Federal Vision focused on the propositions these heretics believe, they would have immediately identified the inherent structure of the Federal Vision scheme of justification as being a clever counterfeit of the Biblical one. They would have easily and quickly identified the Federal Vision as a false gospel and the fight would have been over. They would never have identified those who believe this perversion of the gospel as their "brothers in Christ," as those writing the PCA study report on the Federal Vision did.

Not surprisingly at this point in the discussion Doug Wilson responded:

> "Lane, I am happy to let you have the last word here." And, well he should. With the battle won, Wilson knew the debate was over. It was for this reason Lane

[12] Benjamin Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 504. See also http://bbwarfield.com/quotes/.

> declared, "Personally, I am willing to believe that Wilson holds to justification by faith alone, although he is too ambiguous on the aliveness of faith and its place in justification."

What Keister failed to identify is that the question of the imagined "aliveness" of faith was a carefully laid trap and one that I suspect Keister still fails to see.

IV. THE SCRIPTURES AND SAVING FAITH

Jesus said in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Jesus' use of the word *hear* is not a reference to sound vibrations tickling an eardrum, but rather to understanding. Consequently, he who understands Jesus' word, His message, and believes it has passed from death to life. That person has been born again.

There is nothing inherent in the act of believing or faith that saves a sinner, but rather, as Jesus makes clear, it is the message or propositions believed. The problem with all sub-Christian systems like Romanism, Mormonism, or the Federal Vision, is that they do not believe Jesus' message. Simply put, they do not understand and assent to the gospel.

Further, the idea of a faith that is dead or alive in Scripture has to do with the process of sanctification. A person who claims to believe the message of the gospel will invariably evidence, to one degree or another, his belief in it.[13] For example, James writes:

> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even

[13] Editor's Note: For a Free Grace interpretation of this passage, see Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994).

> the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (Jas 2:15-25).

As every Christian knows, or at least should know, James is not talking about justification before God, but rather those things, those actions, which justify our claims to believe in Jesus Christ to other believers. As Calvin explains in his commentary on this passage:

> But here a question arises: Can faith be separated from love? It is indeed true that the exposition of this passage has produced that common distinction of the Sophists, between unformed and formed faith; but of such a thing James knew nothing, for it appears from the first words, that he speaks of false profession of faith: for he does not begin thus, "If any one has faith;" but, "If any says that he has faith;" by which he certainly intimates that hypocrites boast of the empty name of faith, which really does not belong to them.[14]

Note carefully, for Calvin the question is not between those who have faith in which one person's faith is alive and the other's is dead, as if they both had faith, but rather between the one who believes and the other who does not. The distinction James is drawing is between the person who possesses genuine belief and the hypocrite. Calvin rightly understands in describing faith as alive or dead that James is using a rhetorical device as he "disputes against those who made a false pretense as to faith, of which they were wholly destitute." This is so painfully obvious that it is unbelievable that any man claiming to be Reformed—even a PCA pastor—could be taken in, much less

[14] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. by John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 309-310.

tied in knots, by Wilson's subtlety. Instead of simply judging Wilson by his works, his theology, they find common ground with Wilson and the Federal Vision when it comes to their shared and errant view of saving faith. This is why they are willing to believe that Wilson and the other Federal Vision men believe in justification by faith alone, even if some like Keister were later forced to eat their words.

Similarly, Calvin corrects those who would likewise distort Paul's meaning in Gal 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Calvin writes:

> There would be no difficulty in this passage, were it not for the dishonest manner in which it has been tortured by the Papists to uphold the righteousness of works. When they attempt to refute our doctrine, that we are justified by faith alone, they take this line of argument. If the faith which justifies us be that "which worketh by love," then faith alone does not justify. I answer, they do not comprehend their own silly talk; still less do they comprehend our statements. It is not our doctrine that the faith which justifies is alone; we maintain that it is invariably accompanied by good works; only we contend that faith alone is sufficient for justification. The Papists themselves are accustomed to tear faith after a murderous fashion, sometimes presenting it out of all shape and unaccompanied by love, and at other times, in its true character. We, again, refuse to admit that...faith can be separated from the Spirit of regeneration; but when the question comes to be in what manner we are justified, we then set aside all works. With respect to the present passage, Paul enters into no dispute whether love cooperates with faith in justification; but, in order to avoid the appearance of representing Christians as idle and as resembling blocks of wood, he points out what are the true exercises of believers. *When you are engaged in discussing the question of justification, beware of allowing any mention to be made of love or of works, but resolutely adhere to the exclusive particle. Paul does not here treat of justification, or assign any part of the praise of it to love. Had he done so, the same argument would prove that circumcision and ceremonies, at a former period, had some share in justifying a sinner.* As in Christ Jesus

> he commends faith accompanied by love, so before the coming of Christ ceremonies were required. But this has nothing to do with obtaining righteousness, as the Papists themselves allow; and neither must it be supposed that love possesses any such influence (emphasis added).[15]

In every case Calvin rightly notes that whether it is a question of love or works or a faith that is alive or dead, the question has to do with sanctification, not justification. Justification in every case is by mere faith or belief alone. And, in every case, those who lack love or good works, or the difference between a faith that is alive or one that is dead, is really the difference between those who believe and are being sanctified and those who are not. It is also important to note that while Calvin did say some confusing things in regard to the nature of saving faith (for example in one place, confusing assurance with faith), he did not hold to the traditional three-fold definition.

V. CONCLUSION

The time has come to finally reject the traditional three-fold definition of saving faith as a Latin brew mixing *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*. Frankly, it is time to end this Romish love affair with Latin entirely and return to the Greek of the NT. It is time to return to *pistein* (which means "to believe") or one of its cognates like *pistis* (which means "belief"). Faith consists of understanding and assent; nothing more, nothing less. And, the difference between faith and saving faith is not found in *fiducia*, that ill-defined and meaningless addition to ordinary faith. Rather, the difference between faith and saving faith is found exclusively in the propositions believed.

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[15] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 152-53.

WORTHY TO REIGN: THE CROSS AND THE WAR FOR DOMINION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Why did Jesus have to die? For whom did He die? What did His death accomplish? Of all the ways that God could have saved the world, why the cross?

Theologians have given different answers to those questions. Their answers are commonly called *theories of the atonement*.[1] Discussions of the atonement among conservative Evangelicals have too often been confined to debating a narrow range of questions raised by Calvinists and Arminians over one theory, penal substitution, and whether it is limited or unlimited. Although those are important questions, it does not exhaust the breadth of the Biblical evidence about the meaning of the cross.

This journal has already addressed different aspects of the atonement.[2] In this article, I want to explore a neglected theme that sheds light on the meaning of the cross. I will argue the cross is part of the war between God and Satan for dominion over creation. I believe this theme fruitfully ties together different strands of Biblical evidence regarding the meaning and purpose of the cross within redemptive history.

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[1] I will use the word *atonement* because, in theological literature, it is the commonly accepted term for referring to Christ's death. However, I recognize there are strong objections to using it that way. The basic objection is this: while an atonement merely covers sin, the cross did more than that. E. W. Kenyon put it this way: "The 'Atonement' means 'to cover.' It is not a New Testament word, it does not appear in the New Testament Greek. Why? Because the blood of Jesus cleanses, instead of merely covering." See *The Blood Covenant* (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 2012), 32; cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 3:127.

[2] See Anthony Badger, "TULIP: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 3: Limited Atonement," *JOTGES* (Spring 2004): 33-56; Bob Wilkin, "Benefits of Christ's Blood: Restricted or Unrestricted?" *JOTGES* (Autumn 09): 3-10. Zane Hodges's articles on the atonement were compiled in *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014).

II. THE WAR BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN FROM CREATION TO THE FALL

The Bible can be read as a war drama. It begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. I am not the first to recognize the theme of war between God and Satan. For example, R. B. Thieme described it in dramatic terms:

> From the moment of birth, every person, regardless of age or gender, regardless of status in life, is in the midst of the great war. A ceaseless war! No man knows exactly when it began, and no man can end it. The resolution will never be attained during human history. The antagonists are irreconcilable; the conflagration, inescapable.[3]

Likewise, while commenting on Genesis 3, Sidney Greidanus wrote: "Human history will consist of a long struggle between evil and good."[4]

And Erich Sauer understood that "the opposition between [Satan] and the kingdom of God is henceforth the theme and the essential subject of the universal super-history outlined in Holy Scripture."[5]

What is the purpose of the war between God and Satan? Wars are often waged to control a territory, and that is the reason here. God created the world—but who will rule over it?

A. The Dominion Mandate

The importance of dominion as a theme is evident in the creation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 1:26-28 may be taken as God's purpose statement for man:

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; *and let them rule* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him;

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[3] R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Angelic Conflict* (Houston, TX: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2012), ix.

[4] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 84.

[5] Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption* (London: Paternoster, 1951), 33.

> male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue it*; *and rule over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:26-28, emphasis added).

Clearly, God's original plan for men and women was to serve Him by *ruling over creation*. In that way, they were created as "servant-kings."[6] They and their children (e.g., "fill the earth") were meant to subdue the wilderness and extend the pattern of the Garden of Eden over the whole land[7] ("subdue it"; cf. Gen 2:15).[8] By being fruitful, they would fill the earth with image-bearers "who would worship and reflect God's glory to the ends of the earth."[9] If the fall had not happened, this mission would have continued into eternity.

This obligation to rule is called the dominion mandate or the cultural mandate.[10]

B. Satan's Pride

Although man was created to rule under God, so was Satan. He was created as a guardian cherub: "You were an anointed *guardian*

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[6] Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 55.

[7] John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 186.

[8] The fact that the land needed to be subdued indicates it was in a wild state. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1999), 23.

[9] G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 29. Some commentators suggest that Adam was called to a priestly role, with Eden as the primordial Temple. The language of Adam's mandate to "serve" and "guard" also describes the priests' roles in the Temple. The dominion mandate would therefore be a priestly mandate (see Treat, *The Crucified King*, 55). If so, this would tie in with the goal of Rev 5:10: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

[10] Nancy Pearcey explains the full implications of the cultural mandate in this way: "In Genesis, God gives what we might call the first job description: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.' The first phrase, 'be fruitful and multiply,' means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, 'subdue the earth,' means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music. This passage is sometimes called the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—nothing less." See *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 47. This is distinct from what you may call the evangelistic mandate.

cherub, for I had appointed you. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the fiery stones" (Ezek 28:14 HCSB, emphasis added).

The exact nature of Satan's guardianship and where he served are not explained. Speculation abounds. Some say he was a guardian in Eden.[11] Others say he guarded God's presence.[12] And still others say he had governmental authority over the earth.[13] Whatever the case, Satan was not content with that subordinate position. Instead, he wanted to rule over all, including God Himself. Notice these "I will" statements:

> "But you said in your heart,
> '*I will* ascend to heaven;
> *I will* raise my throne above the stars of God,
> And *I will* sit on the mount of assembly
> In the recesses of the north.
> '*I will* ascend above the heights of the clouds;
> *I will* make myself like the Most High'" (Isa 14:13-14, NASB, emphasis added).

Satan was created with free will. Even though he was in a perfect environment, with a perfect nature, and had direct revelation and knowledge of God, he had the free will to choose to rebel—and he did. This shows that Satan's volition was the source of evil in creation.[14] Satan *willed* to sit above the divine assembly, rule the other angels, ascend above God's glory clouds, and be like God Himself. But God had delegated that job to man. So the devil plotted a *coup d'état*.[15]

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[11] John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1969), 196-97.

[12] Charles Dyer, "Ezekiel," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1:1283. R. B. Thieme describes him as "the personal honor guard of the second person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ" (*The Angelic Conflict,* 7).

[13] Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, 32-33.

[14] On this view, the will must be self-caused in order to be free. Of course, the will can be *influenced* by many different factors, but nothing can cause it to choose this or that. This is known as the doctrine of the incipiency of the will. For a defense see Harry Conn, *Four Trojan Horses* (Van Nuys, CA: Bible Voice, 1978), 125-36.

[15] Thieme, *The Angelic Conflict*, 23.

C. The Angels Fall

In order for Satan to gain control over creation, he had to attack and undermine God's government in heaven.[16] That attack began by persuading many of the other angels—up to a third—to rebel (cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev 12:4a).

We are not told how God reacted to this insurrection. However, given that Jesus warned of an "eternal fire which *has been prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt 25:41; cf. 8:29), the implication is that God made preparations for their future judgment and damnation.

D. First Shots Fired

Next, Satan had to attack God's government on earth by persuading man to rebel. We read about this in Genesis 3. A serpent appeared in the Garden, whom we know to be Satan himself (Rev 12:9; 20:2). The conversation between the serpent and the woman shows us what is at stake in the war, the object being fought over, and the rules of engagement.

First, God's moral government was at stake. In order to undermine God's rule, Satan questioned God's good reputation: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" This made God seem *unreasonable*, as if He were not fully providing for Eve's needs. When he went on to say, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil," he was questioning God's *good intentions*, implying that God was jealously keeping something good back from her. The serpent was implying that God's dominion was not ideal and would lead to her harm.

Second, God and Satan are fighting for the minds and hearts of men and women. Satan sought to win Eve (and her descendants) to his side, to rule under him, instead of under God.

Third, the main weapon in this conflict is *persuasion*, not *raw power*. If raw power were the issue, there could be no conflict. God is

[16] Generally speaking, God has two forms of government: moral and natural. God's natural government involves a cause and effect providential care over inanimate creation (e.g., trees and seas and the planets). God's moral government involves the moral and spiritual laws given to self-conscious moral agents like humans and angels. See Gordon Olson, *The Moral Government of God* (St Paul, MN: Revival Theology Promotions, 1974, 1999).

omnipotent. Satan is not. Hence, the fact that there is a conflict tells us the rules of engagement occur at a different level.

Since God created man with free will, Satan could *influence* Eve to sin, but could not *cause* her to. And the same held true for God. He could *influence* Eve to obey, but could not *cause* her to obey. Why not? Because in order for an action to count as genuine obedience—as genuinely blameworthy or praiseworthy moral action, as genuine love—it must be freely chosen.[17] Hence, given the reality of free will, both God and Satan are limited in what they can do. In Satan's case, he is *inherently* limited because he is a finite being.[18] In God's case, He is self-limited because His goal was to create creatures capable of genuine good and love.[19]

Both God and Satan presented their respective cases to Eve's mind. God presented Eve with the *truth*. He demonstrated His loving character by creating her, giving her life, and providing her with an abundant garden. He also truthfully warned her about the deadly consequences of eating the forbidden fruit. By contrast, Satan presented her with *distortions and lie*s. He denied God's Word, questioned His good character, and made Eve promises that were either

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[17] As Major Ian Thomas noted, "It is quite obvious that if this process had been purely mechanical, and Adam had possessed no capacity to exercise his own choice, he would have been no more than a robot; an impersonal 'device,' completely incapable of responding to or of satisfying the love of God, for only love can satisfy love, and love cannot be compelled…All genuine affection springs from free volition, and you cannot truly love without the power to choose" (*The Mystery of Godliness* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964], 77).

[18] Satan and the demons can cause physical suffering (e.g., ailment, disease), and even possess a body by supplanting someone's will, but cannot force the will to choose this way or that.

[19] Those who hold to divine determinism deny there is any conflict between God and Satan at all, because Satan's actions are God's own decrees. For example, Homer C. Hoeksema writes, "There is no fight between God and the devil. The God of our salvation is the God who from moment to moment performs all his good pleasure, even in and through the very opposition of the devil and the powers of darkness. All creatures, good and evil, are subject unto him and execute his will, even in spite of themselves. According to God's sovereign good pleasure, the devil, though purposing opposition and rebellion against the living God, nevertheless must serve God's purpose. He must serve to create the opposition and rebellion against God only to show ultimately how all who oppose God will be defeated" (*Unfolding Covenant History: An Exposition of the Old Testament* [Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000], 1:139). In other words, the devil is a straw man that God sets up in order to prove He can knock him down. In my view, that turns the history of redemption into a grand charade.

lies or distortions of the truth. Each side presented its best case, and Eve and Adam were left to choose—God or Satan.[20]

Of course, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. They ate the fruit, and as a result, humanity fell. Satan won the initial battle. But this victory set the stage for God's announcement of the cross.

III. THE WAR CONTINUES IN THE PROTOEVANGELIUM

The temptation in the Garden did not end the war between God and Satan. And as the following events show, God planned through the cross to win the war and to re-establish His dominion over creation.

A. The Coming Enmity

God confronted the serpent and issued this proclamation:

> "And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall [crush] your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15).

Enmity is a state of hostility. God would be the cause of it. In other words, Satan started the fight, but God will finish it. As Lawrenz and Jeske explain, "For Satan this was an announcement of judgment of defeat."[21] O. Palmer Robertson says the two-seeds theme "anticipates the long struggle that ensues in the history that follows. 'Seed of woman' and 'seed of Satan' conflict with one another throughout the ages."[22] In other words, there would be war.

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[20] However, further Scripture shows that Satan is also able to influence people to bring harm to others (e.g., Judas with Jesus), can, with God's permission, harm people directly (e.g., Job), and when a person voluntarily sins, he comes under Satan's authority (John 8:34; Rom 6:16; 2 Pet 2:19).

[21] Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 147.

[22] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co, 1980), 99.

B. The Coming Messiah

In Gen 3:15, God also revealed His intention to win the war through a Messiah ("her Seed"). A descendant of Adam and Eve would defeat the serpent,[23] take up the royal mantle, and fulfill the dominion mandate. As T. Desmond Alexander explains,

> This life of "seed"…is the beginning of a royal dynasty through whom God will bring his judgment upon the "seed of the serpent." That the one who will bring this judgment and reverse the consequences of the first couple's disobedience will be of kingly standing is not surprising when we bear in mind the vice-regent status earlier conferred on Adam and Eve.[24]

C. The Covering

God also provided Adam and Eve with animal skins, a symbolic action that typified Christ's propitiation (Gen 3:21). Initially, Adam and Eve tried to cover up the nakedness of their sin (the effects of their rebellion) by making a covering of fig leaves (Gen 3:7).[25] After all, in order to make a garment of skin, animal blood must be shed.[26] Commentators see this as the first animal sacrifice. The garments of skin are a figure for Christ's death and being clothed in His righteousness and covered by His blood.[27] While the animal sacrifices had no inherent saving power,[28] they pointed to One that would. In other words, it points to the sacrifice of the cross that God would provide through the Messiah.[29]

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[23] Lawrenz and Jeske, *Genesis 1-11*, 151-52; Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 19.

[24] T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2003), 18.

[25] Hoeksema, *Unfolding Covenant History*, 1:151; Thieme, *Angelic Conflict*, 30-31.

[26] Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:124.

[27] Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, 60.

[28] G. H. Lang, *Atoning Blood: What It Does and What It Does Not Do* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co, 1988), 14.

[29] Thieme, *Angelic Conflict*, 43.

IV. THE CONTINUATION OF THE WAR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

With the war begun and the plans for victory stated, the rest of the Bible's story can be read as the development of the themes of Gen 3:15.

A. War Narratives

The Bible is full of stories of war. In light of Gen 3:15, clearly, they are not there by accident. They illustrate the enmity between God and Satan and their respective proxies.

One sees this enmity depicted through literal *geo-political conflicts* between God's people Israel and the pagan nations around them (e.g., Cain vs Abel; Abraham vs Nine Kings; Moses vs Pharaoh; Joshua vs the Canaanites; Samson vs the Philistines; David vs Goliath; Elijah vs the Prophets of Baal; and Esther vs Haman).

We also see it in the internal, psychological, spiritual conflicts that occur in the minds and hearts of men as Satan attempted to persuade them to be unfaithful, even while God called them to faithfulness. That internal struggle is often presented during an external struggle (e.g., David is *externally* at war with his enemies, *internally* at war with his lust for Bathsheba; Esther is *externally* at war with Haman, and *internally* at war with accepting her vocation from God).

B. Rulership Narratives

Since God and Satan are fighting for dominion, the Bible naturally has many stories of how God's people overcome their enemies to rise to positions of great power and authority. The dominion mandate remains in force. As Treat explains, "the essence of [Adam's] commission is then passed on to Noah (9:1,7), Abraham (12:2-3; 17:2, 6, 8, 16; 22:18), Isaac (26:3-4, 24), Jacob (28:3-4, 14; 35:11-12; 48:3-4, 15-16), and corporate Israel (47:27; Deut 7:13)."[30] For example, note that in Gen 17:6, God promised that Abraham's descendants would be kings: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, *and kings shall come from you*" (emphasis added). And it is no accident that Genesis opens with Adam and Eve's loss of dominion

[30] Treat, *The Crucified King*, 57.

and appropriately ends with Joseph's reigning over Egypt. Ultimately, the theme of dominion, as well as the promise that a royal line would come through Eve and then Abraham is continued through the OT.[31]

C. Messianic Narratives

The Bible also tells many stories of when God sent a messiah—a deliverer—to turn the tides of war. Oftentimes, these same individuals are placed in positions of rulership, fulfilling the dominion mandate. Both qualities—of being a deliverer and ruler—make them types of the future Messiah (e.g., Joseph, Moses,[32] Esther, Daniel).

D. Types of the Cross in the OT

God foreshadowed the cross by presenting Adam and Eve with a covering of animal skins. This typology continued through the Bible. Lewis Sperry Chafer defines a type as "a divinely purposed anticipation which illustrates its antitype. These two parts of one theme are related to each other by the fact that the same truth or principle is embodied in each."[33] Types of the future blood atonement include: Abel's offering (Gen 4:4); Noah's altar and sacrifice (Gen 8:20-22); Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-14); the Bronze Serpent (Num 21:4-9); the Paschal Lamb; the Five Levitical Offerings (Lev 1:1—7:38)[34]; the Day of Atonement; the Tabernacle; and the Feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23).

E. Prophecies of the Suffering Servant

Types are implicitly prophetic, but there are also *explicit* prophecies in Scripture about the sufferings of the Messiah (e.g., Ps 22:1-21;

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[31] Likewise, think of Moses who is born a slave, becomes an Egyptian prince, then refugee, then leader of Israel. Think of David, a lowly shepherd boy, hounded and hunted by King Saul, who becomes ruler of Israel. Think of Daniel, thrown into the lion's den, but becomes third in Babylon. Think of Esther, an orphan raised by her uncle, under threat by Haman, who becomes Queen over Persia. The pattern here is very similar. In each case, God's people overcome Satanic opposition to rule.

[32] To give only one example, think of Moses as a type of Christ. He confronts Pharaoh and delivers his people from slavery. The killing of the Passover lamb was a key event in that victory. And Moses then leads the people to (but not into) the Promised Land.

[33] Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:116.

[34] R. B. Thieme, Jr,. *Levitical Offerings* (Houston, TX: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2004).

40:6-7; Isa 52:13–53:12). Again, these prophecies contribute to our understanding of the atonement, the reconciliation that Messiah would bring through His death. They also tie the atonement with God's dominion through a Messianic king.[35]

V. THE OUTWORKING OF THE WAR DURING JESUS' MINISTRY

As Biblical history continued, it looked as though Satan would win the war. But then Jesus came and turned the tides of history.

A. Satan's Influence

Although the Bible presents God's people as winning significant victories in redemption history (e.g., the Exodus), it is clear that Satan gained the advantage. The people of God were few in number. Wickedness, immorality, and idolatry spread through the world. The Bible records that, generally speaking, the world believes Satan's lies and acts on his principles. As Paul said, Satan is the god of this world: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4 NASB). And if that is true today, it was certainly true before the time of Jesus, a fact assumed during the wilderness temptation.

B. Tempting Jesus

Satan tempted Jesus just as he did Adam and Eve. He knew that Jesus came to rule, so he offered Him dominion over the kingdoms of this world (which he evidently controlled) in exchange for worship:

> Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me" (Matt 4:8-9 NASB).

[35] This is the conclusion of recent work on the unity of Isaiah that links the suffering servant of Isaiah 1–39 with the Messianic king of Isaiah 40–55. See the bibliographic list in Treat, *The Crucified King*, 69-86, and the bibliography on 69, n. 5.

Notice that Satan offered Jesus a subordinate position. Jesus could rule under Satan if He worshipped him. However, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus resisted that temptation, rebuked Satan, and won the victory.[36] After winning the wilderness trial, it was Jesus' turn to go on the offensive.

C. The Gospel of the Kingdom

After exiting the wilderness, Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom, which, you will notice, involves a direct conflict with Satan.

> Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people (Matt 4:23 NASB, emphasis added; cf. Luke 11:14-21).

The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that the theocratic kingdom promised by God would soon be offered to Israel. The implication was that Jesus Himself would be king. And the miracles that attended the preaching of that gospel are described in Scripture as attacks against Satan's rule:

> Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."
>
> And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom

[36] Note the parallels: Whereas the original temptation occurred in an uncorrupted Garden, Jesus' temptation occurred in cursed wilderness. Whereas Adam and Eve were tempted in the midst of plenty, Jesus was tempted in the middle of extreme hunger. Whereas Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden into the wilderness, Jesus was led into the wilderness and then triumphantly departed to begin His ministry.

> of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Matt 12:22-29 NASB).

D. Satan Cast Out

Jesus declared His ministry had the effect of overthrowing Satan's rule. Each exorcism demonstrated His authority to take back dominion from Satan one person at a time. And He announced that an even greater de facto victory was at hand: "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31 NASB); "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30 NASB); and "The ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:11 NASB).

VI. THE WAR AND THE CROSS

The victories won during Jesus' three-year ministry all pointed to the greater victory of the cross. How was the cross a victory over Satan? One answer is that it "disarmed" him. That is, it took away some of Satan's most potent weapons for persuading humanity to rebel against God.

A. The Cross and Death

> Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, *that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*, and might *free those who through fear of death* were subject to slavery all their lives (Heb 2:14-15 NASB, emphasis added).

According to this passage, the cross has (at least) two effects.

First, the cross rendered Satan powerless. The author of Hebrews says that Satan had, and still has, the power of death. In earthly terms, death is the most potent weapon you can possess. But Jesus defeated death by rising from the dead. And the Lord promised Martha that all who believe in Him would be resurrected, too. Death lost its sting (1 Cor 15:55). Indeed, one day death itself will be "destroyed"

(1 Cor 15:26; cf. Rev 20:14; 21:4). In other words, death is no longer a potent weapon. It has no permanent hold on the believer. Hence, Satan has become powerless.

Second, the cross frees believers from the fear of death. Satan uses the fear of death to persuade people to serve him. Consider how false religions use that fear to motivate people to try and save themselves through works. The cross unmasks that fear. As Lang said, "Thus by means of death Christ annulled the power of Satan over those who rely on Him and delivers them from fear of death; for these 'fall asleep through Jesus' (1 Thess 4:14) and are in His charge and company as was the repentant thief (Luke 23:43), for they 'die in the Lord' (Rev 14:13)."[37]

B. A Public Display

On the cross, Jesus also made a public display of the satanic powers: "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Col 2:15)."

This is a difficult passage. The context is the Colossians' battle with a Gnostic form of legalism. Paul's point is that Jesus, not legalism, is sufficient for all your spiritual needs.[38] The image is borrowed from the way disgraced public officials would have their robes torn off and put to public shame,[39] or the way Roman generals would lead a train of captives.[40] The Colossians risked being ensnared by Satanic authorities that ruled through legalism (vv 16, 20-23; cf. 1 Tim 4:1-5), who appear wise (Col 2:23). The cross triumphed over these forces by showing that Jesus is greater, that He is the real power, the real life, and that eternal life is through Him, not through following a Gnostic, legalistic, religious system.

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[37] One caveat: the thief was in Christ's charge because of his faith, not his repentance. See Lang, *Atoning Blood*, 13.

[38] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Complete* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984), 80.

[39] Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1991), 266.

[40] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augusburg, 1964), 120.

C. Redeemed from the Law

Paul lists the Law as one of the hostile powers aligned against us. That may come as a surprise. The reason why the Law is on Satan's side of the conflict is because it is related to sin and death, meant to kill and to curse, not to give life: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them'" (Gal 3:10; cf. Deut 27:26); "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Cor 15:56; cf. 2 Cor 3:7; Rom 7:5). The Law is especially deadly when it is made into a way of eternal salvation. Hence, Paul portrays the cross as a triumph over the Law,[41] releasing the believer from the Law's curse: "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God" (Rom 7:4); "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written: Everyone who is hung on a tree is cursed" (Gal 3:13); "Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14).

D. A Penal Substitute

Most Evangelical literature on the atonement discusses penal substitution. For that reason, I will only briefly mention how that view relates to the theme of the war between God and Satan for dominion.

As we saw, Satan's attack against God involved attacking His good character. When Satan tempted Eve, he put doubts in her mind about God's good intentions and provisions. The major objections to God's existence (and consequently, His right to rule) have often centered on

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[41] Interestingly, while the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement strongly emphasized the cross as a victory over Satanic powers, it tended to overlook the Law as one of the powers to be overcome. As Gustaf Aulen explains, "this feature of the Pauline teaching is distinctly weakened in the Fathers, and even in the later New Testament writings; it does not, in fact, return in full strength till Martin Luther." I believe this is due to the predominance of salvation by works teaching by the Church Fathers. They did not understand how commandments requiring good works could be one of the forces used by the devil and overcome at the cross. But those of us who believe in salvation by faith apart from works can easily understand how legalism is on the side of the devil. See Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969), 68-69.

His justice (e.g., the problem of evil). The cross answers some of those objections.

In Rom 3:25-26, Paul explained that Jesus was "displayed publicly." The cross taught a public lesson. What lesson is that? Paul goes on to explain that Christ's "propitiation" publicly demonstrated God's "righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." Since God had not executed a penalty for sin in the past, it might have appeared that God was unjust, unconcerned about right and wrong, and not willing to uphold His law. The cross corrects those misperceptions in two ways.

First, the cross demonstrates God's justice. It shows that God hates sin, that it has horrible consequences, and that the law's penalty for sin has been exacted at the cross. But Jesus has died in our place, as our substitute.

Second, the cross also publicly demonstrated God's love for the world. It showed that God was reluctant for any sinner to die. So Jesus died in our place, the way a friend would.

Because of the cross God could be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:25-26). The legal obstacle to salvation was "taken away" for the entire world (John 1:29). Now God was free to show mercy to believers by giving them eternal life.

VII. THE WAR ENDS

At the cross, Jesus disarmed, defeated, and triumphed over His enemies. But the cross itself did not spell the end of the war. It raged on. You and I are in it now. As Paul warned the Ephesians: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). We are also caught up in the war between God and Satan. Eventually, though, it will come to an end. In Revelation 20, we read about Satan's final defeat: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev 20:10).

Where does the cross fit in this final victory for dominion? In Revelation 5 we are told that through His death on the cross, Christ became worthy to rule:

> "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
>
> "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will *reign upon the earth*…"
>
> "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain* to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing…To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory *and dominion* forever and ever" (Rev 5:9-10, 12, 13b NASB, emphasis added).

In the battle between God and Satan, the cross settles the question—who will reign, God or Satan? As Walvoord comments, "He is declared to have the right to rule, not simply in virtue of His deity, but in His victory over sin and death."[42]

But Christ will not rule alone. Believers will, too. As Grant R. Osborne says, "As royalty, they reign with God in his kingdom… There is a progression to this theme elsewhere in the book. In 11:15, 17 and 19:6 it is God and Christ who reign, and in 20:4, 6, and 22:5 it is the victorious saints who 'reign with him.'"[43]

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have demonstrated that a major theme for understanding the cross is the war between God and Satan for dominion over creation. The cross was and is the means for defeating Satan and for qualifying Jesus to rule. Jesus sets the stage so that He might soon fulfill the purpose for which man was originally created—to have dominion. Believers can fulfill that purpose, too, and rule with Christ, if we endure in our walk of faith (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26).

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[42] John F. Walvoord, *Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2011), 114.

[43] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 261.

BOOK REVIEWS

No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came from, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful. By Andrew David Naselli. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. 123 pp. Paper, $17.99.

I came to faith and grew via the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. It taught a higher-life view of the Christian life, with two types of Christians. Then I was educated at Dallas Theological Seminary, which for the most part also taught a higher-life view, a Chaferian view, of justification and sanctification.

Over the years I found weaknesses in some aspects of the Keswick or Chaferian views. Yet I very strongly agree with the underlying point that there are two (or three!) types of Christians. So when I saw this title, I was drawn to the book.

Naselli does a good job of pointing out some of the weaknesses of higher-life teaching. Unfortunately, two of the major problems he sees are actually its strengths.

The author is right to warn that some versions of higher-life teaching promote "a form of perfectionism" (pp. 48, 77-81), "emphasize passivity, not activity" (pp. 48, 81-83), "use superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification" (pp. 48, 91), "foster dependency on experiences at special holiness meetings" (pp. 48, 91-92), and "misinterpret personal experiences" (pp. 48, 95-97).

Unfortunately, Naselli goes too far. He rejects aspects of higher-life teaching that are foundational to both justification and sanctification.

Throughout the book, Naselli promotes Lordship Salvation (see esp. pp. 25-27). He finds the idea that there are some Christians who are spiritual and others who are carnal to be "the fundamental reason [why] higher life theology is harmful…It divides Christians into two distinct types. This is the lynchpin reason that higher life theology is wrong" (p. 49).

Naselli goes so far as to say that "All Christians are spiritual" (p. 55); "All Christians are Spirit-filled" (p. 62); and "All Christians abide in Christ" (p. 69). To be fair, he does qualify each of those assertions. He says, "All Christians are spiritual; *none are permanently carnal*" (p. 55, emphasis added); "All Christians are Spirit-filled *to various degrees*"

(p. 62, emphasis added); and "All Christians abide in Christ *to various degrees*" (p. 69, emphasis added).

Concerning all Christians being spiritual, Naselli adds, "Believers may *temporarily* live in a fleshly way, but believers by definition live in a characteristically righteous way" (p. 59, emphasis his). I don't see how he can square that statement with the believers in Corinth. They were not living "in a characteristically righteous way." And some of them died before they ever lived in such a way (1 Cor 11:30).

All of this is quite confusing. What evidence is there in Scripture that abiding in Christ and being Spirit-filled are a matter of degree? And how can one have assurance he is born again if assurance is found in our holiness and yet we may be fleshly for days, weeks, months, years or even decades?

Like other Lordship preachers, Naselli thinks that professing believers should have varying degrees of confidence that they are probably saved (pp. 88-90). His chart on degrees of assurance is something every *JOTGES* reader will want to see. He places people into different categories.

Category one are non-Christians who have either "strong evidence of unbelief" or "weak evidence of unbelief." By looking at their works, category one unbelievers can be very confident that they are unregenerate.

Category two are non-Christians who have evidence sufficient to show they are unregenerate, but not as much as the category one non-Christian. This category two non-Christian evidently has some reason to believe that he might be born again, but not enough reason to move him into category three.

Category three is a type of person who cannot be assured that he is a Christian or a non-Christian. This person has "mixed evidence of unbelief and faith." Naselli says, "They may profess to be Christian, but they should not have assurance that they are Christian because the evidence is mixed" (p. 89). That is quite an admission. That means that no one can have assurance because we all have mixed evidence regarding our works. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10).

Category four is the Christian with "weak evidence of faith." That is, he has some works, but not enough to give him the stronger assurance of category five. This is evidently someone who doubts his salvation and

has good reason to do so, but who has enough good works to make him think that he might have everlasting life.

The best a person can hope for is to be in category five and have "strong evidence of faith." This strong evidence is not certainty. So Naselli thinks that God wants His children to go through their entire lives concerned that they might spend eternity in the lake of fire. God does not want His children to be sure they are His. But most human parents, even atheist parents, want their children to know that they are secure in their love.

While Naselli finds it encouraging that some professing believers have "strong evidence of faith," there is always contrary evidence since we are imperfect. When a person gets into an argument with his spouse or kids and yells or misbehaves, does he not move from category four or five to category three (or two)? Only perfect people can be sure of their eternal destiny under Lordship Salvation.

As a side note, I found the title to be a bit ironic. Naselli says that the higher life teaching is *No Quick Fix*. I agree with him on that point. Yet Lordship Salvation teaching—Naselli's teaching—is also a quick fix. According to Naselli all who have everlasting life are transformed at the moment of the faith (or repentance and faith in his view). Though he specifically rejects the idea that there is some instantaneous victory in the Christian life *when we let go and let God*, he nonetheless sees essentially that, except that the instantaneous victory occurs at the moment of the new birth, not some time later. The "true Christian" is instantly spiritual, Spirit-filled, and abiding in Christ. For him to become temporarily carnal, he must backslide.

This is not a book to give to an unbeliever or a new believer. However, I highly recommend it for Free-Grace pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, and all who are well-grounded.

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Associate Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Doctrines of Grace in an Unexpected Place: Calvinistic Soteriology in Nineteenth-Century Brethren Thought. By Mark R. Stevenson. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017. 320 pp. Paper, $37.00.

This book explores the presence of Calvinistic soteriology among the Plymouth Brethren. *JOTGES* readers will be especially interested in Chap. 7, "'What Must I Do to be Saved?': Brethren Perspectives on Saving Faith, Repentance, and Assurance." People often ask about the historical roots of Free Grace Theology. Although that is not the subject of Stevenson's book, he nevertheless does an excellent job of summarizing the answer.

The chapter begins by tracing the history of some Calvinist theologians in Scotland who held to the idea that saving faith means simply believing that God's promises are true and that assurance is the essence of such faith. These figures included the Marrow men, John Glas, Robert Sandeman, John McLeod Campbell, and Thomas Erskine. This view of faith came to be known as Sandemanianism, and it caused a great deal of controversy among Calvinists, especially those of Puritan convictions. Stevenson defines the Sandemanian movement this way: "it is most remembered for its intellectualist view of faith. Accordingly, saving faith consists solely in mental assent to the facts of the gospel; neither the will nor the affections play any role. As Andrew Fuller summarized, Sandemanian faith consists of 'the bare belief of the bare truth'" (p. 210).

Next, Stevenson seeks to determine whether or not the Plymouth Brethren were Sandemanian in their view of faith. His discussion in the rest of the chapter shows three things.

First, Stevenson demonstrates that the Plymouth Brethren were commonly thought to teach a Sandemanian view of faith. Critics were especially alarmed that Brethren evangelists rejected the necessity of repentance to be born again.

Second, Stevenson shows this criticism was mostly unwarranted. The best known Plymouth Brethren writers—men like Darby, Macintosh, and Kelly—explicitly rejected the Sandemanian view of faith. "Darby rejected Sandemanianism by name" (p. 223). He quotes Darby as saying, "If there is merely a mental conclusion…or assent to a proposition, it is worthless" (p. 223). He quotes C. E. Stuart as arguing, "At all

times after the fall, and under all dispensations, repentance on the part of fallen man was needful" (p. 230). For William Kelly, "there is no true faith without repentance. Faith (so-called) without self-judgment is nothing more than the mere assent of the natural mind, not a Spirit-formed faith in the heart" (p. 232). According to F. W. Grant, "We all believe that a fruitless faith is no faith" (p. 236). And one James Campbell even went so far as to make this complaint: "But there is a more dangerous thing still—we read John 3:16 and make them believe because they believe it they are saved" (p. 238). These quotes will come as a shock to many readers of this journal who may have assumed the Brethren were essentially Free Grace in their understanding of the one condition of eternal salvation.

Third, Stevenson shows the critics were not wholly mistaken, that some Brethren were Sandemanian. These were mostly minor figures and popular evangelists. For example, Alexander Marshall—an Arminian Plymouth Brethren—seems to have been one. Here is a good quote from him: "Men may speak about a 'living faith' and a 'dead faith,' and a 'saving faith' and an 'intellectual faith,' but Scripture speaks of *believing* what God says. Faith in man and faith in God are the same exercises of mind; the difference is not in the faith, but *in the person* on whom the faith terminates" (pp. 241-42).

Here is Stevenson's summary of his findings: "while some Brethren—particularly (some) evangelists influenced by revivals and zealous for conversions—advanced something akin to Sandemanian faith and repentance, many of the most respected Brethren teachers (and some important evangelists too) strongly rejected that position" (p. 243).

This book is important for the Free Grace movement because it provides a wealth of footnotes for further research and effectively challenges the assumption that the majority of Plymouth Brethren were implicitly Free Grace. While it is not the final word on this subject, it raises important questions and is an important resource for further research. Recommended.

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Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views. By Chad O. Brand, Tom Pratt, Jr., Robert L. Reymond, Robert L. Saucy, and Robert Thomas. Edited by Chad O. Brand. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2015. Vii + 317 pp. Paper, $29.99.

As Charles Ryrie explained in his classic work on Dispensationalism, the first aspect of the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism is the distinction between Israel and the Church. This distinction is born out of a literal interpretation of Scripture and reflects an understanding that the underlying purpose of God in the world is the manifestation of His glory. The degree to which the distinction between Israel and the Church is consistently maintained determines the degree to which one is a Dispensationalist.

Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views includes the following four views of Israel and the Church: the late Robert Reymond (1932-2013) presents the traditional Covenantal view; Robert Thomas presents the traditional Dispensational view; Robert Saucy presents the Progressive Dispensational view; and Chad Brand and Tom Pratt present the Progressive Covenantal view.

Regarding the contributors, Thomas and Saucy are well known to those in Dispensationalist circles. Reymond (1932-2013) was professor emeritus of theology at Knox Theological Seminary. Brand has been a pastor and has taught theology and church history at three Baptist colleges and seminaries. Pratt is president of Eagle Rock Ministries and is a Bible teacher, preacher, and freelance writer.

The format of the book is typical of this genre. Each contributor presents the case for his view (50-54 pages each), followed by responses from the other contributors (averaging about six pages each). The book begins with a fair and balanced 15-page introduction by one of the contributors, Chad Brand. The book is enhanced by about 500 footnotes. There is scarcely a page without one, including the response sections. The book concludes with subject, name, and Scripture indexes.

Two questions immediately come to mind when reviewing a book of this nature: (1) Are the four views under consideration adequately presented in a book of this size, and (2) Does the author of the traditional Dispensationalist view do a good job of presenting Dispensationalism and responding to the other three views? Having carefully read the whole book, with a special focus on not only the presentation of traditional

Dispensationalism by Thomas, but also the criticisms of it by Reymond, Saucy, and Brand/Pratt and Thomas's responses to them, I can say unequivocally that both questions can be answered in the affirmative.

It is quite evident in his presentation of the traditional covenantal view that Reymond despises Dispensationalism. Here he castigates Dispensationalism almost as much as he promotes Covenant Theology. He gladly accepts "replacement theology" because "Jesus himself enunciated it" (p. 49). The land promises to ethnic Israel "are to be viewed in terms of shadow, type, and prophecy in contrast to the reality, substance, and fulfillment of which the NT speaks" because "it is we Christians as members of Christ's messianic kingdom who are real heirs to the land promises of Holy Scripture, but in their *fulfilled* paradisiacal character" (p. 36). His authority for his covenant theology is the Westminster Confession of Faith (pp. 20-22, 25). Although Reymond mentions the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (p. 24) and the Dallas Theological Seminary doctrinal statement (pp. 23, 24, 31, 32), the only Dispensationalists he refers to are Charismatic showmen like John Hagee, Kenneth Copeland, and Pat Robertson (p. 35). Certainly, he could have found better representatives of Dispensationalism. The three replies to Reymond each focus on a different aspect of his argument for Covenant Theology. In one particular, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views* is three views against one because of Reymond's acceptance of, and the other contributors' rejection of, replacement theology, infant baptism, and amillennialism.

Thomas's presentation of traditional Dispensationalism is unique as compared with the standard works on Dispensationalism. He divides his presentation into three parts: Israel in the OT, Israel in the NT, and Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse. In the first part of his presentation, Thomas introduces the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and new covenants and then focuses on the land promise to Israel in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Prophets. In the second part, Thomas maintains that the NT never reverses or spiritualizes the OT land promise. He discusses ten "occasions when Jesus might have canceled God's promises to Abraham but did not" (p. 95) and six "occasions when the Apostles might have canceled God's promises to Abraham but did not" (p. 109). In his third part, Thomas examines the book of Revelation as it relates to the Abrahamic (including the Palestinian), Davidic, and new covenants, using the commentaries on Revelation by Greg Beale,

David Aune, and Grant Osborne to contrast their eclectic hermeneutical approaches with his literal hermeneutical principles. In his response to Thomas, Reymond rehashes much of what he writes in his presentation of the traditional covenantal view and fills two pages with extended quotes from Carl F. H. Henry. Naturally, Saucy is "in general agreement with the basic thesis of Thomas's essay" (p. 143) and Brand/Pratt "have several major concerns about his exposition" (p. 149).

Because he doesn't believe that the Church is the true, the new, or spiritual Israel, or has replaced Israel, there is much in Saucy's presentation of the progressive Dispensational view that is valuable. However, as Thomas points out in his reply to Saucy: "He derived some of his hermeneutical principles from systems other than Dispensationalism" (p. 218). The relatively new progressive covenantal view presented by Brand/Pratt, because it derives partially from progressive Dispensationalism and partly from covenant theology, contains errors from both systems. In his reply to the Brand/Pratt perspective, Thomas (who says he was "unfamiliar" with the term "progressive covenantalism" until reading their essay [p. 286]) explains how it has an unfortunate understanding of Dispensationalism, a neglect of grammatical-historical principles of interpretation, and a distortion of the land promises to Abraham. It is, as I pointed out in a review of a book on this perspective (*Kingdom through Covenant*, by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum) merely a baptized Covenant Theology.

Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views is an important book that I highly recommend. It gathers into one place a unique presentation of traditional Dispensationalism, viewpoints on Israel and the Church that oppose it and each other, and a Dispensationalist response to those contrary viewpoints. Seasoned Dispensationalists will sharpen their skills by reading and attempting to critique on the fly the covenantal, progressive Dispensational, and progressive covenantal views. This book belongs on the bookshelf of every Dispensationalist.

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Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King. By Matthew W. Bates. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 234 pp. Paper, $24.99.

Matthew Bates received his Ph.D. from a Catholic school (Notre Dame), and he teaches at a Catholic school (Quincy University). But Bates says, "I am a Protestant" (p. 6), though he does not mention his affiliation. He says that in the past he has worshipped with "nondenominational, Baptist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, and Evangelical Free Churches" (p. 6). He indicates that he hopes "this book will ultimately contribute to the healing of that long-festering wound between Catholics and Protestants" (p. 6). He later suggests that "once it is agreed that salvation is by allegiance alone," Catholics and Protestants may well be reconciled (p. 9). Certainly, his theology is consistent with that of Roman Catholicism and with that of many Protestants as well, although most Protestants at least *affirm* justification by faith alone. Bates rejects justification by faith alone.

For years I have suggested that Lordship Salvation teaches that faith in the Bible is always being persuaded of the truth of something, *except when the issue is salvation from eternal condemnation*. Of course, that makes no sense. Why in Scripture would faith always be persuasion except when it comes to justification/regeneration?

Bates is the first author I've seen who openly states what I've been saying Lordship Salvation teaches. Here is what he says in the introduction:

> With regard to eternal salvation, rather than speaking of belief, trust, or faith in Jesus, we should speak instead of fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus the king…Allegiance is the best macro-term available to us that can describe what God requires from us for eternal salvation…But we do not need to avoid the words "faith" and "belief" entirely. For example, they do carry the proper meaning in English for *pistis* with regard to confidence in Jesus's [sic] healing power and control over nature; moreover, these terms are suitable when *pistis* is directed primarily toward facts that we are called mentally to affirm. Our Christian discourse need not shift in these contexts *but only with regard to eternal salvation* (p. 5, emphasis added).

So belief in the deity of Christ is persuasion. So is belief in the Trinity, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and that He is coming again. Indeed, every time you see the words *belief* or *faith* in the Bible the issue is persuasion, *except* in the most important contexts. In any place which speaks of justification or regeneration by faith alone, the issue is not persuasion, but allegiance, commitment, following, obeying, and serving.

Bates is suggesting that verses like John 3:16 have long been misunderstood. The issue is not "whoever believes in Him," but *whoever obeys Him* (p. 96). Similarly, Bates would have us understand that faith in Eph 2:8, "By grace you have been saved through faith," means *By grace you have been saved through continuing to show loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ* (pp. 3-5).

Note this doublespeak statement in which Bates claimed that Paul taught works salvation and opposed work salvation:

> So, in sum, for Paul, salvation requires the performance of concrete works (deeds) in loyal submission to Jesus as the king…but Paul stridently opposes the idea that good works can contribute to our salvation when performed as part of a system of rule keeping apart from the more fundamental allegiance to King Jesus (p. 121).

See also the section entitled, "Discipleship Is Salvation" (pp. 205-213).

Bates rejects Thomas Schreiner's view that works are not the basis of kingdom entrance, but they are the necessary evidence that one will enter (p. 109). Instead, Bates suggests that when Paul rejects works salvation in Eph 2:8-9, he was rejecting works unrelated to allegiance as king. But since according to Bates *pistis* is allegiance to Jesus, and allegiance to Jesus is works, thus "*Pistis* is not the polar opposite of works; rather *pistis* as ongoing allegiance is the fundamental framework into which works must fit as part of our salvation" (p. 109). Note the words "ongoing allegiance." Bates believes that *a life of good works* is necessary to gain "final salvation."

Schreiner has reviewed Bates's book at The Gospel Coalition website. Schreiner initially praises the thesis of Bates. He appears to be in essential agreement, saying, "*works clearly are essential for the reception of eternal life*" (italics his).

However, Schreiner feels that Bates has gone too far: "Despite the advantages of the word 'allegiance,' though, I still believe 'trust' or 'faith' is better since 'allegiance' puts the emphasis squarely on the human

subject—on what we do, on our commitment." He goes on, "We receive the gift of righteousness with an empty hand, and this conception is absent when we put 'allegiance' in place of 'faith.'"

Bates has a fairly long defense of faith as allegiance (pp. 77-100). However, it is unconvincing. He gets off to a bad start with Protestants when he cites 3 Maccabees 5:31 as proof that *pistis* in the NT refers to allegiance (p. 79). Why cite an Apocryphal book to prove what the NT teaches?

As part of this discussion, Bates makes the puzzling claim that while *pistis* is not intellectual assent, "believing certain facts is required as a minimal starting point" (p. 93). He says such belief "is a *necessary*, but not *sufficient*, condition for salvation" (p. 93, emphasis his).

What is "the bare minimum of facts to which one must cognitively agree" (p. 93)? Bates has a rather long and surprising list. One must believe that "Jesus the king 1) preexisted with the Father, 2) took on human flesh, fulfilling God's promises to David, 3) died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4) was buried, 5) was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 6) appeared to many, 7) *is seated at the right hand of God as Lord*, and 8) will come again as judge" (p. 93). This same 8-essentials list appears and is explained on pp. 52-75 and is mentioned again on pp. 196-197.

Wow. That is a big list. A person must believe in Jesus' eternality as part of the *intellectual assent requirements*. He must believe that God promised David that the Messiah would be God in the flesh. He must believe in Jesus' burial and His post-resurrection appearances to many. And one must believe that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God as Lord.

How can Bates have it both ways? How can saving *pistis* be intellectual assent and not be intellectual assent? It is one or the other. It cannot be both. He repeatedly argues that it is not intellectual assent. Then as part of the "Dimensions of Allegiance" (pp. 92-100), he says that *pistis* is intellectual assent to certain truths.

It should be noted that not a single translation ever renders *pistis* as *allegiance*. In the NKJV approximately 237 times in the New Testament it is translated as *faith*. In less than ten verses is it translated variously as *faithfulness* (twice, Rom 3:3; Gal 5:22), *believe* (once, Heb 10:39), *fidelity* (once, Titus 2:10), and *assurance* (once, Acts 17:31). The NIV translates *pistis* as something other than faith ten times, with four of the ten being

synonyms for faith (faithfulness, four times; believers, twice; believe, twice; trusted, once; and proof, once). I found nearly identical results for the RSV, ESV, HCSB, NASB, and LEB.

Though the noun *pistis* does not occur in John's Gospel, Bates finds it there. For example, he paraphrases John 3:16 in this way, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever *gives pistis* unto him should not perish, but have eternal life" (p. 96). Similarly, he paraphrases John 3:36 as, "Whoever *has pistis* in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (p. 96).

In both cases, the Greek has the verb, *pisteuō*. Indeed, the verb *pisteuō* occurs a whopping 100 times in John's Gospel alone. That is why it is often called *the Gospel of belief.* (No one calls it "The Gospel of Allegiance.") Strangely, in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* we do not find a discussion of *pisteuō*, other than passing references to it (pp. 37-38 note 16, 97, 103). Bates explains why:

> In Greek, the noun *pistis* has the same root as the verb *pisteuō* (traditionally, "I believe, have faith, trust"). But unfortunately, there is no verb directly associated with "allegiance" in English, making my thesis more cumbersome to discuss in English than in Greek. So in this study, when appropriate, the verb *pisteuō* has been rendered "I give *pistis*" or "I give allegiance" (and the like) as a way of foregrounding *pistis* and the allegiance concept (pp. 37-38, note 16).

I do not find "I give *pistis*" to be less cumbersome than "I obey," "I am devoted to," "I loyally follow," or "I submit to." Bates understands "whoever believes" to mean "whoever obeys." Why hide that by saying, "whoever gives *pistis*"?

Bates gives almost no consideration to *pisteuō* in John's Gospel, the only evangelistic book in the Bible.

In Scripture, believing is always being persuaded that something is true. When Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26), was He asking her about her allegiance to Him? Clearly not. Interestingly, Bates never discusses John 11:26 (or 11:25-27 or anything in John 11). Nor is John 5:24 discussed in the book. Nor Acts 16:30-31. Nor Eph 2:9. Nor Rev 22:17. John 3:16 gets only a passing comment (p. 230). In fact, very little exegesis is done in this book.

According to Bates, "final salvation" (an expression he uses often; see pp. 6, 7, 8, 9, 91, 100, 105, 110, 112, 140, 185, 191, 204, 205, 207, 213) is conditioned upon our continued allegiance. He praises the Catholic view that "a person's initial justification does indeed stand at the fountainhead of a lifelong process of becoming increasingly righteous" (p. 185). He says that:

> All too often Protestants have treated these ["initial righteousness" and "subsequently enjoyed righteousness (…sanctification)]" as separate, self-contained categories, with the righteousness of "justification" alone deemed relevant for an individual's final salvation, and the righteousness of "sanctification" regarded as merely the inevitable outworking of a prior justification" (pp. 185-86).

He summarizes, "So Trent, in stressing the necessity of perseverance in good works, offers helpful directives that Protestants should consider, even if some of its specific formulations are problematic" (pp. 186-87). Bates fails to point out that the Catholic Council of Trent anathematized anyone who says that justification is by faith alone.

Bates both denies eternal security and to some degree dodges the question (pp. 190-91, 204). The following statement is quite strongly against it:

> As nearly all Christians agree, perseverance in allegiance is required. If the union were to be severed by an unrepentant cessation of *pistis* (allegiance to Jesus as Messiah-king), then the continuing presence of the union-securing and fruit-producing Spirit would be decisively ruptured; *the born-again person would experience spiritual death. The individual would no longer be justified, righteous, or innocent before God; eternal life would no longer be a present possession* (p. 190, emphasis added).

After that quote, Bates indicates that "Christian traditions disagree about whether or not such a severance is possible." That is confusing. If nearly all Christians agree, how could many disagree? Bates goes on to say that though not all agree (evidently with him) that salvation can be lost, he repeats, "Christian theologians are nearly unanimous: it is necessary for an individual to persevere in *pistis* through the course of her or his lifetime in order to attain final salvation" (pp. 190-91). Scripture

teaches that salvation was final the very moment a person believes in Jesus for it (John 4:10-14; 5:24; 11:25-27; Eph 2:8-9).

Bates honestly says, "Allegiance cannot be quantified, but Scripture does give us general measures to help us weigh whether our imperfect allegiance is genuine" (p. 127). This is the same sort of reply that one hears from Lordship Salvation authors all the time. Obviously with such a view, assurance of one's eternal destiny is impossible before death (see also pp. 27-29, 203). Of course, if we must persevere in righteousness to get "final salvation," then even if a person had "general" evidence that his allegiance currently was genuine, he could not be sure he would persevere in that allegiance. This is a double whammy of non-assurance. You can't be sure you have enough allegiance right now. And you can't be sure you will persevere in the allegiance necessary to get "final salvation." There can be no assurance before death for those who follow Bates.

There seems to be some momentum in scholarly circles for the view that Jesus and His Apostles taught works salvation. First, there were books by Paul A. Rainbow (*The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification*) and Alan P. Stanley (*Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?*). Now this work by Matthew Bates.

One has to turn the teachings of the Lord and His Apostles upside down to come up with works salvation.

I do not recommend this book.

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What Is Faith? By R. C. Sproul. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2010. 67 pp. Paper, $2.50.

This booklet is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters are good. The last two are not.

In Chap. 1, "A Hopeful Vision," Sproul takes Hebrews 11 as his main text. He emphasizes that the promises of God are the objects of our faith. The man of faith believes: "Even though God's promises tarry, they are sure to come to pass, and the righteous person in God's sight is the person who lives by faith" (p. 12).

In Chap. 2, "Examples of Faith," Sproul describes how faith operated in the lives of some OT saints. Again, he emphasizes believing the promises of God for salvation (although in this quote he uses unfortunate synonyms for *believing*): "When a person embraces the promises of God that are found in Christ, that person is instantly justified. Even so Abraham was counted (or reckoned) righteous by God because he trusted the promise of God" (p. 27).

Sproul is also clear that the object of Abraham's faith was the future Redeemer: "Abraham not only looked forward to the promise of land, he looked forward to the promise of the Redeemer, which promise was fulfilled in the person of Christ" (p. 29). Consequently, Abraham was saved the same way we are: "people in the OT were redeemed in exactly the same way as people are redeemed today. There was not one way of salvation in Israel and another way in the new covenant (Christian) community. Justification is by faith now; justification was by faith back then...His faith was in the promise; our faith is in the fulfillment of that promise. But the way of salvation was the same for Abraham as it is for us today" (p. 30). The content of that promise was "the coming Messiah, whose blood would take away sin" (p. 30).

Chapter 3, "A Gift from God," is poor. Sproul defends the Calvinistic doctrines that regeneration precedes faith and that God elects who will be regenerated. But in John 4:10-15, Jesus makes clear you must believe to be regenerated, not the other way around: "but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." If you believe, then you get eternal life ("shall never thirst"); you do not get eternal life to believe. Jesus makes the same point in John 6:35.

Chapter 4, "Strengthened by the Word," undermines the possibility of assurance. Sproul defends the Calvinistic doctrines of election and predestination (for a more Biblical view, see my book, *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life*). Although Sproul says you can be sure you are elect (p. 60), he uses Wesley's "strangely warmed" heart as an example of how that is possible (p. 60). That approach undermines assurance in two ways. First, it makes assurance based on figuring out whether or not you are elect, instead of simply believing the promises of God. Second, it makes assurance based on a mystical experience instead of the promises of God. But how do you know if your mystical experience is genuine? Mormons have strangely

warmed hearts, too. Does that mean Mormons are saved? Of course not. It is odd that Sproul would base assurance on having a mystical experience when he had so many helpful things to say about being certain of God's promises. Those promises are the only grounds for our assurance. If whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, and you believe, then what are you certain you have? Eternal life. Strangely warmed hearts are no proof at all.

Interestingly, although Sproul claims you can be sure you are elect, he quotes Jonathan Edwards as teaching his congregation: "You don't know whether you're elect or not elect" (p. 64). The fact that Sproul says you *can* be sure and then quotes Edwards as saying that you *cannot* be sure demonstrates the divide in Calvinism over the possibility and basis of assurance.

In this booklet, Sproul makes some good comments about the object of faith (i.e., the promises of God), and the one condition of salvation in both the OT and the NT. However, since he undermines the possibility of assurance, I can recommend it only with caution.

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Free Grace Theology on Trial: A Refutation of "Historical Protestant" Soteriology. By Anthony B. Badger. NP: np, 2017. 370 pp. Paper, $24.95.

This is not designed to be a general work covering global aspects of the Free Grace vs. Calvinism vs. Arminianism theological debate. If one is seeking that kind of work, I highly recommend Dr. Badger's other recent text, *Confronting Calvinism*. In this book, Badger presents "a careful, point-for-point defense against the five charges of Wayne Grudem in his book (*"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways it Diminishes the Gospel*) and D.A. Carson's three allegations of fallacious hermeneutics leveled against the Free Grace method of interpretation in his book (*Exegetical Fallacies*)."

Free Grace Theology on Trial is two works in one. Part One covers the answers to Grudem's five charges. Part Two counters Carson's three attacks on certain Free Grace positions, primarily as expressed by Zane Hodges in his 1981 edition of *The Gospel Under Siege.*

To introduce the book, Badger presents a very brief recounting of a long forgotten historical event—the trial of Anne Hutchinson by the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony (Nov. 7, 1637). The analogy is profound and unmistakable. I am presently struck by how much one might learn from this fragment of history (that goes way beyond its current application) to present-day sociological and political occurrences.

After an important preface that notes the author's motivations there are six detailed chapters, five covering each one of Grudem's key arguments and one his overall conclusion. Each chapter contains a brief summary of the argument and the Free Grace response, followed by introductory remarks, and then a point by point deconstruction of each argument. They are most readable but do require attentiveness to detail.

Part 2 is much shorter (43 pp.) and covers three technical, logical allegations presented by Carson in his text *Exegetical Fallacies* (1984), 1996) that until now do not appear to have been formally refuted in print. These require more than a rudimentary understanding of formal logic. Fortunately, Dr. Badger has provided precise analysis and several accompanying illustrations such that the lay reader can understand the points. It does require an attentive read and will clearly serve as a reference volume in one's library. The first discussion could be especially useful as "real world" supplementary material to anyone taking a course in logic.

The book ends with nine appendices covering several items of Free Grace interest, including four doctrinal statements, a discussion on carnal Christians, the "Present Tense Solution" as applied to 1 John 2:27 ff., the Pothole in the Romans Road and Romans 9-11, a simple hermeneutical guide, and the tenses of salvation. A bibliography, Scripture index, and author information round out the book.

The defenses/arguments presented in *Free Grace Theology on Trial* are devastating to those who desire to refute the Free Grace position, or relegate its adherents to some deviate offshoot of Protestant theology. It is stunning to see the logical errors and contradictory statements coming from a person of Grudem's stature and reputation. More than once he contradicts himself within the same paragraph of his text!

Dr. Carson fares no better. A detailed dissection of his supposed fallacies are often found to be either misunderstandings or deliberate misrepresentations of Free Grace positions or failures in his logical arguments.

Several times it is clearly shown that Carson employs the same logical errors he accuses Free Grace advocates of supposedly using.

In summary, *Free Grace Theology on Trial* provides a Biblically based very credible, logical defense of the Free Grace position against specific targeted attacks by two of the best known luminaries of the Reformed persuasion. Their scholarship is found to be wanting in this case, perhaps colored by years of indoctrination into a "system" rather than openness to the Biblical text. One wonders if anything has changed since 1637. I highly recommend this book, and urge evangelicals of all positions (Free Grace, Reformed, or Arminian) to secure a copy.

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