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“THE DAY” IS THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

BOB WILKIN

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

Several years ago at a Pre-Trib Study Group Conference I heard Dr. Richard Mayhue speak on *the day of the Lord*. He suggested that the day of the Lord has been (in the OT) and will be (in the Tribulation) a time of judgment followed by a time of blessing for Israel.

As an aside, Dr. Mayhue suggested that there are similar expressions using the words *day* and *Lord* that do not carry that meaning. He said that the expressions *the day of the Lord Jesus* and *the day of Christ* always refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Bema, and never to the Tribulation.

This study will examine those expressions and will show that they indeed refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will also show that even the single word *day* (*hēmera* in Greek) often refers to the Bema.

For years I missed the point of all these texts because I didn't understand these important truths. My thesis is that we will miss what the Lord is telling us in these various passages if we fail to recognize that the day of the Lord Jesus is His Judgment Seat.

II. THE DAY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE DAY OF THE LORD JESUS

Let's begin by looking at two closely related expressions, the day of the Lord Jesus and the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are three such passages in the NT.

A. FIRST CORINTHIANS 1:8

Paul's prayer for the believers in Corinth was that they "may be blameless *in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (emphasis added). This is typically understood by commentators as a desire that they prove

to be true believers who ultimately make it into the kingdom.¹ Morris writes, “Christ, who has enriched the Corinthians and given them grace and every good gift, is their guarantee that right through until the end time nothing will be lacking in them... They may be assured that they will be *blameless* in that day.”²

Such an interpretation is, of course, inconsistent with the free gift of eternal life. Believers need not do anything in order to enter the kingdom. Even believers who fail to persevere in faith or good works are guaranteed to spend eternity with the Lord Jesus. While not all believers will be blameless on that day, all believers will enter the kingdom.

Recognition that *Paul is talking about being blameless at the Judgment Seat of Christ* allows this passage to make perfect sense. When this passage is linked to other texts in First and Second Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 3:13; 5:5; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 1:14; 5:9-10), the full picture emerges.

B. FIRST CORINTHIANS 5:5.

When dealing with an immoral man in the church in Corinth, Paul instructs the church to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be saved *in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (emphasis added).³ The salvation here is normally understood as kingdom entrance.⁴ Morris writes, “That this means saved in the fullest sense⁵ is made clear by the addition, *on the day of the Lord*.⁶ At the final day of judgment⁷ he expects to see the disciplined offender among the Lord’s

¹ See, for example, Charles Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: The James Family Christian Publishers, 1887, reprint edition, n.d.), 10.

² Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 38.

³ Emphasis added. The majority of NT manuscripts include *Jesus* here. However, the Critical Text, from which we get translations like the NASB and the NIV, exclude it. In my opinion this is another example of where the Majority Text makes a big difference in interpretation over the Critical Text.

⁴ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 99-100.

⁵ By this he clearly means kingdom entrance, escaping eternal condemnation, and all that attends such salvation.

⁶ Note that Morris is commenting on the Critical Text reading and this is having an impact on his interpretation as well.

⁷ *Final judgment* is a term many commentators use to refer to a general judgment in which all people of all time, believers and unbelievers, will be

people.”⁸ Thus most think that Paul is saying that an erring Christian must have his flesh destroyed by God’s temporal judgment in order for him to make it into the kingdom.

What about the believer who does not respond properly to church discipline? In this way of viewing the passage, he ends up in the lake of fire! That is, he ends up not being eternally saved.

That view doesn’t make sense. If a person is eternally secure, and all believers are, then why would they need their flesh destroyed in order for them to stay eternally secure? And since Paul made it clear in First Corinthians that born again people sometimes die under God’s discipline (1 Cor 11:30),⁹ failure to respond properly to God’s discipline does not lead to the loss of eternal life.

The key to understanding this verse is recognizing that the Judgment Seat of Christ, a place for the evaluation of the works of believers, is under view. The salvation here is Bema-related. Paul is speaking of *the health* of this man’s spirit,¹⁰ his *spiritual wellness* at the Bema. Paul’s desire is for the church to exercise church discipline on this man with the result that his immorality is destroyed and that he might be spiritually healthy at the Bema.

judged to determine their eternal destiny. Typically people who use this expression to not distinguish between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. Of course, the Lord Himself indicated that the believer “shall not come into judgment” concerning his eternal destiny (John 5:24). And a careful reading of Rev 20:11-15 shows that even that judgment is not for the purpose of determining the eternal destiny of the lost. The purpose of that judgment is two-fold: to determine the degree of suffering unbelievers will experience forever based on an evaluation of their works (as found in the books, plural), and to announce who will be cast into the lake of fire (anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life).

⁸ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 86, italics his.

⁹ Note that Paul says that “some sleep.” When used figuratively in the NT, sleep (*koimaomai*) refers exclusively to the death of believers (cf. Matt 27:52; John 11:11-12; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13-15; and 2 Pet 3:4). It never is used to refer to the death of an unbeliever.

¹⁰ The verb to save (*sōzein*) is often used in the NT to refer to health. See, for example, Matt 9:21-22; Luke 8:36; Acts 4:9; 14:9; Jas 5:15. Paul is clearly not speaking of the health of the body here, but of the health of the spirit (see also 1 Cor 3:15 and 15:2).

C. SECOND CORINTHIANS 1:14

Paul envisions a mutual boast. Paul says that he and his coworkers “are your boast as you also are ours, *in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (emphasis added). What would this mean if one views this as a reference not to the Bema, but to the Tribulation? Commentators vaguely speak of this *day of the Lord Jesus* as the time when “every person’s life and work will be subject to divine scrutiny.”¹¹

The ambiguity vanishes when one makes it clear that Paul is speaking of the Judgment Seat of Christ, the time when *believers* will be subject to the scrutiny of the Lord Jesus to determine *their eternal rewards*. Once the issue of one’s eternal destiny is removed, passages such as this one open up like a flower in the sun.

III. THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE DAY OF CHRIST

There are four references in the NT to the day of Christ or the day of the Jesus Christ.

A. PHILIPPIANS 1:6

Of what future event was Paul speaking when he said he was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it *until the day of Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added)?

This verse is actually a problem passage for the Free Grace position because two things are misunderstood in it, the *good work* and the *day of Jesus Christ*.

Most commentators see the good work that God had begun in the Philippians as good works which they did.¹² Thus this verse is often cited as a proof text for the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the

¹¹ Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 14. See also, for example, Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1859, reprinted in 1980), 15-16.

¹² For an additional example beside John MacArthur, see Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 62-64. Martin sees “the good work” as including the financial participation of the Philippians in Paul’s ministry, but ultimately including their perseverance in good works of all types until they go to be with the Lord. He is extremely vague as to what “the day of Jesus Christ” refers.

Saints. For example, in his 1993 book, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*,¹³ John MacArthur cites Phil 1:6 six times, making it one of the most cited verses in that work.¹⁴ He sees this verse as promising that one’s faith and good works continue to the end of one’s life: “Real faith cannot be defective or short-lived but endures forever (Phil 1:6; cf. Heb 11).”¹⁵ After quoting Phil 1:6 he says, “‘Grace’ that does not affect one’s behavior is not the grace of God.”¹⁶ In a rather remarkable statement for a Calvinist, he says, “God does not declare someone righteous whom He does not also make righteous. Having begun the process [of making one righteous], He will continue it to ultimate glorification (Rom 8:29-30; cf. Phil 1:6).”¹⁷

As John Hart has well demonstrated in a two-part *JOTGES* article, the good work is specifically the financial participation of the Philippians in Paul’s ministry and the day in view is the Bema.¹⁸

Philippians 1:6 is no problem text at all if we recognize that “the day of Jesus Christ” is the Judgment Seat of Christ. That verse is a straightforward statement of Paul’s belief that the gifts of the Philippians to his ministry will have ongoing fruit until the Bema. Clearly implicit is the point made explicitly by Paul in Phil 4:17, that the Philippians at the Bema will be highly rewarded for their support of Paul.

B. PHILIPPIANS 1:10

A few verses later, Paul prays that their “love may abound still more and more...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you

¹³ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 267. He cites Phil 1:6 on pages 24, 33, 71, 110, 185, 192. According to the Scripture index no other passage is cited more than six times. Indeed, only 4 others passages are cited six times: Acts 17:30; Rom 8:30; Gal 2:16; and Eph 2:10. Of the approximately 350 passages listed in the Scripture index, most are only cited once and only a handful receive more than three citations.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁸ John F. Hart, “Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification?” *JOTGES* (Spring and Autumn 1996). Hart doesn’t clearly identify the day of Jesus Christ as the Bema until the conclusion of Part 2 (p. 59) where he says, “Their good work would result in a full reward at the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 John 8).” Earlier in the article he refers to that day simply as “the parousia.”

may be sincere and without offense *till the day of Christ*" (emphasis added). Commentators once more see this as a reference to a general final judgment.¹⁹ However, Paul is again, as in v 6, expressing his desire that the Philippian believers persevere in good works *till the Bema* so that they would have a good experience in that judgment.

C. PHILIPPIANS 2:16

The apostle urges his readers to be "holding fast the word of life, so *that I may rejoice in the day of Christ* that I have not run in vain or labored in vain" (emphasis added). Here the emphasis is on Paul's experience at the Bema. Only if those who disciplined hold fast to the word of life will he receive maximum reward for the work he did among them. Paul is clearly not concerned about his eternal destiny here.²⁰ He is concerned about his eternal reward.

D. SECOND THESSALONIANS 2:2

The Majority Text reading here is *the day of Christ*, as opposed to the Critical Text reading, *the day of the Lord*. While the difference this makes in interpretation in this context is not as great as in the others we have considered, it does matter. If the Bema had already occurred and these believers had missed it, then that would mean that they would not be rewarded for their labors. In Paul's theology that would be a tragedy. Our labors for the Lord will be rewarded at the Bema.

Also notice that v 1 concerns "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *and our gathering together to Him*" (emphasis added). When will church-age believers be gathered together to the Lord Jesus? The Rapture is surely in view. And the Bema is closely linked to the Rapture.²¹

¹⁹ For example, see Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 69. He speaks of being "pure and blameless in preparation for the day of eschatological testing (Rom. 2:16)."

²⁰ Martin, *Philippians*, 122, sees Paul of speaking here of "the final day of reckoning." While he doesn't identify this as the Bema, or as for believers only, he does indicate that Paul was concerned "that his work may pass the test of the day of Christ and be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:13-14)."

²¹ Second Thessalonians does not have any explicit references to the Bema except this one. However, see 3:13, "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good." This is almost identical to Gal 6:9, a Bema passage (though the word is not used there or elsewhere in Galatians).

IV. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

1 JOHN 4:17

There is also a use of the word *day* that is not specifically modified by Christ, Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, or Lord Jesus Christ. It is the expression *the day of judgment* (*tē hēmera tēs kriseōs*).

This expression occurs 7 times in the NT.

It is used four times in Matthew and twice in Peter, where it always refers to the Great White Throne Judgment (Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7).

The lone use of this expression by John in 1 John 4:17 refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Believers “may have boldness in *the day of judgment*” (emphasis added) if we are in this world as He is; that is, if we are loving people. However, most commentators understand this *day of judgment* as a reference to a generic final judgment in which the eternal destiny of people is determined.²²

Hodges comments on this expression are quite helpful:

There is no such thing as a judgment for the saved to determine their destiny in heaven or hell, since that is already settled (cf. John 5:24; Romans 8:31-34). But Christians will give an accounting of their Christian lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

It is clear, however, that the Judgment Seat of Christ should not be thought of as simply some kind of great awards celebration. After speaking of the fact that “we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10), Paul goes on to say, “Knowing, therefore, *the terror* [Greek: *phobos*, fear] of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11, italics added). In another place, Paul states that our works “will be revealed by fire,” and that “the fire will test each one’s

²² Interestingly, most commentators assume that everyone understands what this expression means. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 222-25; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John: Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 51 (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 258 (note: Smalley does devote a paragraph to discuss the day of judgment; however, the paragraph is designed to reject Bultmann’s suggestion that these words were the words of a redactor and not of John); John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, 1988), 171-73.

work, of what sort it is.” The possibility is held out that “if anyone’s work is burned [Greek = burned *up*], he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:13, 15). And John himself, standing in the presence of the Lord Jesus and seeing Him as God’s appointed Judge, “fell at His feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17).

In light of these Scriptures, the Judgment Seat of Christ must be viewed as utterly solemn and potentially productive of fear. Even a transformed believer, who knows he is in no danger of hell, will be capable of feeling the fear which the presence of God always produces in those with holy sensibilities. We forget the awesomeness and majesty of Jesus Christ our Lord if we think otherwise.²³

V. THE DAY OR THAT DAY

The word *hēmera* is used a lot in the NT. I count 387 NT uses. Far and away most of these refer to either to a 24-hour day or to the daylight hours (as opposed to night). On some occasions it refers to years (Luke 1:7, 18) or even to eternity future (2 Pet 3:18).

The expression *the day of the Lord* actually doesn’t occur often in the NT. There are only 2 direct references to *the day of the Lord* in the entire NT (1 Thess 5:2 and 2 Pet 3:10). In addition there are approximately 21 allusions to that time of judgment simply referring to *that day* or *the day* (Matt 24:19, 22 [twice], 29, 36, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:17, 19, 20 [twice], 24, 32; Luke 17:24, 26, 30, 31; 21:22, 23, 34; 1 Thess 5:4).

I have identified five unmodified uses of *hemera* that definitely refer to the Judgment Seat of Christ and four others that might. All of the five definite references are in Paul’s writings, two in First Corinthians and three in Second Timothy.

A. FIRST CORINTHIANS 3:13

This passage starts in v 5. Paul is using himself and Apollos (3:5-6ff) as examples of faithful workers, “God’s fellow workers” (3:9). Then he discusses the future judgment by Christ of their works (3:10-15). Paul says that each one’s work will become clear; *for the Day will declare it*, because it will be revealed by fire...” (emphasis added).

²³ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 199-200.

“The Day” here is clearly *the Day* when believers will be judged by Christ, the Judgment Seat of Christ. However, that is not the way that most commentators understand this. They assume this refers to a time of final judgment when the eternal destiny of people is determined.²⁴

B. FIRST CORINTHIANS 4:3

The word *Day* is not even found in most English translations of this verse, even though *hēmera* is used by Paul. The NKJV reads, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court [lit., “day”, *hēmera*].” Other translations that render *hēmera* here as *court* include the NIV, NASB, TNIV, HCSB (which has a footnote that reads, “lit. *a human day*”), RSV, and the NET Bible.

I think this is an unfortunate translation choice. If the English reader saw the expression *a human day* here, he would realize that day in the NT sometimes refer to a time of judgment.

Paul concludes this paragraph in vv 4-5. There he makes it clear that “He who judges me is the Lord” when He comes. Clearly Paul is speaking of the Bema. The contrast is between a *human day* and a *divine Day*, Jesus’ Day. Paul came out on the wrong side of some human days. That didn’t concern him. What did concern the apostle is that he would be found faithful—“it is required in stewards that one be found faithful”—by the Lord Jesus at His Day.

Charles Hodge has an excellent discussion of *a human day* and of the entire passage up to v 5. Then he says, “*Until the Lord comes...i.e., until the second advent of Christ, which in the New Testament is constantly represented as contemporaneous with the resurrection of the dead and the*

²⁴ As an aside, I feel that the meaning of v 15 has been missed. In light of 1 Cor 5:5, which uses the word *to save* (*swzein*) to refer to being spiritually healthy at the Bema, the same fits perfectly here (and, in my opinion, in all uses of *swzein* in First Corinthians). “If anyone’s [that is, any faithful minister’s, like himself or Apollos] work is burned [up], he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved [will be spiritually healthy at the Bema], yet so as through fire.” It would make no sense for Paul to say that even if some of the works of a servant of Christ are burned up, he will remain eternally secure. The salvation here is Bema-related. Paul’s point is that we should not fear that since some of our works will be found to have been perishable (impermanent) that we will thus not be approved by Christ (cf. 1 Cor 9:27).

general judgment.”²⁵ Commentators for some reason do not distinguish between the judgment of believers at the Bema and unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment.²⁶

C. SECOND TIMOTHY 1:12

Here is a famous verse that has been famously misunderstood as a declaration of eternal security. There is a wonderful song based on this verse, though it unfortunately misinterprets it. If we carefully observed the reference to *that Day*, we wouldn’t make that mistake.

Paul said, “I know whom I have believed [the Lord Jesus] and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him [or, what He committed to me] *until that Day* [the Bema]” (emphasis added).

Guthrie’s comments are helpful here:

The words *what I have entrusted to him* represent an expression (*paratheke mou*) which literally means ‘my deposit’...The ‘deposit’ could be understood either of what God entrusted to Paul or what Paul entrusted to God, but since in the other occurrences in the Pastorals the word *paratheke* is used in the former sense, it is most probably used in the same sense here. In that case the reference is to the work which the apostle was commissioned to do or the doctrine entrusted to him.²⁷

All of his service for Christ was based on the fact that Jesus promised to reward him with heightened opportunity for serving Jesus in eternity if he was faithful with what Jesus had entrusted to him in this life. While included in “I know whom I have believed” is the idea of his secure eternal destiny, that is in the background. In the foreground in Jesus’ promise that those who serve Him faithfully to the end of their lives will

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d., reprinted in 1980), 67-68, italics his; underlining added.

²⁶ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 77-74, also has a fine discussion of this passage. Yet in his discussion of v 4 he speaks of “the final judgment” being in view in vv 4-5 (p. 73).

²⁷ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 144. For a fuller discussion of both views, see D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Timothy: Everyman’s Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 43. Hiebert also sees Paul as referring to what the Lord Jesus entrusted to him, ultimately the gospel itself.

rule with Him forever. *That Day* is a clear reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ here and in its other two uses in Second Timothy.²⁸

Hiebert is one of the few commentators that actually mentions the Bema directly when discussing this verse: “‘Against that day’ looks forward to that future day when Paul will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive his reward for his Gospel labors.”²⁹

D. SECOND TIMOTHY 1:18

Onesiphorus was a man who aided Paul often during his second Roman imprisonment (vv 16-17). As a result, Paul expects that he will “find mercy from the Lord *in that Day*” (emphasis added). Clearly Paul has the Bema in view and he has a strong desire that those who aided him in his ministry would have a good experience there.

E. SECOND TIMOTHY 4:8

The interpretation of 2 Tim 1:12, 18 is confirmed by a comparison of those verses with 2 Tim 4:6-8. There Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me *on that Day*, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing” (emphasis added). Note the inclusion of *that Day* in all three places in 2 Timothy.

F. PASSAGES TO PONDER

There are four other uses of *hēmera* that might refer to the Bema, though I am not yet convinced. These verses are on my radar to continue thinking over.

In John 8:56 the Lord says that “Abraham rejoiced to see *My day*” (emphasis added). Is He referring to the Bema specifically, or to His return and establishment of His kingdom in general? There isn’t enough context to answer that question definitively. At least that is how it appears to me at this time. Since Hebrews 11 points out that Abraham was looking for future reward, that might tip the scales that the Bema is in

²⁸ After his excellent discussion cited above, Guthrie (144-45) is very vague as to what *that Day* refers here and in its other two uses in Second Timothy. While there is nothing objectionable in his discussion of *that Day*, it would be so helpful if he would explicitly refer to the Bema.

²⁹ Hiebert, *Second Timothy*, 44.

view here as well. You will note that the NKJV didn't capitalize *day* here, evidently not feeling that the Bema was in view. I wonder.

In the Upper Room Discourse Jesus said, "At *that day* you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:2, emphasis added). I tend to think this refers generally to Jesus' return and kingdom reign. However, in light of the other NT uses of *hēmera*, it is certainly possible that the Lord is specifically alluding to the Bema here.

What did Paul mean in Rom 13:12 when he said, "The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*" (emphasis added)? Clearly the night is this sinful evil age. Thus *the day* would seem to be a reference to the righteous kingdom of the Lord Jesus which is soon to dawn. In light of the fact that in this very verse Paul goes on to say, "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light," it seems that the Bema is at least in the background of this reference to *the day*.

The final possible reference is Heb 10:25, a very famous text. We are to exhort one another as we assemble together in church, "and so much the more *as you see the Day approaching*" (emphasis added). This strikes me as being highly likely to be a direct reference to the Bema. While it could be general reference to the Lord's return, the reason for urgency is the imminent return of Christ brings with it our judgment at the Bema. I have not included it with the other references only because I wished to reserve those for references where the context made it crystal clear that the Bema was in view.

VI. CONCLUSION

More work needs to be done on this vital topic. This would be a great topic for a thesis or a dissertation. In the meantime, whenever you see *the day of the Lord Jesus, the day of Jesus Christ, the day of Christ, or the day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, realize that the Bema is specifically in view. Whenever you see *that Day*, think Bema. Whenever you see *the day*, realize that the Bema might be in view. At least consider it is a possibility.

The single most important day in any of our lives is the day we believed in the Lord Jesus for everlasting life. The very next most important day for us in all of human history will be *that Day, the Day of the Lord Jesus*, the Bema. That Day will determine how fully we will serve and glorify the Lord Jesus forever. What we do for the rest of our lives until *that Day* is vital to our eternal experience.

Live each day now in light of *that Day*. The Doctrine of the Day is a key proof that grace theology is not in any way a license to sin and waste one's present life.

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING: CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY'S TROJAN HORSE

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I. INTRODUCTION

When the Greeks had lain siege to Troy for ten years, without success, they pretended to retreat. They left behind a large wooden horse in which a number of Greek soldiers had hidden themselves. A planted spy convinced the Trojans, despite the warnings of Laocoön, to move the horse inside the city as a war trophy. In the following night, the Greeks descended out of the wooden horse, opened the gates for the Greek army, attacked the unsuspecting and celebrating Trojans, and finally conquered Troy.

From this story comes the expression *Trojan horse* as a general term describing a gift that is actually a trick. It gave rise to the proverb “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” The term *Trojan* is also used today to refer to malicious computer software that look harmless or beneficial to the user but actually contain a computer virus or spyware. In the last decade the spiritual virus of contemplative spirituality¹ has been introduced widely in Evangelical circles through the avenue of leadership training and enrichment.

¹John Caddock, “What is Contemplative Spirituality and Why Is It Dangerous?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1997): 3-25.

II. EXAMPLES OF CONTEMPLATIVE INFLUENCES IN EVANGELICALISM TODAY

A. VANTAGEPOINT³ AND THE NAB CONFERENCE

In the fall of 2005 I received a call from the developer of the leadership training material used by the conference of Baptist churches of which my church is a member. He wanted to form what's called a Leadership Training Center in the North Dallas region that would involve churches from several denominations. I met with him at a Starbucks and he went over with me the Leadership Training Center strategy and gave me a copy of the first workbook used in the program. I took the workbook home and began to read it. I was surprised to find this contemplative exercise:

Step into the Quiet...

find a place where you can be alone for a two hour period of time. for the first thirty minutes, relax and allow yourself to be comfortable.

chill the noise and clutter within...this could take awhile.

focus on God actually indwelling your very being.

repeat a special name or phrase which characterizes your relationship with God.

when distractions come, return to your name or phrase.

sing a chorus, or pray Psalm 42:1.

for the next hour, meditate on the truths for you in Luke 1:26-38.

if it helps you to focus, write thoughts or prayers as they come to you.

for the next thirty minutes listen.

conclude your two hour time by praying the Lord's Prayer or singing a chorus.²

This exercise, I now understand after some research, makes use of two contemplative practices: centering prayer and sacred reading (*lectio divina*). I continued reading through the workbook and observed that contemplative spirituality was an integral part of the whole leadership development program. Two required texts were *In the Name of Jesus*:

² *Emerging Leaders: Biblical Foundations of Leadership* (Sioux Falls, SD: VantagePoint³, 2005), 70.

Reflections on Christian Leadership by Henri J. M. Nouwen and *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* by Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese. Reese is the developer of the program and the man I met with at the Starbucks. I acquired both books and read them and began to research the topic of contemplative spirituality and theology. I soon found out that contemplative spirituality had become the practice of many leaders in the Evangelical Christian community.

Nouwen is a popular author with many Evangelical leaders. Most books by popular Evangelical authors that deal with the topic of spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines refer to him. A few quotes from his book, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, summarize Nouwen's view of the necessity of contemplative practices for Christian leadership.

For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required.³

Future leaders must be mystics deeply steeped in contemplative prayer.⁴

We have to be mystics.⁵

But for the future of Christian leadership it is of vital importance to reclaim the mystical aspect of theology so that every word spoken, every word of advice given, and every strategy developed can come from a heart that knows God intimately.⁶

Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our time. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice, and guidance. Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen again and again to the voice of love and to find there the wisdom and courage to address whatever issue presents itself to them.⁷

³ Henry J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

If there is any focus that the Christian leader of the future will need, it is the discipline of dwelling in the presence of the One who keeps asking us, “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?” This is the discipline of contemplative prayer.⁸

It is not enough for the priests and ministers of the future to be moral people, well trained, eager to help their fellow humans, and able to respond creatively to the burning issues of their time. All of that is very valuable and important, but it is not the heart of Christian leadership. The central question is, Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God’s presence, to listen to God’s voice, to look at God’s beauty, to touch God’s incarnate Word, and to taste fully God’s infinite goodness?⁹

Note the highly experiential and sensory aspects of the last quote. The goal of the mystic is to concretely encounter and interact with “God” in the silence or secret place of the heart. According to Nouwen and many others, one cannot be a fruitful Christian leader in our times without such daily experiences. A current Evangelical proponent of contemplative spirituality is Bill Hull.¹⁰ He recently developed a 30-week curriculum with bible.org to facilitate spiritual transformation through contemplative practices.¹¹ The curriculum is divided into five modules and makes significant use of *lectio divina*. Hull specifically endorses and encourages what Nouwen extols:

Henry Nouwen said, “The central question at the heart of Christian leadership is, are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God’s presence, to listen to God’s voice, to look at God’s beauty, to touch God’s incarnate Word, and to taste fully God’s infinite goodness?” Notice the range of desires that Nouwen mentions: to dwell, to listen, to focus, and to taste.

⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰ Hull is the author of *The Disciple Making Pastor* and *The Disciple Making Church*; he is the founder of T-NET, which stands for the “Training Network”; the leadership team of my church went through a two-year T-Net coaching process for disciple making churches in 1994-95.

¹¹ Bill Hull and Paul Mascarella, *Experience the Life: Making the Jesus Way a Habit* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2007).

These describe a level of experience with God that may be unknown to many of us, yet is available to anyone who will reserve space in their daily schedule to spend personal time with God. I am not talking now about the typical quiet time, because to be honest, mine were too often just me doing religious stuff with very little experience...Being a self-disciplined, well-educated leader with an acceptable quiet time wasn't sufficient to develop the qualities extolled by Henri Nouwen...I needed to be trained in developing my inner life...Now my quiet time with God became the training center where I relearned what it meant to follow Jesus.¹²

The discipline of spiritual direction or mentoring is used to support mystical or contemplative spirituality. The Anderson/Reese Model of Spiritual Mentoring is based on monastic spiritual direction and contemplative spirituality.¹³

In January 2006, I received an invitation from our Regional Minister to attend a Leadership Center informational dinner for the pastors in our association. He is the one who had referred Randy Reese to me. I responded with an e-mail letter. Among other things I wrote,

I am not aligned with the mysticism components of the material. Some examples of what I mean are the contemplative prayer exercise on page 70 of the manual; the reliance on the book by Catholic contemplative Henri Nouwen; the frequent quotes from mystical contemplatives such as Thomas Merton, Thomas More, Richard Foster; the entire structuring of Randy's book on spiritual mentoring around spiritual mystics such as Aelred of Rievaulx, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Madame Jeanne Guyon. I find Randy's approach to spiritual mentoring more in line with the spiritual direction of Catholic monasticism than biblical discipleship. I will not take the existing leaders and the emerging leaders of the church I pastor through such material.

I received back a brief reply saying that he looked forward to talking with me further about the benefits of mysticism. Just recently (September

¹² Ibid., 86-87.

¹³ Keith R. Anderson & Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 12, 13, 25, 31-32, 92, 109-110, 112.

2007) I received an invitation to a Pastoral Enrichment Retreat for our association pastors that will be moderated by Reese. It is a retreat designed to cultivate contemplative practices in tending to the interior life.

B. RICK WARREN AND BREATH PRAYERS

To direct people on a spiritual journey for 40 days, Rick Warren wrote *The Purpose Driven Life*. The bestselling book has impacted millions of persons. My church took the journey in the fall of 2003. There were some things that I found odd at the time. One was the encouragement to use “breath prayers.” Chapter 11 is entitled “Becoming Best Friends with God.” Two secrets of friendship with God are “constant conversation” and “continual meditation.” After quoting 1 Thess 5:17, “pray without ceasing,” Warren asks how a Christian can practice unceasing prayer to which he answers, “One way is to use ‘breath prayers’ throughout the day, as many Christians have done for centuries. You choose a brief sentence or a simple phrase that can be repeated in one breath.”¹⁴ Then after providing ten examples of short biblical phrases that could work as breath prayers, Warren advises, “Pray it as often as possible so it is rooted deep in your heart.” In this context Warren also cites the book of Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*¹⁵, who testified of experiencing God’s presence by repeating short prayers throughout the day.

An advocate of contemplative spirituality explains breath prayers,

One of the beautiful things that emerged from the disciplined life of the Desert Fathers was their soul-full practice of contemplative prayer, including the use of ‘Breath Prayers.’ The Desert Fathers preferred short, one breath prayers offered in a receptive stillness before God . . . To focus their minds simply on Christ and to descend with Christ into their hearts these monks slowly repeated their short holy prayers over and over with each breath. Many of these prayers were a perfect body rhythm of seven syllables that easily could be whispered in one breath.¹⁶

¹⁴ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 89.

¹⁵ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982).

¹⁶ William Gaultiere, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Soul: Breath Prayers* (2007); available from <http://www.christiansoulcare.com/spiritual-discipline-breathprayers.htm>; Internet; accessed September 2007.

Should we employ breath prayers? Praying a short sentence over and over bears resemblance to the mantra praying of eastern religions in which a word is recited or sung repeatedly to induce an altered state of consciousness.

What did Paul mean when he commanded the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing”? The command is likely an iterative present, the idea being, “not that believers are to pray every minute of every day, but that we should offer prayers to God repeatedly.”¹⁷ Prayer should be a constant part of Christian consciousness as defined by the surrounding commands to rejoice and give thanks. Just as the attitude of a believer is to be continuously joyful and thankful, so also their attitude is to be continuously prayerful. This command does not support the practice of simply repeating a short phrase in conjunction with the breath throughout the day to experience God’s presence.

C. SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAMS AT CHRISTIAN COLLEGES AND SEMINARIES

Many Christian colleges and seminaries have developed spiritual formation programs that promote contemplative spirituality. For example, Biola University and Talbot School of Theology have an Institute for Spiritual Formation that functions as a Department in Talbot.¹⁸ Note some of the stated objectives, curricular requirements, and course descriptions.

The aim of the Institute for Spiritual Formation functioning as a department in Talbot is to integrate an in-depth integrative theology of spiritual formation with the process and dynamics involved in spiritual growth, soul care and mentoring in the church. It attempts to train a generation of servants who are equipped both to understand and participate in the process of spiritual growth from a theological, integrative and experiential perspective, within the context of a developing mentoring community, to the end that students are better equipped to help others in the church in this process.¹⁹

¹⁷ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 521.

¹⁸ Biola University and Talbot School of Theology; *2005-2007 Catalog*, 235-238; available from http://www.talbot.edu/academics/downloads/talbot_catalog_05-07.pdf; Internet; accessed September 2007.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

All students are required to experience monthly spiritual direction and mentoring for the sake of their own spiritual growth and training in spiritual soul care in each semester they are enrolled in courses.²⁰

Due to the nature of soul work involved in spiritual direction and in harmony with its tradition, each student is required to have a total of three weeks of extended retreat in isolation or partial isolation to explore and cultivate the inner life in the presence of God under the supervision of a spiritual guide and one's advisor.²¹

TTSF 531 History and Traditions of Christian Spirituality. An exploration of spirituality through Church history. The course introduces the student to the various traditions of spirituality (contemplative, holiness, Word, charismatic, social reform etc.) and their historical-theoretical roots (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran etc)...Various experiential projects are designed to facilitate understanding, appreciation and personal growth with respect to these traditions.²²

TTSF 532 Developmental Spirituality & Contemplative Prayer. An exploration of the various stages of growth involved in the believer's journey, employing both experiential and biblical data. Particular focus is given to St. John of the Cross who developed perhaps the most elaborate and influential approach to understanding the work of the Spirit in various phases of the Christian's life and how this relates to the relationship between discursive and contemplative prayer and meditation.²³

TTSF 623 Contemplative Spirituality and Prayer. This course encourages personal awareness and sensitivity to the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. Particular emphasis is upon growing in faith as understood in the Bible and the contemplative tradition by attending, listening and openness to the truth of oneself and God as revealed by the Spirit inwardly.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 236.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 237.

D. KENNETH BOA, BIBLE.ORG, AND SACRED READING (*LECTIO DIVINA*)

Bible.org promotes *lectio divina* through a series on the Apostles' Creed by Kenneth Boa and the previously cited 30 weeks curriculum, *Experience the Life: Making the Jesus Way a Habit*, developed by Bill Hull. Boa's first article is *An Introduction to Sacred Reading: Our Image of God*.²⁵ *Lectio divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or sacred reading, and represents a method of prayer and scriptural reading intended to promote inward communion with God and provide special spiritual insights. It is about hearing God personally talk to us. There are four phases of the prayer: *lectio* (listen/read), *meditatio* (meditate/reflect), *oratio* (pray/respond), and *contemplatio* (contemplate/rest).

E. NATIONAL PASTOR'S CONVENTION

Zondervan is the main sponsor of the National Pastors Convention. This year's conventions feature a Pastors Transforming Retreat. The convention's website gives the following description:

Experience God's transforming presence in this special overnight retreat designed specifically for you. "Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership" challenges participants to forge a connection between their souls and their leadership. This National Pastors Retreat provides leaders with a safe place to be honest about the challenges of spiritual leadership, to experience spiritual rhythms of solitude, prayer, and community, and to deepen their understanding of leadership that flows from one's authentic self. Led by the Transforming Center leaders Ruth Haley Barton and Joe Sherman, this retreat offers a meaningful introduction to the community, spiritual rhythms, teaching themes, and guided experiences that will come to characterize National Pastors Retreat.²⁶

Ruth Haley Barton is the co-founder of The Transforming Center. The center's website biographical page tells us that she is a spiritual director, teacher and retreat leader trained through the Shalem Institute for

²⁵ Available from http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=3862; Internet; accessed September 2007. See also Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 174-86.

²⁶ Available from <http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/NPC/Retreat/>; Internet; accessed September 2007.

Spiritual Formation and the Pathways Center for Spiritual Leadership in Nashville, Tennessee.²⁷ She is also the author of several books including *Sacred Rhythms* and *Invitation to Silence and Solitude*. She has served on the pastoral staff of Willow Creek Community Church. The Shalem Institute and the Pathways Center for Spiritual Leadership (a ministry of the Upper Room now known as the Academy for Spiritual Formation) are ecumenical and interspiritual organizations that find unity in the experience of contemplative spirituality.²⁸

III. WHAT IS THE APPEAL?

Why are so many Christians attracted to mysticism? One or more of the following reasons may apply: the desire for a direct experience of God, the desire for personal communication from God beyond the Bible, the desire for peace and calm within, the desire to experience something new. It seems to be a matter of walking by sight. We would do well to have the same ambition as the apostle Paul, “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor 5:6-9).

IV. WHAT ARE SOME DANGERS?

A. ELEVATING MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OVER THE EXEGESIS AND APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is the believer’s objective authority for everything pertaining to faith and practice. Mystics come to rely on subjective experience.

B. FINDING UNITY IN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE NOT TRUTH – ECUMENICALISM AND INTERSPIRITUALITY

At the end of 1994 Thomas Keating and a group of Centering Prayer practitioners established a structure called Contemplative Outreach to

²⁷ Available from <http://www.thetransformingcenter.org/ruthbio.php>; Internet; accessed September 2007.

²⁸ Available from www.shalem.org and www.upperroom.org/academy/; Internet; accessed September 2007.

serve as a network to transmit the method.²⁹ They listed three purposes for the network. The first purpose was to renew the contemplative tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. The second purpose was to make the Christian Contemplative heritage available to the other Christian communities. Keating explains, “We knew from our experience of praying together with people of different denominations that Centering Prayer bonds the participants in a way that transcends doctrinal differences.”³⁰ The third purpose was to prepare Christians for more profound interreligious dialogue. After such dialogue Keating came to believe “God manifests himself through the rituals and spiritual disciplines of the various religions of the world.”³¹

C. PHYSICAL, PHYSIOLOGICAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTURBANCES

DSM IV TR has a diagnostic category that can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem.³² David Lukoff, one of the members of the task force who helped to establish the diagnostic category explains its rationale.

In the DSM-IV, spiritual problems are defined as distressing experiences that involve a person’s relationship with a transcendent being or force, but are not necessarily related to an organized church or religious institution. Sometimes such experiences result from intensive involvement with spiritual practices such as yoga. The impetus for proposing this new diagnostic category came from transpersonal clinicians whose initial focus was on crises triggered by meditation and other spiritual practices.³³

Lukoff details possible physical, physiological, and psychological symptoms. Physical symptoms can include “sensations of heat, tremors, involuntary laughing or crying, talking in tongues, nausea, diarrhea or

²⁹ See Thomas Keating, *Manifesting God*, 119-23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³² *American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), V62.89, 741.

³³ David Lukoff PhD, *DSM IV Religious & Spiritual Problem*; available from http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/lesson3_5.asp; Internet; accessed September 2007.

constipation, rigidity or limpness, animal-like movements and sounds.” Physiological problems can present as “internal sensations of burning, hypersensitivity to sensory input, hyperactivity or lethargy, great variations in sexual desire, and even spontaneous orgasm.” Psychological symptoms can be “feelings of anxiety, guilt, and depression (with bouts of uncontrollable weeping).” There may be “visions of lights, symbols, spiritual entities. Auditory sensations may include hearing voices, music, inner sounds or mantras. There may also be disruption of the proprioceptive system, with loss of a sense of self as a body, or an out of the body experience.”

D. SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

Contemplative practices can usher in an altered state of consciousness which may render the practitioner susceptible to the wrong kind of spiritual influence. The Apostle Paul warns “that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). Even as strong a proponent of contemplative practices as Richard Foster cautions:

I also want to give a word of precaution. In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as a supernatural guidance that is not divine guidance. While the Bible does not give us a lot of information on the nature of the spiritual world, we do know there are various orders of spiritual beings, and some of them are definitely not in cooperation with God and his way! But for now I want to encourage you to learn and practice prayers of protection... All dark and evil spirits must now leave.³⁴

It is not wise to become involved with a non-biblical form of prayer that could bring exposure to demonic influence.

E. DISTORTION AND MISAPPLICATION OF SOME SCRIPTURES

Many contemplatives quote the first part of Ps 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God,” to endorse a form of meditation that involves techniques on “quieting” the mind or going beyond the mind. Is this what the verse is talking about? Psalm 46:10, far from endorsing a mystical meditative state, is stating to the readers that they should be in awe of God as the Sovereign Ruler. This verse is not about contemplative prayer, it’s a

³⁴ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992), 157.

declaration of God's sovereignty. It simply means to stop and acknowledge that God is in charge. Some other passages that are distorted and misapplied are 1 Kgs 19:11-13 as referring to the still, small voice of God heard in the silence of the heart, Matt 6:6 as to meeting with God in the secret place of the heart, and 1 Thess 5:18 as to using "breath prayers" throughout the day to continually experience the presence of God.

V. CONCLUSION

Many in the academy and in the church are using leadership and mentoring programs to introduce contemplative practices. Contemplative practices lead the practitioner into the "silence." A common method is to empty the mind of thought through repetition, usually of a word or phrase. This helps to self-induce a contemplative state which supposedly facilitates an experiential encounter with God and the reception of personal communication from Him. It is often asserted that no one can be a spiritually deep leader without such consistent experiences. Not only are contemplative practices not supported by the Bible, but they can also produce artificial experiences or even leave a practitioner open to the deception of familiar spirits.

Nowhere in the Bible is prayer a technique or a way to go beyond thinking. Creating an experiential theology of prayer apart from the Bible is dangerous because we enter an area filled with subjectivism, truth based on experience, and therefore, an area where we can be deceived. The Bible presents prayer as words and thoughts expressed by us to God.

Contemplative practices are not found in the Bible. We should be wary of any instruction that advises us to repeat continually a word or phrase, even if it's from the Bible, or use a word or phrase to stay "focused," go beyond thinking or thought, to turn inward in order to find or be with God, be in silence in order to truly hear from God. Christian prayer should be taught as it is modeled in the Bible. Beware of monks bearing gifts.

APPENDIX 1

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

David Knowles concisely explains the origin of Christian mysticism, "All theoretical, speculative presentation of contemplation came down the centuries from Plato, Philo and the Alexandrians, reinforced by a new

and strong infusion of Neo-platonism, originating with Plotinus and carried over into the Christian tradition by Augustine and pseudo-Denis.”³⁵ Contemplative spirituality does not have its origin in the revelation of the Bible. Plotinus (c. 205-270 AD) wrote the *Enneads* and is the non-Christian, neo-platonic basis for much Christian, Jewish, and Islamic mysticism. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500 AD), is the author of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, the *Mystical Theology*, and *The Divine Names*. He originated the distinction between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* theology.

Kataphatic and *apophatic* are two strands which run throughout Christian mysticism.³⁶ The term *kataphatic* comes from a Greek word that means “affirmative,” and refers to the tradition as the way of affirmation and stresses the knowledge of God through symbols, song, images, and metaphors. The *apophatic* comes from a Greek word which means “negative,” and refers to the tradition as the way of negation and understands God as beyond words and images.

The contemplative practices can be categorized by their tendency to fit one end of this spectrum or the other. Ritual chants (Taizé, Gregorian), Icon meditation, Ignatian spirituality with its emphasis on visualization fit the *kataphatic* tradition. Centering prayer and the Jesus Prayer fit the *apophatic* tradition. The practice of *lectio divina* seems to bridge both the *kataphatic* and *apophatic*. The stages of *lectio* and *oratio* involve words, but *meditatio* and *contemplatio* move beyond the words. Regardless of the tradition they fit, the practices are really aids to entering into a relaxed and altered state of consciousness so as to have spiritual experiences.

APPENDIX 2 SOME CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

Many practices help induce a mystical state of contemplation.³⁷ Let’s take a closer look at four of them.

³⁵ David Knowles, “The Influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Western Mysticism” in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 94.

³⁶ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 467-511.

³⁷ For a description and historical overview of many contemplative practices see Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand

A. CENTERING PRAYER

Eastern mystics, religious contemplatives, occultists, and others have employed what they call *centering* as a means to self-induce an altered state of consciousness. Don Matzat in an article entitled “What Is Centering?” provides a good explanation of how a person can enter an altered state of consciousness in this way.³⁸

Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Jones is a strong advocate of contemplative spirituality and the national coordinator of *Emergent Village*.

³⁸ In 1920's, Dr. Hans Berger, a German psychiatrist, uncovered some interesting insights about the activity of the brain during various stages of human consciousness. By hooking-up patients to an electro-encephalograph, he discovered that the brain of the person actively using his or her five senses emits between 13 and 18 vibrations per second. He referred to these as “beta” rhythms. During sleep, the brain emitted between five to eight rhythms, or what he called “theta.” The vibrations below five, found in the deep sleep of infants, he termed “delta” rhythms. The brain waves emitted between “beta” and “theta,” the state of consciousness between normal mental activity and sleep, when the brain is emitting between eight to 13 vibrations per second, Berger termed “alpha” rhythms. This is the basis for what is called the “alpha zone,” a new definition for the trance of the mystics. In the alpha zone, the human brain is in a state of receptivity. Images freely flow through the imagination. The critical, rational mind, as Jose Silva puts in, is on the back burner and the imaginative mind is up-front. It is important to point out that entering the alpha zone is a natural human condition and is experienced by everyone prior to falling asleep. We have all sensed the free flow of images that pass through the mind immediately before sleep. This is natural. This is alpha. Also, there is good evidence to suggest that inducing this alpha state of consciousness does have value in stress management. Lowering brain waves produces relaxation, and we all need to relax. The issue is not the natural experiences of human consciousness, but rather the relationship between the alpha level and spiritual experience. Does such a relationship exist? If so, is the Holy Spirit producing the experience or is there an alternative source? Should we be concerned that this altered state of consciousness is associated with a variety of occult practices?

Self-inducing alpha is the goal of a wide range of today's spiritual practitioners. Mystics alter their consciousness in order to seek a visualized experience with God. New Age advocates desire a personal, visualized “spirit guide” who will grant enlightened knowledge. Occultists continue to go after psychic phenomena. Followers of Eastern religions pursue the god within.

Don Matzat, “What Is Centering,” *Issues, Etc. Journal* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 1998); See also Dennis Coon, *Psychology: A Modular Approach to Mind and Behavior* (Florence, KY: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 216, 223, 235-36; read

The current practice of centering prayer can be traced to the mid 1970's, to St. Joseph Abbey in Spencer, MA, and three monks, Abbot Thomas Keating, William Meninger and Basil Pennington.³⁹ Their work was a response to the exhortations of the Second Vatican Council to become more knowledgeable about other religious faiths through dialogue with practitioners from these traditions and to revitalize the path of contemplative prayer in order to help Catholics, especially those who had left the church, to find such experiences in their own faith tradition.

Thomas Keating was personally disappointed that so many Catholics had left the church because they had no idea it offered meditation practices that could cultivate the inner peace and spiritual union they desired. At a monastery gathering in the mid-1970's, Keating posed a question to his fellow monks that provided the impetus to the centering prayer movement: "Could we put the Christian tradition into a form that would be accessible to people in the active ministry today and to young people who have been instructed in an Eastern technique and might be inspired to return to their Christian roots if they knew there was something similar in the Christian tradition?"⁴⁰

Fathers Keating, Meninger, and Pennington entered into dialogue with leaders from other religious traditions living near the abbey. They invited to the abbey ecumenically oriented Catholic theologians, an Eastern Zen master who offered weeklong retreats on Buddhist meditation, and a former Trappist, Paul Marechal, who taught Transcendental Meditation. The interaction between these Christian monks and practitioners of Eastern meditation helped distill the practice of Christian contemplative prayer into the centering prayer form that could be easily practiced by anyone.

Keating puts forth four simple guidelines for practicing centering prayer:⁴¹

the definitions for "alpha state", "alpha waves", "alpha-wave training", and "altered state of consciousness" by Robert M. Goldenson, PhD, *Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Longman 1984), 33; Robert Jean Campbell, MD, "electroencephalogram", in *Psychiatric Dictionary Seventh Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 238-39.

³⁹ See Thomas Keating, *Manifesting God* (New York: Lantern Books, 2005), 115-128; and Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad Classic, 1996), 11-21.

⁴⁰ Keating, *Intimacy with God*, 15.

⁴¹ Keating, *Manifesting God*, 133-36.

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

2. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently and introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

The recommended time for centering prayer is twenty minutes twice a day. Centering prayer is a close cousin to Transcendental Meditation.

The practice of centering prayer has spread widely to "Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Protestants, and Evangelicals as well as Catholics."⁴² For example, Larry Crabb writes about his contemplative prayer practices, "I've practiced centering prayer. I've contemplatively prayed. I've prayed liturgically...I've benefited from each, and I still do. In ways you'll see, elements of each style are still with me."⁴³

B. SACRED READING (LECTIO DIVINA)

Lectio divina is the slow meditative reading of Scripture. It is undertaken not with the intention of gaining information but of using the texts as an aid to encounter God. The four phases of the prayer are *lectio* (listen/read), *meditatio* (meditate/reflect), *oratio* (pray/respond), and *contemplatio* (contemplate/rest).⁴⁴ Tony Jones explains that the final step of contemplation "...moves beyond words and intellect and into that 'thin space' where time and eternity almost touch. It's in moments like these that some of the greatest saints in the history of the church have had a 'mystical union' with Christ."⁴⁵

The concept of God speaking to us through the Bible is legitimate. We receive that through normal reading, study and meditation. The purpose of *lectio divina* is not to think about the meaning and application of a Bible verse or passage, but to gain an experience from it and even receive a personal word from God. There is a difference between reading

⁴² Ibid., 122.

⁴³ Larry Crabb, *The Papa Prayer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 9.

⁴⁴ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 175-85.

⁴⁵ Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 53.

the Bible to understand its meaning and apply it to our lives versus a method of focusing on a text to gain a mystical experience.

C. THE JESUS PRAYER

The “Jesus Prayer” is based on the biblical prayer of the tax collector, “God be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). It is the normal form of unceasing prayer in the Orthodox tradition. Kallistos Ware explains the practice and its intended effect:

The repetition needs to be unvarying, so as to bring the intellect from fragmentation to unity, from a diversity of thoughts and images to a state of single-pointed concentration. While itself an invocation in words, by virtue of its brevity and simplicity the prayer Lord Jesus enables us to reach out beyond language into silence, beyond discursive thinking into intuitive awareness.⁴⁶

How, more specifically, are we to acquire inner stillness or *hesychia*, progressing from the level of discursive thinking to that of unmediated, non-discursive union? How are we to stop talking and to start listening?...there is one way of praying that has been found especially valuable as an aid to inner silence: the Jesus Prayer. This is a short invocation, designed for frequent repetition and addressed to the Savior. Most commonly it takes the form “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”⁴⁷

The Jesus Prayer has become popular among contemplative Evangelicals. For example, leading Evangelical scholar J. P. Moreland recommends the repetition of the Jesus Prayer about “three hundred times a day” to help develop the habit of ongoing prayer!⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Kallistos Ware, “The Origins of the Jesus Prayer,” in *The Study of Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 178.

⁴⁷ Kallistos Ware, “Ways of Prayer and Contemplation,” in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1985), 402-403.

⁴⁸ J. P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, *Lost Virtues of Happiness: Discovering the Disciplines of the Good Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 90. I have a personal story which involved J. P. Moreland. In the summer of 1976 I was working in Mississippi and corresponding with a girl, now my wife, who was on a Campus Crusade for Christ summer project at Myrtle Beach, SC. The Bible teacher for the project was J. P. Moreland and he was teaching on the book of

D. WALKING A LABYRINTH

Walking a Labyrinth has popular with many Evangelical organizations and churches.⁴⁹ It is sometimes called a “prayer path.”⁵⁰ It has been promoted by Youth for Christ, Youth Specialties, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Navpress, Campus Crusade for Christ, Zondervan Publishing, National Pastors Convention, Leadership Magazine, Group Publishing and a host of others.

The labyrinth has only one path. The path follows a circuitous route to a center. By walking amongst the turnings of a labyrinth, a person loses track of the outside world and quiets the mind. It is but another technique for centering.

Philippians. Brenda wrote me of being teased by some of the girls on the project with the question “Received any letters from your Philippe...ian?”

⁴⁹ Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 127-33.

⁵⁰ A prayer path kit is available from Group Publishing at www.grouppublishing.com/prayerpath/kit.htm.

THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST: DECOUPLING JESUS FROM THE CHRIST*

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*Editor's Note: This article is a slightly condensed form of a message given at the 2001 annual GES conference in Dallas. In light of events that have occurred in the intervening 6+ years, the challenges and warnings given in this article have proved prescient.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, as I was discussing the Lordship Salvation controversy with a fellow grace person, I was asked an interesting question. The question was: "Are we winning?"

The essence of my answer was: "Absolutely."

Of course, I was not talking in terms of popularity polls. Head counting is irrelevant here.

Unfortunately many grace people are not aware of the tremendous impact that the grace movement has had and continues to have. What I have heard and seen over the last few years is enormously encouraging.

Fundamentally, God has been at work with His truth. The number of people who have been liberated from false gospels is very large as far as I can tell. The reason we are winning, however, is because we are being led by an all-conquering Captain—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All the true victories of grace truth are His victories, and not really ours at all. He is accomplishing His own purposes.

But having said this, we must also admit that the grace movement faces some significant dangers. Let's think about these for a few minutes.

II. THE DANGER OF NOT BEING OPEN TO GOD'S WORD

It may seem strange to say it, but the grace movement must face the danger of not being open to God's Word.

Most grace people probably feel that openness to God's Word is a hallmark of the grace movement. After all, we are prepared to let the Scriptures speak even if they clearly contradict long-held traditional interpretations. The doctrine of rewards is one such area where the grace movement seems prepared to let the Scriptures speak.

I agree that this has been a strong point of the grace movement up until now. I hope it will continue to be. But there are some warning flags.

A. THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE

One of the central issues in the Lordship debate has been over the doctrine of repentance. This doctrine obviously occupies a critical place in the whole discussion.

I am concerned that the grace movement should not allow itself to become vulnerable by maintaining a position on repentance that cannot be sustained from Scripture.

Lordship people do not tire of telling us that, in the NT, repentance is basically repentance from sin. It does not mean merely a change of mind from unbelief to faith. And they are absolutely right. There is not even one clear passage in the NT where repentance does not refer to repentance from sin. By contrast there are many clear passages where it does.

I have confessed before, and I do so again, that I myself once held the "change-of-mind" view. But I have changed my mind about repentance meaning simply a change of mind. My views on the whole subject are presented in the book, *Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance*.

But the question is this. Can grace people still search the Scriptures honestly when some traditional view of their own is called into question? Are we open to the Word of God whether it agrees with us or not?

B. FUDGING ON THE SIMPLICITY OF FAITH

There is another area where we need complete openness to God's Word. That area involves the amazing simplicity of Biblical faith.

I am convinced that some committed grace people are still a little scared by the simplicity of believing in Christ. They are eager to avoid the charge that we teach mere intellectual assent. It is hard for people like this to agree that faith and salvation occur when the core message of the Gospel is simply accepted as true.

Instead they wish to hedge this position with the requirement that faith must include some personal element like trust. Or that I must make some personal appropriation of the saving offer. This is the perspective that rapidly leads to urging, or even requiring, a prayer of faith.

I have argued elsewhere that trust can often be used as a synonym for faith. But when trust is seen as an improvement on the word *faith* (or, on the word *believe*) the door to confusion is open. What often results is a two-step view of faith: Step 1: believe the facts; Step 2: trust Christ for eternal life. The Bible knows no such distinction as this.

At the conclusion of John 9, the Lord Jesus says to the former blind man: “Do you believe in the Son of God?” The man replies, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” Jesus’ response is majestic: “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking to you.” Then the former blind man says, “Lord, I believe.”

This is an impressive passage. The issue of concern is in no way what “believe” might mean. Rather, the former blind man feels only a need for information. The term “Son of God,” of course, was a functional equivalent of the term “Christ,” as John 20:30-31 shows. The former blind man understood that Jesus must be telling him that the Christ was present somewhere. His confidence in Jesus is so high that he needs only to find out who Jesus is referring to. Jesus informs him that He is referring to Himself.

So the man believes. That is, he believes that Jesus is the Christ and is thus born of God in conformity with John 20:30-31 and 1 John 5:1.

But if this former blind man had been a 21st century Evangelical, he might have said: “Lord, what do you mean by believe?” “Do you mean personal trust?” “Do you mean intellectual assent?” “Do you mean commitment of the whole person?”

I hope you see that, in the context of John 9, such statements are actually theological nonsense. They are the result of failing to take the Biblical treatment of faith at face value. When it comes to believing something, the Bible does not contradict normal usage or common sense. Theologians have been known to do both!

We have no excuse, really, not to see the extreme simplicity of Biblical belief. The question is, however, whether we are open to this aspect of the Biblical testimony about faith. Or will we continue to hedge our view of faith with alternate expressions and unbiblical provisos?

C. SUMMARY

The issues I have just discussed are examples only. They are intended to remind us that the grace movement must bring all of its convictions to the bar of Scripture. And we must be prepared to revise these convictions however God's Word requires. No movement can remain vital which no longer examines itself in the light of Scripture.

When such examination of our convictions ceases, tradition and dead orthodoxy are not far down the road.

III. THE DANGER OF LOSING THE HISTORICITY OF THE GOSPEL

Now we come to the major burden of my talk today. A second danger that confronts the grace movement is the loss of the historicity of the gospel message.

My reference to the former blind man in John 9 was definitely not a throw-away illustration. It happens to impinge directly on my chief concern.

Did you notice that when Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" the blind man did not say something like, "Well, of course I do?" Instead the blind man said (and I admit I'm paraphrasing): "Well, I'd love to believe in Him but before I can do that, I'll have to know who He is"! Are you impressed by that? I certainly am.

You see, it is sometimes suggested that a heathen person in some far-away land can get saved just by trusting the Creator God to save him. Acting on the light of nature he puts his eternal destiny in the hands of his Maker and is born again. Without knowing it, he has believed in God's provision through Jesus Christ.

I'm sorry. It's a beautiful scenario, but very contrary to the Scripture. What it does in fact is this. It denies the essential historicity of the gospel. It does this by denying that the gospel is inseparable from the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.

If the truth which men must believe to be eternally saved is separated from Jesus, it is also separated from history. This separation in turn re-

sults in a separation from the Biblical revelation itself and from the Messiahship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A. BACK TO THE DESERTED ISLAND

Several years ago I created a deserted island scenario that some of you may remember. The man who is marooned on that island gets a fragment of the Gospel of John that has washed up on the beach. That fragment contains the opening words of John 6:43, “Jesus therefore answered and said to them” and everything is unreadable until we reach the words of John 6:47, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

My question was, “Is that enough information for the man to get saved?” My answer, of course, was “yes.” But now I want to offer you a variation on my deserted island scenario. Suppose the portion of John 6:43 containing, “Jesus answered and said to them,” was missing. Does the man still have enough information to get saved?

This time my answer is, “no.”

Note well, that even though the entirety of John 6:47 is legible for our marooned man, he does not know who the “I” or the “Me” refer to. He would have to enquire about the identity of the “I” and the “Me” of this verse, just as the former blind man enquired about the identity of the Son of God.

Let me state this issue in terms of the purpose of the Gospel of John. According to John 20: 30-31, the book was written that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.” Please notice that it was not written simply that we might believe in the Christ. No, instead, it was written that we might believe that “*Jesus is the Christ.*”

Think about this for a moment. We are not being called to believe that the Christ will give us eternal life. Rather we are called to believe that Jesus gives us eternal life because *Jesus is the Christ.*

Or take 1 John 5:1. “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Did you notice something? It is not, “whoever believes in the Christ for eternal life is born of God.” But once again, the issue is Jesus. If we believe that Jesus is the Christ, then—but only then—do we have a promise of eternal life.

The NT offers eternal life exclusively to those who believe in Jesus for it. There is no other offer of eternal life in the NT. None. Zero. Zip. Nada.

Jesus is man's only way to God. He Himself says so. In words familiar to all of us, Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). No one gets to the Father apart from Jesus. In the context of the Gospel of John, this *does not mean* that men may come to God and not know that they come by means of Jesus.

On the contrary, John is always at pains to point the believer to the historical Jesus as the Object of His faith.

B. FAITH IN JESUS SAVES

As you can see, the Gospel of John teaches that people are saved by believing in Jesus. Not by believing in God. Not by believing in an unknown Messiah. But by believing in Jesus. Regardless of how people were saved in the OT, this is how they are saved now.

This is certainly not contradicted by John 5:24. We are used to reading that verse this way: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word *and believes in Him who sent Me* has everlasting life" (emphasis added). But the first thing we must notice is that there is nothing in the Greek to correspond to the word "in."

So we really should read the verse like this: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word *and believes Him who sent Me* has everlasting life." Notice carefully: the believer hears Jesus' word and, when he believes it, he is believing the God who sent Jesus. The point is, of course, that Jesus' word is God's word. To believe Jesus' word is to believe what God says.

This is an important point for John. Take, for example, John 12:48-50. Jesus says:

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.

Or again, in John 8:28, we read:

When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, so I speak these things.

As my former Greek students will all know (I hope!), John's characteristic phrase for the faith that brings eternal life is *pisteuō eis*. This is usually rendered by our English versions as "believe in" or "believe on." But *pisteuō eis* is not found in John 5:24. (Instead we find *pisteuōn tō*) It was a mistake for the translators to use the words "believe in" (or, *on*: KJV) in John 5:24. John *never* makes God the Father the Object of *pisteuō eis*.

John's point is *not* that we can "believe in" God for eternal life just like we do when we "believe in" Jesus for that. On the contrary, his point is that when we believe Jesus' word we are, in fact, believing something God Himself is saying to us.

And of course, faith in Jesus' word is still faith in Jesus. But obviously, the saving experience of John 5:24 cannot come to someone who has never heard Jesus' word. No matter what he believes about the Creator, the heathen person still needs to hear the message brought by the Savior whom the Creator has sent. And note well: when the unsaved person believes the word of Jesus, he is not simply believing God, but he is believing the God *who sent Jesus!*

To put it plainly, *God apart from Jesus* is never the Object of the faith that brings eternal life.

Of similar significance is the way the Samaritan woman of John 4 is led to faith in a specific historical person. Jesus first draws her attention to the water of life that He can give to her. Then as the exchange between her and the Son of God draws to its climax, the woman states: "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

As you already know, the climax of this unforgettable interview comes when our Lord announces: "I who speak to you am He." Like the blind man of John 9, she places her faith in the person of Jesus.

Someone may wish to haggle here and raise the question, Did she know His name was Jesus? To this we may say two things: (1) it would be surprising if she did not. After all, this is a mere fragment of the total conversation. Would they not have introduced themselves to each other at some point? But (2) it doesn't really matter. It was the historical person called Jesus that she believed in. Who is the Christ? "You're looking at Him," says Jesus.

I am reminded also of the statement Jesus makes in John 6:40: "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who *sees the Son* and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the

last day.” Once again, identification of the historical person is the issue. Of course, an individual can be saved without seeing Him as John 20:29 makes clear. But if someone sees Him and believes in Him, he has obviously believed in a particular historical person. The Gospel of John is completely adamant that the historical person of Jesus must be the focus of our faith if we are to have eternal life.

As the apostle Paul has put it, God is “just and the justifier of the one who has *faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26).

There is no salvation for anyone outside of faith in the historical person of Jesus Christ. The NT promise of eternal life is made exclusively to believers in the historical Jesus. Nothing else has even a shred of Biblical evidence.

If the grace movement should ever lose its grip on this simple fact, it would have subverted the gospel and subverted the worldwide evangelistic enterprise. Just as grievously, it would have failed to properly honor the name that God has placed above every name. Someday, every knee will bow to that name, and every tongue will confess, the exalted name of Jesus to the glory of God the Father. God has ordained that the name of Jesus should be the one and only name in the universe that is a source of eternal salvation.

If the grace movement ever loses all this, it would richly deserve to die.

C. THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST

In the light of all we have just said, we can better appreciate the subtle wickedness of the spirit of the Antichrist.

As John informs us in his First Epistle, there are already many antichrists in the world. His words are familiar:

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know it is the last hour.

Shortly afterwards, he adds,

I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

In chapter 4, the Apostle also says:

. . . and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world [see 1 John 2:18, 21-22; 4:3].

Please observe. The spirit of the Antichrist is revealed by denying that Jesus is the Christ, or by denying the historical manifestation of the Christ who came in the flesh and blood of Jesus.

Let me stress that the spirit of the Antichrist is not defined by denying that there *is* a Christ. Nor is this spirit even defined by denying the *salvific significance* of the Christ.

He is defined instead by the denial that the historical Jesus—the Jesus who had flesh and blood—is indeed the Christ.

Even more precisely, this spirit is defined by a *failure to confess* this truth. Listen to 1 John 4:3 again: *every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist . . .*” (underlining added).

Needless to say, the Satanic assault is targeted at the person of Jesus for the precise reason that there is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus. One can actually articulate a gospel that even sounds theologically correct, but without Jesus it is not the gospel at all.

For example, I might say: *salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ*. But if the hearer does not know that the Christ is the historical Jesus, he does not yet know how to be saved. Like the blind man of John 9, he will have to ask, “Who is the Christ that I might believe in Him?”

And if Jesus is totally subtracted from my message, so that there is no witness to Him as God’s Christ, my message is not merely inadequate. It is also perfectly acceptable to the spirit of the Antichrist.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is no question in my mind that God has raised up the grace movement and is using it widely. On the other hand, we live in a very confused world. And our world is headed for even greater confusion as the end of the age approaches.

We ought therefore to feel a new sense of urgency to keep the Scriptures as our guide as we navigate through the shadows and twilight that are rapidly gathering. In addition to the old forms of confusion about the

gospel, we must also face the rise of new forms of error like contemplative spirituality.

I am reminded of the solemn words of Jesus as He spoke about the end of the age. His warning was grim: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:24).

Unless the grace movement holds firmly to the uniqueness of the Biblical gospel and to the indispensability of the name of Jesus for salvation, it cannot hope to accomplish what it ought to accomplish for God. Indeed if it does not do these things, it may be buried under an ocean of false theology. It may be washed away by the experience-based religion that is all too rapidly rising to prominence, as our world hurtles toward divine judgment.

So what’s my final word today? Here it is: *Stay awake; it’s later than you think!*

Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44?*

Part 1 of 3

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25 has always been of unique interest to expositors of the Scriptures. For one thing, it is the only extended and uninterrupted discourse of Christ recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. One might have expected this most extended teaching of Jesus to be predominantly ethical. Surprisingly, it is largely prophetic instead with ethical admonitions drawn from the eschatological teachings. Next to the Apocalypse, the Olivet Discourse contains the most extensive eschatological revelation in any one portion of the NT.¹ Ice remarks about the importance of the Olivet Discourse, “This discourse is so significant that the way a person interprets it will impact his understanding of the rest of the prophecy passages in the Bible.”² Similarly, Hodges states, “without it [the Olivet Discourse] we could hardly understand the other prophetic passages in the NT, *including* the book of Revelation” (italics original).³ Interestingly, out of the four Gospels the technical term for the future coming of Christ, *parousia* (“arrival, presence”), is found only in Matthew (24:3, 27, 37, 39). Matthew 24–25 has

*This is the first article in a three-part series. Unless otherwise stated, Scriptural quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version.

¹ James F. Rand, “A Survey of the Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse—Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (April 1956): 162; Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 34, 129.

² Thomas Ice, “The Olivet Discourse,” in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, gen. eds., *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming under Attack* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 151.

³ Zane C. Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise* (Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, 2006), 15-16.

contributed to such watershed doctrines as preterism *vis à vis* futurism, and pretribulationism *vis à vis* posttribulationism. For these reasons, the Olivet Discourse—particularly Matthew 24—is a crux passage for any teaching on the Rapture. Pettigrew’s claim is of interest: “From a negative side, the Olivet Discourse is important because all incorrect Rapture systems go astray in this passage.”⁴

Most if not all posttribulationists argue that the Rapture of the church is described in Matt 24:36-44 and that this Rapture coincides perfectly with the return of Christ *after* the Tribulation period mentioned in 24:29-31.⁵ By far, the most common interpretive approach by pretribulationists is to assign Matt 24:29-31 and 24:36-44 to the same posttribulational Second Coming of Christ.⁶ Accordingly, the Rapture is not found in the Discourse whether it is a posttribulational or pretribulational Rapture.⁷

⁴ Larry D. Pettigrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 174.

⁵ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 129-39; Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 190-96.

⁶ Contra Carson, who thinks that the most common view among pretribulationists is to assign vv 36-40 to the rapture of the church. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:494. Later, on p 495, however, he acknowledges that many dispensationalists deny the rapture in the Discourse.

⁷ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 76-79; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 209; Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time,” *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 106-40; Thomas R. Edgar, “An Exegesis of Rapture Passages,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, and Charles C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 217, 221; Paul D. Feinberg, “Dispensational Theology and the Rapture,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, and Charles C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 242-43; Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” *Three Views*, 80, 225, 229-31; E. Schuyler English, *Rethinking the Rapture* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1954), 41-55; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476; William K. Harrison, “The Time of the Rapture as Indicated by Certain Passages: Part III: The Time of the Rapture in the Light of Matthew 24,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (April-June 1958): 109-19; John MacAr-

Nevertheless, a few, but only a few, pretribulationists argue that the Rapture is taught in Matthew 24, specifically in 24:36-44.⁸

One must readily admit that the reference to one taken from a field or mill while another is left behind (24:40-41) sounds strikingly similar to the pretribulational Rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4. Then, too,

thur Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24–28* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 70-72; Russell L. Penney, “Why the Church Is Not Referenced in the Olivet Discourse,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 1 (April 1997): 47-60; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study of Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 162, 275-85; James F. Rand, “The Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954), 126, 162; Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 94-97; Ryrie, *What You Should Know about the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 82-84; Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Comes!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 178-84; John A. Sproule, “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 56, 60; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1991), 57-65; David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matt 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (spring 1989): 21-22; Stanley D. Toussaint, “Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 235-50; Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), 280-82; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 85-90; John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (April 1971): 116.

⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 1982), 446-47; Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 24-32; Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 105-6, 210-11, 238, 314-15; J. F. Strombeck, *First the Rapture* (Moline, IL: Strombeck Agency, 1950), 68-71; Ray C. Stedman, *What on Earth’s Going to Happen?* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, G/L Publications, 1970), 130-43. Beechick understands the Discourse as a double reference, applying to both tribulation saints and the church. Allen Beechick, *The Pretribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Books, 1980), 231-68. Wood states that the Discourse implies the rapture in 24:42-44 and that Jesus’ language has an unusual similarity to other passages on the pretribulational rapture. Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events: An Introductory Survey of Last-Day Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 91.

Jesus' teaching that no one knows "that day and hour" (24:36) also seems quite fitting with what pretribulationists believe about the imminent return of Christ at the Rapture. But with Jesus' reference to His return as taking place "immediately after the Tribulation of those days" (24:29), the interpretive hands of the pretribulationist are contextually tied. For the sake of sound hermeneutics that honor the context (vv 29-31), any Rapture in 24:36-44 is best excluded.

The pretribulationist is not opposed to finding the Rapture in Matt 24:36-44 *per se*. The truth of the Rapture is established as valid on the basis of other passages, even on the teachings of Jesus as recorded in one of the Gospels (John 14:3). If the Rapture is being taught in vv 36-44, the fundamental challenge is to demonstrate contextually how 24:29-31 can refer to the posttribulational Second Coming of Christ, while 24:36-44 can depict the pretribulational Rapture of the church. This series of articles will attempt to meet that challenge.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF MATTHEW 24:3-35

A. THE NATURE OF THE DISCIPLES' QUESTIONS

Jesus' movement from the temple takes Him to the Mount of Olives where the disciples privately ask Him the questions that form the immediate occasion for the Olivet Discourse (24:3). Basically, two questions⁹ are asked: 1) when will "these things" take place? and 2) "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The Greek grammar by itself is not conclusive in suggesting that the last two clauses of the disciples' questions are a single, unified question. Nevertheless, the Parousia and the consummation of the age are a reference to the same event and are identified by one sign (*to sēmeion*). The disciples were

⁹ Some writers hold that three questions are addressed. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 182; Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 280; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 461, 463; W. K. Price, *Jesus' Prophetic Sermon: The Olivet Key to Israel, the Church, and the Nations* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 280. Rand ("Olivet Discourse," 213), following Lewis Sperry Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, 8 vols., [reprint, Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978], 5:119), claims that the word "sign" should be supplied in the last phrase so that the second and third questions refer to two different signs. The sign of the Parousia is answered in v 30 and the sign of the "end of the age" is described in v 15.

asking for a single sign that would identify Jesus' future appearance and the end of history.

While the disciples' question may be divided into parts, they understood the answer to their questions as a single complex event rather than distinctively separate events. Most commentators agree that in the mind of the disciples, the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the Parousia/consummation of the age were closely associated events.¹⁰ This perspective may have been based on Zech 14:1-11.¹¹ The plural form, *tauta* ("these things," v 3), could also connote a complex web of contemporaneous events involving the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the Parousia/consummation,¹² and not merely the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In the Matthean context, the disciples' use of "these things" gathered into one thought the temple's destruction ("your house is being left to you desolate!" 23:38) and Christ's Second Coming ("you will not see Me until..." 23:39). The New English Translation notes on Matt 24:3 state, "Because the phrase *these things* is plural, more than the temple's destruction is in view. The question may presuppose that such a catastrophe signals the end" (italics original).¹³

¹⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 195-96; Carson, "Matthew," 8:495, 497; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 525; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 688; Ray Summers, "Matthew 24-25; An Exposition," *Review and Expositor* 59 (1962): 504. This was the current Jewish perspective. Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 12; Moo, "Posttribulation Rapture," 191. Fuller cites intertestamental literature to the same effect (*Testament of Levi* 14:1; 15:1; *Apocalypse of Baruch* 27:128:7). George C. Fuller, "The Structure of the Olivet Discourse" (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964), 69-71.

¹¹ Contra Nelson, who holds that the disciples were misguided and Jesus was correcting their ignorance. Neil D. Nelson Jr., "'This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (September 1996): 384.

¹² Carson, "Matthew," 495; Ronnie George Woolery, "The Olivet Discourse in Light of Present-Day Expectations of the Parousia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 13; Fuller, "Olivet Discourse," 71.

¹³ New English Translation notes on Matt 24:3 available from <http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>; Internet; accessed October 2007.

B. DID JESUS ANSWER THE DISCIPLES' FIRST QUESTION?

A common dispensational approach to the Discourse is that Jesus did not answer the first of the disciples' two (or three) questions in Matt 24:3.¹⁴ Despite the use of the plural *tauta* ("these things") in v 3, the conviction of these scholars is that the first question regards the AD 70 event. Therefore, if the first question goes unanswered by Christ—a question about AD 70—an eschatological interpretation to the Discourse is verified.

As is universally agreed, according to Luke 21:12-24 Jesus did address the AD 70 event on the same historical occasion as Matthew 24–25. Jesus did not sidestep the question of the disciples concerning the temple's destruction. Nor did He correct the disciples' thinking that the devastations coming to Jerusalem and its temple would take place before the end of the age. In Luke 21:8-11, Jesus first detailed the events that begin the seventieth seven of Daniel.¹⁵ But at Luke 21:12 with the words, "But *before* all these things..." (italics added), a transition is made by Jesus to events that precede the Tribulation period. Therefore, the destruction of the city and temple would take place sometime prior to the catastrophes of the future Tribulation period. But how long before the end time events is not specified by the Lord.¹⁶

McClain offers a satisfying explanation for the relationship of the destruction of the temple to the end of the age. "In conformity with the general method of predictive prophecy, our Lord pictured together future events which would be outrolled separately in their historical fulfillment. This method is not something wholly arbitrary but has a gracious purpose. Within certain limits, it leaves room in history for the interplay of both divine sovereignty and human freedom. The future event is always certain, but the time element (with certain important exceptions) has elasticity. This is particularly true of the present church age. Thus, it should not be surprising to find interpreters confusing the destruction of

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part II: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 207; Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, 435; Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," 159, 161, 163; Price, *Coming Last Days Temple*, 280. But Hagner (a nondispensationalist) also holds the same view. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 688.

¹⁵ This description in Luke parallels Matt 24:4-8. See the discussion below on why the latter verses are a reference to Daniel's seventieth seven.

¹⁶ Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 17-18.

Jerusalem with the end of the age. For, viewed from the standpoint of Jewish opportunity and responsibility, the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 might have led directly to the end of the age, as we shall see in considering the Book of Acts.”¹⁷ Hodges maintains the same viewpoint: “The destruction of the Temple *could have been* part of the end times, because the kingdom of God is re-offered to Israel in Acts (see Acts 1:6-7; 3:19-26)” (italics original).¹⁸

Yet it is true that in the Olivet Discourse Jesus does not take up the AD 70 event. However, this does not necessitate that the first question of the disciples remains unanswered in the Discourse.¹⁹ Contrarily, it is likely that Jesus answered both questions of Matt 24:3, but in reverse order. From a literary point of view, Matthew structures these as a chiasm. It is well known that Matthew brings order and precision to his Gospel.²⁰ Chiasmic structures in Matthew are quite common²¹ and are fully appropriate in light of his precision. The chiasm in Matt 24:3-44 is as follows:

A¹ Question: “When will these things happen?” (v 3a)

B¹ Question: “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (v 3b)

¹⁷ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 365-66.

¹⁸ Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 18.

¹⁹ Carson asks why Matthew retains the first question if Jesus does not answer it. He also argues that Jesus’ answer is opaque or even deceptive if it does not interact with the disciples’ question. Carson, “Matthew,” 494-95.

²⁰ Ellis calls the author “meticulous Matthew,” suggesting his precision is similar to the precision of a Swiss watch; Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and Message* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974), 19. See also Donald Senior, *What Are They Saying about Matthew?* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 22. One example is the orderly arrangement of the genealogy in chapter 1, which strikes the reader almost immediately.

²¹ Gary W. Derickson, “Matthew’s Chiasmic Structure and Its Dispensational Implications,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (October-December 2006): 423-37. Chiasmus is seen in the Sermon on the Mount by Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 250-69. For chiasmus throughout the entire Gospel, see Ellis, *Matthew*, 10-13; J. C. Fenton, “Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew,” *Studia Evangelica IV* (1957): 174-79.

B² Answer: “What will be the sign of My coming and of the end of the age?” (vv 4-35)

A² Answer: “When will these things happen?” (vv 36-44)²²

The second question of the disciples is answered first. The use of *sēmeion* (“sign”) in v 30 together with “and they will see” (*kai ipsontai*) does seem unavoidably the primary answer to the question of the disciples for the sign (*sēmeion*) of His coming. But undoubtedly the central force of 24:15 to the 15-28 unit, together with *hotan oun idēte* (“therefore, whenever you see”), makes the abomination of desolation a potential sign. And if vv 15-28 are eschatological in scope and immediately precede the Second Coming of Christ (vv 29-31), v 15 outlines a sign of the consummation of the age.

C. DANIEL’S SEVENTIETH SEVEN AND MATTHEW 24:4-31

From the inception of the Discourse at 24:3, Matthew depicts the future seventieth “seven” (“week”) of Daniel 9:24-27. In vv 4-14, the Lord surveys the entire seven-year tribulation period. It should not be surprising that the Discourse, right from its start, focuses on the seventieth seven of Daniel. First, Daniel is the only OT prophet specifically mentioned in the entire Discourse (Matt 24:15).²³ Jesus is likely citing Daniel 9:27²⁴ as a chronological key to identifying the end time events He describes in the Discourse. We should suspect that much more of Jesus’ Discourse has Daniel as its background,²⁵ especially the prophet’s seven-

²² Since in the Discourse four extended parables (24:45-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46) follow 24:44, a natural division can be made between vv 44 and 45. See also the quotation in the text at note 62 below.

²³ Daniel is numbered among an elite group of seven OT authors mentioned by name in the NT: the others are Moses, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Joel.

²⁴ Beda Rigaux, “ΒΑΕΛΥΓΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΠΙΗΜΩΣΕΩΣ,” *Biblica* 40 (1959): 678-79; Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 153-54.

²⁵ The Discourse makes an extensive use of the title, “Son of Man” (Matt 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). “The title ‘Son of man’ is never associated with the human nature of our Lord, but with the place of His fulfillment of the OT expectations of the ‘latter days’ and the ‘day of God.’” William White Jr, “Wrath,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 5:994. A common understanding is to see Daniel 7 as the primary source behind the title “Son of Man.” Richard N. Longenecker, “Son

tieth seven. This is also implied by the exhortation, “Let the reader understand” (v 15).²⁶ Since both Mark (13:14) and Matthew record this statement, it is more likely a part of the words of Jesus instructing the listeners with regard to the reading of Daniel than a remark by Matthew and Mark concerning the reading of their respective Gospels. Daniel is replete with terminology and comments about understanding and wisdom.²⁷ Perhaps this is picked up elsewhere in the Discourse (cf. *phronimos*, “wise,” in Matt 24:45; 25:2, 4, 8-9). Further, the word *anaginōskō* (“read”) is used elsewhere for the reading of the OT, even when no scriptural text is mentioned (e.g., Mark 2:25).²⁸ Since the Book of Daniel is specifically mentioned in the verse, a reference to the reading of Daniel is natural. Jesus was appealing to His listeners to gain wisdom and understanding about His Olivet prophecy from a background reading of Daniel.

Second, Jesus’ use in v 8 of *ōdin* (“birth pains”), a technical term for the future day of the Lord,²⁹ also supports the interpretation that Daniel’s

of Man’ as a Self-Designation of Jesus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (summer 1969): 156; Richard N. Longenecker, “‘Son of Man’ Imagery: Some Implications for Theology and Discipleship,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (winter 1975): 10-11; David L. Turner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 11:316. Keener adds other references to Daniel in Matthew 24, such as the temple’s destruction (Dan 9:27), the reference to rumors of war (Dan 11:44), and the tribulation (Dan 12:1). Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 573.

²⁶ Gundry holds that Dan 12:9-10 is the primary reference behind the command to let the reader understand. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 1994), 481.

²⁷ As an example, *hokmā* (“wisdom”) occurs 10 times; *bīn* (“understanding”) occurs 29 times; *sākal* (“insight”) occurs 29 times; *tā’ām* (“discretion”) occurs 12 times; and *yāda’* (“know”) is used 43 times. *bīn*, *sākal*, and *yāda’* are used a total of 4 times in Dan 9:23, 25—the immediately preceding verses to Dan 9:27.

²⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 532 n. 81.

²⁹ Showers, *Maranatha*, 23-25. The use of the term “birth pains” (*ōdin*) seems to rule out perspectives that regard vv 4-14 or vv 4-8 as being fulfilled in the present church age. Additionally, the perspective excludes the direct involvement of Jewish believers in Israel: “You will be hearing of wars and ru-

seventieth seven is the central concern beginning at 24:4. It should be noted that the future day of the Lord must begin prior to a final conflict at the close of or immediately after the Tribulation.³⁰ Thomas writes,

By using 'day of the Lord' terminology to describe the Great Tribulation, Christ includes the Tribulation within the day of the Lord (cf. Matt 24:21 with Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Joel 2:2). This time of trial at the outset of the earthly day of the Lord will thus not be brief, but comparable to a woman's labor before giving birth to a child (Isa 13:8; 26:17-19; 66:7ff.)... Armageddon and the series of tribulation visitations prior to it are inseparable from each other (Rev 6-19). If Christ's triumphant return to earth (Rev 19:11-21) is part of the day of the Lord, as all admit, so special divine dealings preparatory to it must also be part of it. God's eschatological wrath is a unit. It is quite arbitrary to hypothesize two kinds of future wrath, one prior to the day of the Lord and another within it (cf. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 46, 54).³¹

Therefore, Jesus' reference to "these things" (*tauta*) in v 8 ("all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs") picks up the term used by the disciples (v 3) and fills the term with a perspective that reflects the seventieth seven of Daniel.

Third, in 1 Thess 5:2-3 Paul used the same Greek word (*ōdin*, "birth pangs") to describe the future day of the Lord. It is doubtful that the word would be used two different ways in similar eschatological contexts.

mors of wars. See that you are not frightened..." (24:6). Perhaps because Israel will be protected from invasion by the corrupt treaty described in Dan 9:27, Israel will not be at war during the first half of Daniel's seventieth seven. They will only "hear" of these wars. Others who understand the future seventieth "seven" of Daniel 9 to be the exclusive purview of Matt 24:4-28 are Barbieri, "Matthew," 76; Benware, *End Times Prophecy*, 318; Ice, "Olivet Discourse," 166-67; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 279; Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (Fall 2002): 193; Ron Bigalke, "The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time," *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 120-23.

³⁰ Contra Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 77, 95.

³¹ Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 2:281.

Fourth, the second seal (peace taken from the earth; Rev 6:3-4), the third seal (famine; Rev 6:5-6), and the fourth seal (massive deaths; Rev 6:7-8) judgments of Revelation 6 parallel Matt 24:5-8.³² Since the seal judgments take place in the first half of the Tribulation (and probably into the second half), then Matt 24:4-8 also takes place within this time frame.³³

Concerning the first half of the Tribulation, Jesus instructs Jewish believers in Israel not to be frightened (v 6). But in the second half of the Tribulation, He instructs them to flee (v 16) because of persecution that arises as a result of the abomination of desolation (v 15). Therefore, *tote* (“then”) of v 9 is best understood as a transition to the second half of the Tribulation when Jewish believers will be hated by all nations. Verses 9-14 reach the climax of the Tribulation as indicated by the phrase “and then the end [*to telos*] will come” (v 14).

By the literary device of recapitulation, 24:15 returns to the midpoint of the Tribulation. As is common in premillennial exegesis, the abomination of desolation refers to the future desecration of the rebuilt Jerusalem temple by the first Beast of Revelation 13. This marks the middle of the seventieth seven (week) of Daniel 9. Additionally, Jesus’ teaching that “there will be a great Tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (v 21) identifies the Great Tribulation as within the day of the Lord.³⁴ The phrase, “*immediately* [*eutheōs*, italics added] after the Tribulation” (v 29), helps establish the

³² If the first seal judgment (Rev 6:1-2) is the Antichrist or Beast of Revelation 13, then an additional parallel exists between the seal judgments and Matt 24:4-8. But that the conqueror of the first seal judgment is Christ rather than Antichrist is more probable. Cf. Zane C. Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (October-December 1962): 324-34.

³³ Turner, a pretribulationist, holds that Matt 24:4-14 focuses on the present age. As a result, he reasons, “If the view presented here is correct, these horsemen also portray events that typify the church’s present experience in the world, not the final days of tribulation at the end of the age.” Turner, “Gospel of Matthew,” 310.

³⁴ “Since there can only be one unparalleled time of trouble, and since that unparalleled time of trouble is identified with all three (the Time of Jacob’s Trouble [Jer 30:7], the Great Tribulation [Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21], and the Day of the Lord [Joel 2:1-2]), we can conclude that the Time of Jacob’s Trouble and the Great Tribulation will be included within the Day of the Lord,” Showers, *Maranatha*, 42.

eschatological purview of the 4-28 unit by eliminating any potential time gap between vv 4-28 and v 29. This makes impossible any interpretation that would understand vv 4-28 as the AD 70 event, but 29-31 as the Second Coming.

The relationship of Matt 24:4-31 to the seventieth seven of Daniel 9 is shown here:

III. DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH "SEVEN" IN MATT 24:4-31

The First 3 ½ Years of the Seven

- "the beginning of birth pangs" (Matt 24:8)
- "that is not yet the end" (Matt 24:6)

The Second 3 ½ Years of the Seven

- "then they will deliver you to tribulation" (Matt 24:9)
- "and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14)
- "when you see the Abomination of Desolation" (Matt 24:15)
- "there will be a great tribulation" (Matt 24:21)

An obvious climax has been reached in the Discourse at vv 29-31. From vv 4-28, Jesus has revealed the events that lead up to His coming. In vv 29-31, He describes His coming and the regathering of Israel—events that end history as we know it and begin the new age of the millennial kingdom. The outline of events is now complete.³⁵ But at v 32, Jesus turns His attention to the timing of His return. It is as near to the Tribulation signs as summer is to the spring budding of the fig tree. "All these things" (24:33, 34) collects together the chronological events of 24:4-28.³⁶

"This generation" (v 34) assumes the viewpoint of Jesus as a prophet and refers to the generation of the Tribulation period, particularly the

³⁵ J. Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Context in Mt. XXIV-XXV," in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu. Rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972), 324, states, "Everything has now been said."

³⁶ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 715; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:366.

Jews. These signs and the return of Christ will both be within a single generation.³⁷ The initial impression from these verses is that once the Tribulation signs begin, the Second Coming is highly predictable.

It is assumed from 1 Thessalonians 4–5 and applied to this series of articles that the Rapture and the day of the Lord are coterminous. Concerning 1 Thess 5:9, Thomas writes,

The only way to hold that [the Rapture]...is an imminent prospect is to see it as simultaneous with the beginning of the divine judgment against earth. Only if the Rapture coincides with the beginning of the day of the Lord can both be imminent and the salvation of those in Christ coincide with the coming of wrath to the rest (v 9)...Were either the Rapture or the day of the Lord to precede the other, one or the other would cease to be an imminent prospect to which the 'thief in the night' and related expressions (1:10; 4:15, 17) are appropriate. That both are any-moment possibilities is why Paul can talk about these two in successive paragraphs. This is how the Lord's personal coming as well as the 'day's' coming can be compared to a thief (2 Peter 3:4, 10; Rev 3:3, 11; 16:15).³⁸

³⁷ For this pretribulationist view, see John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part IV: How Near Is the Lord's Return?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January-March 1972): 24; Price, *Coming Last Days Temple*, 279-81; Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 23; Mike Stallard, "A Review of R. C. Sproul's *The Last Days according to Jesus: An Analysis of Moderate Preterism: Part II*," *Conservative Theological Journal* 6 (August 2002): 184; Thomas Ice, "(Part 31) An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, available from <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=229>; Internet; accessed October 2007.

³⁸ Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," 2:281. Cf. also Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 230. Since Daniel's seventieth seven technically begins with the signing of a deceptive covenant with Israel (Dan 9:27), some understand that there will be a period of time between the Rapture and the beginning of Daniel's seventieth seven. E.g., (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Is There a Pre-Wrath Rapture?" *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 393). On the other hand, if the covenant is a secret covenant as possibly suggested by Isa 28:15, the beginning of Daniel's seventieth seven may not be known until after the fact, i.e., it too will be imminent. For a summary of views on a potential gap of time between the Rapture/day of the Lord and Daniel's seventieth seven, see Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 208 n. 41.

Elsewhere Thomas writes, “Both the return of Christ for His church and the return of Christ to inflict wrath and tribulation on the world are imminent.”³⁹

IV. THE ROLE OF VERSE 36 IN MATTHEW 24

Posttribulationists and most pretribulationists propose that Matt 24:36 addresses the same event as the Second Advent of vv 29-31. This investigation suggests that while the Second Coming of Christ is as highly predictable through preceding signs as summer is predictable to the signs of the springtime budding of a fig tree (vv 32-36), vv 36-44 present a contrasting event. Verses 36-44 describe the imminent, unpredictable coming of the day of the Lord and the accompanying pretribulation Rapture. As such, the Lord now answers the first question of the disciples (v 3) about *when* the end time events will commence. When the events within the day of the Lord are present, then Christ’s coming is near. But the timing of the day of the Lord itself and the accompanying pretribulation Rapture cannot be known (v 36).⁴⁰

It must be observed that more than just v 36 alludes to the fact that the time of the Parousia is unknowable. The theme of “not knowing” recurs throughout 24:36–25:13 and is set in full contrast with the fact that the disciples can “know that he is near” (v 33 ESV) according to vv 32-35. This fact establishes the reality of the quandary between what precedes v 36 and vv 36-44. The diagram below presents visually this contrast. Note that five of the eight statements about the inability of the disciples to know the time of Christ’s Parousia are found in vv 36-44.⁴¹

³⁹ Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 192.

⁴⁰ When Jesus said, “But of that day and hour no one knows,” He uses a metonymy of adjunct for subject. The “day and hour” (subject) is put for the “coming (timing) of the day and hour” (adjunct). No one knows *when* “that day” comes.

⁴¹ Not included in the chart is an imperatival use of *ginōskō* (“but *know* this,” v 43), commanding the disciples to know that the householder would have been prepared if he had advanced warning of the coming of a thief (v 43). If readiness is essential for one who might know when a thief is coming (cf. the second class condition, contrary to fact), then readiness is all the more required for the thieflike coming of Jesus that cannot be known (a certain fact). “The householder would have watched, if he had known; the disciples must watch,

The Disciples <i>Can</i> Know He Is Near (24:32-35)
<p>“as soon as its branch...puts out its leaves, <i>you know</i>” (<i>ginōskete</i>, v 32 ESV) “When you see...<i>you know</i> that he is near” (<i>ginōskete</i>, v 33 ESV)</p>
The Disciples <i>Cannot</i> Know and <i>Cannot</i> Anticipate He Is Near (24:36-25:13)
<p>“But of that day and hour <i>no one knows</i>” (<i>oudeis oiden</i>, v 36) “and <i>did not know</i>” (<i>ouk egnōsan</i>, v 39) “<i>you do not know</i>” (<i>ouk oidate</i>, v 42) “if the head of the house <i>had known</i>” (<i>ēdei</i>, v 43) “when <i>you do not think</i>” (<i>ou dokeite</i>, v 44)⁴² “<i>he does not expect</i>” (<i>ou prosdoka</i>, v 50) “an hour which <i>he does not know</i>” (<i>ou ginōskei</i>, v 50) “<i>you do not know</i> the day nor the hour” (<i>ouk oidate</i>, 25:13)</p>

A. DOES VERSE 36 REFER TO THE COMING OF CHRIST IN VERSES 29-31?

If v 36 refers to the same events as detailed in vv 32-35, which in turn refer back to the “coming” of vv 29-31, a serious problem arises for an eschatological perspective of the passage. The problem is as difficult for pretribulationists as it is for posttribulationists. Both groups generally view the signs mentioned in vv 15-28 as describing the second half of Daniel’s seventieth seven. If this time period comprises three-and-one-half years (Rev 12:14) or precisely 1260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6), a fairly accurate pinpointing of Christ’s return would be possible. Perhaps the exact second would still be incalculable. But would Christ’s Second Advent come as a total surprise like the breaking in of a thief (Matt 24:43-44)? The thief imagery appears to point toward an imminence concerning

because they do *not* know” (original emphasis), Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 327 n. 50.

⁴² Nolland calls the phrase, “do not think,” a weaker form of “do not know” in v 39. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 995.

the Lord's Parousia. But as Thomas remarks, "If signs must occur before His coming, His coming is not imminent."⁴³

Pretribulationists, in their defense of a precise three-and-a-half year time reference for vv 15-28 (the second half of Daniel's seventieth seven), have often chosen to downplay the imminence described in vv 36-44. Walvoord takes this approach:

To illustrate the approximate time of the second coming, He used the historic flood in the time of Noah. While those observing Noah building the ark could anticipate that a flood was impending, it was obvious that the flood could not come until the ark was completed. So also with the second coming. Unlike the Rapture, which has no preceding signs and therefore could occur any time, the second coming of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom cannot occur until the preceding signs have been fulfilled. When the ark was completed and Noah and his family and the animals were in it, those observing could anticipate that the predicted flood could occur any day. But even then, they could not predict the day nor the hour.⁴⁴

Walvoord understands the Second Coming to be marginally unexpected and incalculable in that no one will know the exact time of Christ's return.⁴⁵ Pre-wrath theorists and posttribulationists such as Gundry are not satisfied that the tension between signs (vv 4-35) and imminence (vv 36-44) is resolved by Walvoord's solution. In its place, they propose that the seventieth seven (week) itself is shortened according to the Lord's statement in Matt 24:22.⁴⁶ In Gundry's opinion, this resolves general predictability (vv 29-31) and specific unpredictability (v 36).⁴⁷

Many modern scholars take issue with anyone who solves the difficulty of v 36 by suggesting that the general time of Christ's return can be known (general predictability), while the specific time cannot (specific

⁴³ Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 193.

⁴⁴ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 191.

⁴⁵ Walvoord, "Olivet Discourse: Part IV," 25.

⁴⁶ Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 108-12; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42-43.

⁴⁷ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42-43.

unpredictability).⁴⁸ Premillennialists such as Carson and Blomberg escape the impasse of v 36 by suggesting that the events of Matt 24:4-28 span the interadvent age and have now been sufficiently fulfilled. Therefore, the time of Christ's return is incalculable since there are no specific unfulfilled prophecies that precede the Parousia.⁴⁹ If vv 4-28 describe the interadvent age and not Daniel's seventieth seven, the word "immediately" that begins v 29 ("immediately [*eutheōs*] after the Tribulation of those days") becomes innocuous. Jesus could have simply said, "After the tribulation of those days...." What else could happen between an interadvent age and a final advent?

Other pretribulationists reason that it will be the unsaved of the Tribulation that will not know the time of Christ's coming.⁵⁰ But v 36 sounds comprehensive when it states, "no one knows." Glasscock holds that even believers of the tribulation period will not know the time of His return. "Even though the Tribulation will clearly be in progress, the overwhelming circumstances will so distract from focus on the Lord's promises (not unlike the despair of the disciples after the resurrection, Luke 24) that even those who are sealed and who are faithful will not be able to predict His appearance."⁵¹

Ice believes that v 36 addresses only the time up to the Rapture. After the Rapture of the church, then believers will know the time of Christ's coming.⁵² This solves the dilemma of harmonizing v 36 with the preceding context. But if v 36 addresses the time up to the Rapture, then the church is being addressed, not Israel, in the Tribulation. This would open the door to reconsider vv 36-44 as addressing the church, not Israel. But pretribulationists want to avoid any reference to the church in the Discourse lest it lead to posttribulationism.

⁴⁸ "Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ's return to a generation or a year or even a few days' period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed." Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365. Cf. also Carson, "Matthew," 508; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 716.

⁴⁹ Carson, "Matthew," 490, 495; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 370.

⁵⁰ Showers, *Maranatha*, 179.

⁵¹ Glasscock, *Matthew*, 477.

⁵² Thomas Ice, "(Part 33) An Interpretation of Matthew 24-25," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, available from <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=236>; Internet; accessed October 2007. Cf. also George E. Meisinger, "The Parable of the Fig Tree: Matt 24:32-36," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1996): 3.

It is this apparent conflict between the instructions to know the approaching end by its evidential signs (vv 4-31, 32-35)⁵³ and vv 36-44 portraying a sudden, unexpected return of the Lord that motivates Moo to write:

There is no basis for any transition from the posttribulational aspect of the Parousia in Matt 24:31-35 (or -36) to its pretribulational aspect in verses 36ff. Therefore, all interpreters, whether they believe the discourse is addressed to the church or to Israel, face the difficulty of explaining how an advent heralded by specific signs can yet be one of which it is said, “no one knows the day and hour” (*italics original*).⁵⁴

B. THE TRANSITIONAL NATURE OF VERSE 36

The Introductory peri de. Contrary to Moo, evidence for a transition at v 36 can be produced. If so, then a transition can be made from the posttribulational coming of Christ in vv 29-31 to concerns that initiate the Tribulation/day of the Lord in vv 36-44. When Jesus said that no one knows that day and hour except the Father alone,⁵⁵ Matthew records the introduction of the statement with *peri de* (“now concerning”). It is well established that when *peri de* stands absolutely at the beginning of a sentence it marks a new section of thought. Pretribulationists have noticed the *peri de* construction in 1 Thess 5:1. This precise construction is recognized as introducing a new yet complementary subject with the 1 Thess 4:13-18 presentation of the pretribulational Rapture.⁵⁶ Although

⁵³ Meisinger mentions (but does not list) eleven specific signs in 24:3-28 that lead up to the Second Coming. Meisinger, “Parable of the Fig Tree,” 3.

⁵⁴ Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 209.

⁵⁵ The majority text does not have the words *oude ho huios* (“nor the Son”). For a favorable disposition toward this reading in v 36, see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text: A Review Article,” *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983): 125. Since the phrase is found in Mark 13:32, the Lord did declare human ignorance of “that day and hour.” If v 36 specifies the same event as vv 29-31, it seems strange—given the chronological details of vv 4-30a that Jesus predicted and therefore fully understood—that He would exclude Himself from knowing the day of His Second Coming.

⁵⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, “*The Church and the Tribulation: A Review*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 175. Ryrie adds 1 Thess 4:9, 13 to the list of passages that use the prepositional construction to mark a new subject. For further insight on this construction and its effect on pretribulational exegesis in 1 Thessaloni-

peri de introduces a new subject at 5:1, it also carries on the eschatological concerns of 4:13-18.⁵⁷ The identical perspective may be true with the *peri de* of Matt 24:36.

Thomas is one of the few who has noted this transition with *peri de* at Matt 24:36.

The (*de*) that begins v 36 must be transitional because the thirty-sixth verse changes the discussion of signs preceding the coming to emphasize that no signs will precede the *parousia*. *Peri de*, (24:36), is a frequent device for introducing a change from one phase of a subject to another phase of the same subject or from one subject to another subject (cf. Matt 22:31; Mark 12:26; 13:32; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor 7:1; 7:25 [sic]; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12; 1 Thess 4:9, 13; 5:1). The verse introduces an aspect of the coming different from the one pointed to in Matt 24:29-31. The verb depicting the coming in 24:30 is *erchomenon*, but the noun designating the 'coming' in 24:37 is *parousia*, a term that easily covers a wider span.⁵⁸

In other words, the "coming" of 24:37 may reference the Rapture, not the Second Coming, since the verse uses the broader Greek term, *parousia*.

Waterman has also observed the use of *peri de* in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5. In the latter passage, Paul said that no one at Thessalonica needed to be informed about the times and seasons "because they knew perfectly well that the time of the Lord's coming was unknown (1 Thess 5:1-2). A different expression, but one with the same meaning, was used by Jesus, 'but concerning that day and hour...no one knows' (Matt 24:36). Since Jesus introduces this remark by the use of *peri de*, it may very well be that Paul uses these words in 1 Thess 5:1...because

ans, see Zane C. Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and the Rapture," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October-December 2000), 25 n. 10.

⁵⁷ Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," 280.

⁵⁸ Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 193-94 n. 8. For further support of the transitional nature of *peri de*, see M. J. Harris, "Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:1203.

Jesus used them.”⁵⁹ The parallel between 1 Thess 5:1-11 and Matt 24:36-44 is instructive as will be seen in the following article in this series.

Several other scholars have noted a major division in the text between vv 35 and 36.⁶⁰ According to Nolland, v 36 certainly goes better thematically with the following than with the preceding material.⁶¹ In fact, all of vv 36-44 form a well-knit unit. Lambrecht writes of this unity,

The idea throughout these verses is one and the same. Verse 37 joins v 35 [sic, v 36] with a *gar* and, together with the day-of-Noah comparison, it confirms again the unknown day or hour. Verses 38-39 elaborate the comparison and vv 40-41 illustrate the two possible attitudes that an unexpected parousia will then (*tote*) meet with. Verse 42 [sic v 42] concludes (*oun*) and ties in with v 36: The Lord will come on an unknown day. But v 44 also concludes (*dia touto*) and contains the same idea...⁶²

Since v 36 and v 44 speak so similarly of the same subject, he concludes that they form a frame for the unit.⁶³

In light of this marked transition at v 36, it is certainly possible to conjecture that the Lord is making a transition to the subject of the initial onset of the day of the Lord and the pretribulational Rapture. Again, Thomas argues, “But in Matt 24:36 Jesus turns the page to speak of the absence of any signs that might signal the beginning of Daniel’s seventieth week.”⁶⁴

“*That Day and Hour.*” Other factors combine with the *peri de* to demonstrate a change of subject from Christ’s posttribulational coming to the subject of when the day of the Lord itself will come. If the phrase “that day and hour” points to the precise moment of the Second Coming (vv 29-31), any reference to the initial commencement of the wrath of

⁵⁹ G. Henry Waterman, “The Source of Paul’s Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (Spring 1975): 109.

⁶⁰ Dallas M. Roark, “The Great Eschatological Discourse,” *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1964): 123; Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 325.

⁶¹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 990, 991, 993; also Carson, “Matthew,” 507.

⁶² Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 327.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 193. Thomas, however, does not directly state that the church is addressed or that the rapture is taught in the Discourse. He reserves this teaching for John 14:3.

the day of the Lord (tribulation period) is unwarranted. However, if the phrase calls to mind the arrival of the day of the Lord as Paul defined it (1 Thessalonians 5), then its parameters encompass the coterminous pre-tribulational Rapture and the surprise inception of Daniel's seventieth seven.

Brown, a moderate preterist, holds that v 36 are now fulfilled (i.e., they describe the AD 70 events) and marks the future return of Christ. This is how moderate preterism harmonizes vv 4-35 with v 36. Nevertheless he observes an interesting distinction:

Such an emphatic denial of any communicable knowledge of 'that day and hour' (Matt 24:36) is in striking contrast to the specific indication 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' (v 29). This is an additional reason why the event referred to in vv 33 and 36 cannot be the same as the one referred to in v 30. Indeed, Matthew distinguishes the two events terminologically. The period of *thlipsis* ["Tribulation"] is characterized by the plural expression 'those days' (vv 19, 22, 29), whereas the singular is used for the close of the age: 'that day' (v 36).⁶⁵

While Brown incorrectly applies the singular, "that day," to the Second Coming, his observation of the shift from the plural "those days" to the singular "that day" implies a change of subject. The clear inference is given that a new and distinct "day" is being described.⁶⁶

What then is the meaning of "that day and hour"? Many commentators correctly identify "that day" as the events of the great day of Yahweh often referred to in the OT prophets, i.e., the OT day of the Lord.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 4 (1979): 26 n. 62. Gentry also argues for moderate preterism based on the change of language at 24:36. Kenneth L. Gentry, "Dispensationalism as a Non-Prophet Movement," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 5 (May 1992), 5:5, available from http://www.entrewave.com/free-books/docs/243a_43e.htm; Internet; accessed October 2007.

⁶⁶ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1971), 232; J. A. O'Flynn, "The Eschatological Discourse," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 18 (1951): 280-81.

⁶⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 378; Ford, *Abomination of Desolation*, 65; Turner, "Matthew," 319. See the following passages where "that day" specifically occurs with the phrase, "day of the Lord" in the New American Standard Bible: Ezek 30:3, 9; Joel 3:14, 18; Zeph 1:7-15.

The word *hēmera* (“day”) may speak of an extended period of time in distinction to a specific twenty-four hour period.⁶⁸ This NT word as it relates to the OT day of the Lord portrays an imminent event.⁶⁹ Paul uses *hēmera* for the imminent day of the Lord in 1 Thess 5:4: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day (*hēmera*) would overtake you like a thief.” Once again, Paul’s use of “day” here is likely connected with the Lord’s in Matthew 24.⁷⁰

A similar significance can be attributed to the word *hōra* (“hour”). While it may be used of a moment of time, it may also represent a span of time.⁷¹ In John 16:21, *hōra* comes together with the image of a woman in labor or birth pains (“Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour [*hōra*] has come”). The following clause uses *thlipsis* (“Tribulation”) in the statement, “but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish [*thlipsis*]...” The verse has eschatological significance since Jesus mentions His coming again in v 22.⁷² Of more significance is Rev 3:10. In this verse, where the church is promised to be kept from the “hour of testing,” *hōra* has reference to the eschatological Tribulation period and therefore to the day of the Lord.

Beasley-Murray believes that either word by itself could refer to the day of the Lord, but not in this combination. Instead, a more narrow and exact time is indicated, i.e., the moment of the Parousia.⁷³ But if the Parousia is coterminous with the arrival of the day of the Lord, and if the Parousia does not involve a narrow moment but a span of time (as it

⁶⁸ G. Braumann, “*hēmera*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:887.

⁶⁹ C. Brown, “*hēmera*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:891, where the following references are cited: Isa 10:27; 27:1; 29:19; Hag 2:23; Zech 6:10.

⁷⁰ Waterman, “Source of Paul’s Teaching,” 109.

⁷¹ Cf. H. C. Hahn, “*hōra*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:847-48.

⁷² The interconnection in v 21 of *thlipsis* (cf. Matt 24:9, 21, 29) and labor pains of a woman (cf. “birth pangs,” Matt 24:8) makes the unity of Matt 24:4-28 nearly certain. One part of the prophecy (Matt 24:4-8 or 24:4-14) cannot be about the interadvent age, while the other part (vv 5-28 or vv 15-28) about the eschatological day of the Lord.

⁷³ George R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 109-10.

does),⁷⁴ then the point Beasley-Murray makes is gratuitous. Moore contends that the demonstrative (“*that day*”) confirms the OT background.⁷⁵

Davies and Allison may be correct in their analysis: “‘That day’ is the OT’s ‘day of the Lord,’ which in the NT is the *parousia*; and ‘that hour’ is a further specification that is effectively synonymous.”⁷⁶ Yet, in conventional language and culture, hour is more narrow than day. Perhaps the addition of “hour” to “day” (“that day and [*kai*] hour,” v 36) reflects the suddenness and imminence of the Parousia.⁷⁷ Numerous contexts require no more than a second or two for *hōra* (“hour”), often translated as a “moment” in modern translations.⁷⁸

All of these evidences confirm the case that the day of the Lord/Parousia is in view in v 36. Thomas concludes, “In other words, 24:36 speaks of a different arrival from the arrival signaled by ‘all these things,’ twice referred to in connection with the parable of the fig tree in 24:32-34. After 24:36 Jesus looks at the events of Daniel’s seventieth week as a whole and how the beginning of that week will catch everyone by surprise....”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ See the quote above by Thomas concerning the use of *peri de* at v 36. Hodges (*Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 26) also agrees: “The term for coming [*parousia*] does not simply refer to an *arrival*. It clearly covers a *span of time*” (italics original).

⁷⁵ Arthur L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 99-100. Moore, however, believes that Jesus taught in 24:36 that no one knew the nature of the day of the Lord. This is impossible since the Old and New Testament everywhere describe the nature of the day of the Lord. The context makes it clear that Jesus has in mind the time that the day of the Lord will come.

⁷⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 378. While Matt 24:36 has “day and hour,” the parallel in Mark 13:32 has “day *or* hour” (italics added). This may rule out “day” as completely synonymous to “hour.”

⁷⁷ Cf. Nelson, “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34,” 385 n. 13.

⁷⁸ In the NIV, NASV, ESV, or NET, *hōra* is translated “[at that (very), that, for a] moment,” or “at once” in Matt 8:13; 9:22; 17:18; 26:55; Luke 2:38; 12:12; 24:33; Acts 16:18, 33; 22:13; Gal. 2:5. This rendering would not be inappropriate for Matt 24:44b, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour [moment] when you do not think He will.”

⁷⁹ Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 194.

V. CONCLUSION

In light of these findings, it can be concluded that in the Olivet Discourse a change of subject from Matt 24:4-35 is introduced at v 36. The Tribulation judgments that comprise the day of the Lord have been unfolded (vv 4-28). But when will these judgments begin? The “when” question is now answered. Jesus instructs His disciples that the coming of the day of the Lord is imminent. As such, the time of its arrival cannot be known by anyone other than the Father (v 36). Paul’s teaching on the impending arrival of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1-2) is in full agreement with Jesus’ teaching on the subject.

Peter’s teachings about the day of the Lord also harmonize well with Matt 24:36-44. Matthew 24:35, with its mention of the passing of the heavens and the earth, has obliquely broached the subject of the day of the Lord. Then in v 36, Jesus mentions the imminent coming of the day of the Lord, followed by the short parable of a thief in the night. It is this thief imagery that forms a central focus in the Lord’s teaching in 24:43-44.

Peter also brings together the destruction of the heavens and earth, coming of the day of the Lord, and the thief imagery. Being informed by the Lord’s teaching in the Olivet Discourse, Peter wrote, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar... and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10). If indeed Jesus addresses the imminent arrival of the day of the Lord in v 36, it would be quite natural for Him to address the pretribulational and pre-day of the Lord Rapture in vv 39-44. Paul addresses the same subjects side by side, just in reverse order (Rapture, 1 Thess 4:13-18; day of the Lord, 1 Thess 5:1-11).

The following articles in this series will develop the Noahic illustration, the interpretation of those who are “taken” or “left” (24:37-41), the thief imagery, and the Lord’s warning to be alert and watchful (24:42-44).

A CRITIQUE OF
BONHOEFFER SPEAKS TODAY:
FOLLOWING JESUS AT ALL COSTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and writings appeal to many evangelical Christians. His personal courage in the face of the Nazi regime has won him many adherents. His willingness to endure the hardships of tyranny to the point of giving his life (executed in 1944) has drawn well deserved admiration. Indeed, such bravery and authenticity is commendable under any circumstances.

As is often the case in religion and politics, however, martyrdom covers a multitude of sins. As much as one may admire the man, his doctrinal errors, which were serious, should not be overlooked. Christians must distinguish between the bravery of the man and the corpus of his beliefs. Sadly, that distinction has faded.

In his very interesting book, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs*,¹ Mark DeVine, professor at Midwestern Theological Seminary, seeks to draw his fellow conservative evangelicals into the Bonhoeffer orb. After a succinct chapter surveying Bonhoeffer's life, DeVine makes a compelling case for following Bonhoeffer in several areas.

Early in his theological studies, Bonhoeffer experienced what DeVine called an "awakening." "For the first time I discovered the Bible," Bonhoeffer wrote. Before this discovery, he added, "I had not yet

¹ Mark DeVine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at all Costs*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005).

become a Christian.” That conversion led to a strong “Back to the Bible” foundation from which all of his theology would develop.² DeVine rightly argues that Bonhoeffer’s desire to let the Bible be the ultimate authority over human experience should be emulated. His critique of “immediacy-dependent approaches” rebukes the modern church that is immersed in theological pragmatism.³ “Do not get into the habit of interpreting Scripture in the light of personal experience,” Bonhoeffer wrote. Along these same lines, he stressed that the mentality that gives way to spiritual hunches disguised as the leading of the Lord has created confusion in the Church especially in the area of discovering God’s will. Bonhoeffer’s use of the Bible as the principal means to finding God’s will is similar to Garry Friesen’s perspective in his *Decision Making and the Will of God*.⁴ One can also admire Bonhoeffer’s balanced approach to the issue of Christian relevance. The modern evangelical obsession with relevance is very much out-of-balance. The gospel message itself cannot be adjusted for relevance sake. “Where the question of relevance becomes the theme of theology,” Bonhoeffer wrote, “we can be certain that the cause has already been betrayed and sold out...” Moreover, he added, “the intention should not be to justify Christianity in this present age, but to justify the present age before the Christian message.”⁵ DeVine aptly comments that Bonhoeffer understood that “felt relevance does not define truth; truth defines true relevance.”⁶ This is advice that many Seeker and Emergent Church proponents would do well to heed.

Bonhoeffer’s apparent biblical fidelity is the stage on which Mark DeVine seeks to showcase the need for a return to his teachings. He repeatedly asserts, for example, that Bonhoeffer was Christocentric and true to the bedrock doctrine of justification by faith alone—all as a result of his “Back to the Bible” approach. But not all is as clear as DeVine would have us believe.

² Ibid., 41.

³ Ibid., 64.

⁴ Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, (Multnomah: Sisters, OR, 1980).

⁵ DeVine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 105.

⁶ Ibid., 110.

II. BARTHIAN PARADOX

DeVine sees theologian Karl Barth as the principal and positive influence on Bonhoeffer's thinking. He states that Barth's influence made Bonhoeffer's theology "attractive."⁷ To be sure, Barth in a sense rescued Bonhoeffer from the radical liberalism of Frederick Schleiermacher and Adolph von Harnack. But to what end?

Of all the similarities in Bonhoeffer's and Barth's perspectives, the one most apparent and troubling is their allegiance to theological paradox. Unfortunately, DeVine does not take us down the road of Barth's contradictory epistemology, but it is the very road we must take if we want to understand the real Barth, and for our purposes, the real Bonhoeffer.

Barth is famous for championing neo-orthodoxy (a term DeVine dislikes), a system that used orthodox terms absent original intent. DeVine dismisses evangelical critiques of Barth's theology. Just after discounting the notion that neo-orthodoxy is "liberalism in disguise—the liberal wolf decked out in evangelical sheep's clothing," DeVine writes the following: "My view is that there is some truth in all of this but not very much. Evangelical critiques of both Barth and Bonhoeffer have often been a little too quick and dirty by my estimation"⁸. Unfortunately he does not point the reader to any one critic for evaluation. Some well known samples of Barth's paradoxically driven theology are as follows: The Bible is not necessarily the Word of God written, but becomes the Word of God to the willing hearer. Christ's resurrection was real even if it did not physically happen! God is the Wholly Other, completely transcendent, having no relevance or communication with man, yet is relevant and communicates with man. These are just a few examples of Barth's thinking.

Upon consideration that Bonhoeffer looked through the lens of a Barthian paradox, it becomes clear why he was so *unclear* in his own theology. For example, like Barth, he did not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture—a fact DeVine admits but seems to dismiss as irrelevant—yet he sought to base his entire theology on the Bible! He was not at all Protestant in his view of the Church, even to the point of seeing the Church and its members, especially in the context of suffering, as a means of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸ *Ibid.*

salvation. DeVine adheres to the same. “. . . As a justified sinner, I have no interest in using my brother as a means to my own salvation in the strict sense.” One wonders how in any sense an evangelical could see a brother as a “means” to salvation. In Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* he writes that in some ways man’s own suffering may be redemptive for eternal salvation.

Although Christ has fulfilled all the vicarious suffering necessary for our redemption, his suffering on earth is not finished yet. He has, in his grace, left a residue . . . of suffering for his Church to fulfil in the interval before his Second Coming (Col. 1.24). This suffering is allowed to benefit the Body of Christ, the Church. Whether we have any right to assume that this suffering has power to atone for sin . . . we have no means of knowing. But we do at least know that the man who suffers in the power of the body of Christ suffers in a representative capacity “for” the Church, the Body of Christ.⁹

Yet, he asserts in the next sentence, “it is true that I am inextricably bound to fellow believers upon incorporation into Christ and that all paths to my Savior run through, not around or apart from, the church.”¹⁰ Then, true to paradox, DeVine adds, “nevertheless, in Jesus Christ, I am confronted with the completed work of atonement and reconciliation for myself and for my brother.”¹¹

III. COSTLY GRACE

Possibly Bonhoeffer’s most glaring paradoxical emphasis was the idea of “costly grace.” As noted, DeVine repeatedly states that Bonhoeffer believed in justification by faith alone, yet, neither he nor Bonhoeffer show any awareness of the logical inconsistency in the concept of “costly grace.” DeVine writes the following defense of this position:

In his rejection of cheap grace, Bonhoeffer insists not only that one cannot obey the command of Jesus unless one believes but also that one cannot believe unless one obeys. Protestants are

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks Edition, 1963), 273.

¹⁰ DeVine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 85.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

accustomed to the former sequencing but not the latter. Bonhoeffer, like a good Protestant, agrees that faith justifies, not obedience, but he also warns that any chronological sequencing or temporal separation between faith and obedience obscures the actual character of faith as a response to the concrete call and command of Jesus Christ. Thus, faith and obedience are coincident. Faith without works is dead and so is not saving faith at all.¹²

In this statement one does not find “a good Protestant” creed, but something more akin to the Council of Trent. Note, for example, the similarity of the Roman Catholic view of saving faith unto justification:

If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary... let him be anathema.¹³

Not only does DeVine require a combination of obedience *and* faith as a means of justification, he clarifies further that there is no “chronological sequencing” of the two. In other words, obedience before, during, and after the act of faith is necessary for justification. This is more than a hedging away from justification by faith alone, it is an outright denial of the doctrine.

To be fair, DeVine seeks to counter any notion that Bonhoeffer believed in meritorious works for salvation. “When the slightest drop of works righteousness seeps into the disciple’s motivation for obedience,” DeVine writes, “belief in Jesus Christ has given way to unbelief.”¹⁴ By itself this is a very good statement. But it is not by itself. It is couched with numerous statements both by DeVine and Bonhoeffer to the contrary, namely, that obedience is an essential condition for justification.

It is very popular among Lordship Salvation proponents to insist that as long as obedience is not viewed as human merit, then making it conditional is not a violation of *sola fide*. The point here is a subtle one. It may be surprising to learn that the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic doctrine Luther and Calvin confronted did not espouse human merit as the basis

¹² Ibid., 69.

¹³ Council of Trent: Canons on Justification, Canon IX, <http://socrates58.blogspot.com/2005/12/council-of-trent-canons-on.html>; accessed September 24, 2007.

¹⁴ DeVine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 121.

of justification either. This is made clear by the subsequent pronouncements of the Council of Trent (1545-63). “If any one saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ; let him be anathema.”¹⁵ For one to make obedience a condition for justification as long as it is not seen as self-meritorious is in complete opposition to the message of the Protestant Reformation, and more importantly, the Bible. The early Reformers believed that any conditions added to faith (self-meritorious or not) resulted in the nullification of grace.

In 1923 J. Gresham Machen warned of this theological trend in his seminal work *Christianity and Liberalism*. Although Machen directed his apologetic toward liberalism, the principle is the same. His words serve as a much needed corrective to the notion of “costly grace.”

According to modern liberalism, faith is essentially the same as “making Christ Master” in one’s life; at least it is by making Christ Master in the life that the welfare of men is sought. But that simply means that salvation is thought to be obtained by our own obedience to the commands of Christ. Such teaching is just a sublimated form of legalism. Not the sacrifice of Christ, on this view, but our own obedience to God’s law, is the ground of hope.

In this way the whole achievement of the Reformation has been given up, and there has been a return to the religion of the Middle Ages.¹⁶

As Machen showed, the emphasis on surrender to Christ’s lordship as a means of salvation allowed theological liberals to side-step the issue of man’s utter sinfulness so as to offer something in exchange for grace.

It is not necessary to expound to the readers of this journal why Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s most famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, is faulty along these same lines, especially if understood as a soteriological statement. *The Cost of Discipleship* has an abundance of excellent and inspiring material if read as a treatise on true Christian discipleship. It is disconcerting, however, to see the repeated assertions that absolute surrender (even to the point of death) is necessary for salvation.¹⁷ By design Bonhoeffer enfolds the gospel of salvation for

¹⁵ Council of Trent, Canon I.

¹⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1923; reprint, 1983), 143.

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *passim*.

sinner with the call of discipleship for saints to the point that one can hardly be distinguished from the other.

Specifically, this work presents the sinner's justification as actualized by obedience and faith. Moreover, Bonhoeffer made his assertion of "costly grace" in the context of a neo-orthodox epistemology. He espoused contradictions because paradox was central to his theological paradigm. Following Barth's lead it seems Bonhoeffer had few qualms with something being true and not true at the same time.¹⁸ Thus, grace could be both *free* and *costly*. J. Kevin Butcher has aptly shown the problem of illogical reasoning in relation to the concept of "costly grace." Butcher writes:

[T]o say that the gift of eternal life involves necessary cost to the unbeliever is not to state a paradox but a logical absurdity. It is a statement that has no possibility of being true if language is to retain meaning and ability to communicate. Truly, Christ calls the believer to a life of costly discipleship *after* receiving the gift of salvation. But to imply that the price of commitment is demanded as part of *receiving* the gift is to portray a gospel of nonsense.¹⁹

In light of the current popularity to extol the notion of "costly grace," one wonders if Lordship Salvation proponents have not unwittingly fallen into a Barthian paradox as well.

Bonhoeffer Speaks Today is a book worth reading. It will give the reader a greater appreciation for the life of a truly courageous man. Unfortunately, it will likely convince some to adopt elements of Bonhoeffer's errant theology. DeVine acknowledges that Barth and Bonhoeffer had "glaring weaknesses and blind spots" in their theology, but does not

¹⁸ For an appraisal of Barth's approach to theology see Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*. Clark shows that although Barth over time lessened his adamant allegiance to paradoxical theology, it remained central to his overall method. To Barth, the concept of paradox was not simply in the realm of the apparent. That is, something did not qualify as paradoxical simply because it was true even though it seemed false. To Barth it could on one level be in fact true and on another false. This was at the crux of his understanding of *heilsgeschichte* or salvation history. What was true in one realm could be false in the other.

¹⁹ J. Kevin Butcher, "A Critique of *The Gospel According to Jesus*," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 1989), 27-43.

explain what he means.²⁰ He writes in his introduction that the “purpose...is not to engage the question of how to place Bonhoeffer within the history of theology, but to make Bonhoeffer help us evangelicals follow Jesus today.”²¹ To follow Bonhoeffer as he follows Jesus and yet downplay theological particulars is itself paradoxical code-speaking. In the last sentence of the book DeVine again sidesteps Bonhoeffer’s neo-orthodox theology and says that “we evangelicals need not put our heads in the sand to sit at his feet for a spell.”²² Indeed we should not have our heads in the sand, but for a different reason than DeVine gives. Vigilance for correct doctrine, doctrine that has eternal consequences for human souls, is the Church’s urgent need. It should be stated clearly that for those who accept Bonhoeffer’s “costly grace,” the cost may be higher than they ever imagined.

²⁰ DeVine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²² *Ibid.*, 174.

BOOK REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Who Will Be Saved? Defending the Biblical Understanding of God, Salvation, & Evangelism. Paul R. House and Gregory A. Thornbury, Editors. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000. 239 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

This multi-author book should be of particular interest to *JOTGES* readers for two reasons. First, the authors are dealing with views such as open theism that have crept into Evangelism in recent years. Second, the authors make some candid comments on the need for Evangelicals to get along, despite significant soteriological differences, and not to anathematize one another.

Part one of the book is entitled, “Who Saves?” (pp. 13-74). This section concerns a proper view of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Part two of the book is entitled, “Who Will Be Saved?” (pp. 75-160), and is the heart of the book, sharing the book’s title.

Much of part two concerns the issue of inclusivism and whether people who’ve never heard of Jesus can be born again without faith in Him. There is an interesting chapter in which Clark Pinnock, who advocates that view, interacts with Doug Geivett, who does not.

Part three is entitled, “How Shall They Hear the Gospel?” (pp. 161-224). This, in my estimation, is the most fascinating section for *JOTGES* readers.

One of the editors, Gregory Thornbury, writes a fascinating chapter in this section. It is entitled, “The Proper Subject of Theology: Giving Voice to the Doctrine of Salvation in a New Century” (pp. 209-224). This chapter is worth the price of the book.

In a section within that chapter entitled, “Potential Dangers from Certain Sectors of Reformed Evangelicalism,” Thornbury cites Reformed apologist Michael Horton as saying, “If we are really convinced of the justice in the Reformation’s critique of medieval Rome, we can no longer...regard Arminianism within Protestant circles as any more acceptable” (p. 216).

For years many Reformed theologians have been calling Arminians, those who don't believe in justification by faith alone, *brothers and sisters in Christ*. I find it refreshing to see Horton rejecting that conclusion. However, Thornbury cites Timothy George as criticizing this position: "We should not draw the evangelical circle too tightly lest, like Jesus' cliquish disciples we exclude those who are earnestly doing the Lord's work because they 'are not one of us'" (p. 217). Thornbury agrees with George, saying that we "must avoid the temptation of theological hubris and of excluding true brothers and sisters in Christ" (p. 217). "When dealing with our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we passionately disagree, we must exhibit a spirit of grace" (p. 218).

Of course, what is *a brother in Christ* is precisely what concerns Horton and should concern Thornbury and all Evangelicals. This book does not delineate what makes a person regenerate and what does not. The impression is given that as long as someone believes that Jesus is his Savior (whatever that means, whether by faith alone or faith plus) and then is found to be "earnestly doing the Lord's work," he is born again.

(Note: an earlier chapter in this section is a printed sermon on Ephesian 2:1-10. In that chapter the author, Timothy McCoy says, "So what is the truth about salvation? The truth is that salvation is by grace, through faith, in Christ, and unto good works!" He then invites the reader to "Cast yourself upon Christ and Christ alone." He then quotes John 6:37. The very next sentence makes his position clear, "*If you have already been transformed by the gospel truth, then rejoice that God has enabled you to know the truth, and that the truth has made you free [John 8:32]*" (pp. 176-77). Good works, transformation of life, are the proof of who is born again and who is not.)

I recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Hoodwinked and Happy? Evangelicals, Calvinism, and Why No One's Answering the Problem of Evil. By Daniel Gracely. np: Grandma's Attic Press, 2006. 450 pp. Paper. \$24.99.

Gracely's book focuses on only one issue: how Calvinism fails to solve the problem of evil. Gracely shows through numerous quotes that a primary problem in Calvinism is the tendency to explain evil as both within the will of God, and therefore caused by God, but not within His perfect will, and therefore, not directly caused by God. Gracely shows in various ways that such an explanation does not work logically, theologically, or Biblically. The chapters which dealt with specific texts (Chap 6–Rom 9:22; Chap 8–Lam 3:37-38; Chap 9–Job 1–2) were some of the best in the book. If Gracely hadn't occasionally mentioned his lack of seminary training and ignorance of Biblical languages, one never would have known.

Due to the strength and diversity of Calvinism, this is a good way to approach refuting some of its points. Books that try to deal with all the issues at once tend to be good introductions, but shallow in their ability to deal with any one subject. However, having said that, Gracely's book did get somewhat repetitive and several of the chapters could have been cut. Also, there were some minor typesetting mistakes in the book.

Even though I don't fully agree with his conclusions, I recommend this book as one that focuses on a main difficulty within Calvinism: the problem of evil.

Jeremy Myers

TILL HE COMES Ministries

Irving, TX

Secure Forever! God's Promise or Our Perseverance?. By Thomas M. Cucuzza. St. Cloud, MN: Xulon Press, 2007. 175 pp. Paper, \$13.99.

I love the title. Is being secure forever contingent merely on God being faithful to His promise, or on us faithfully persevering to the end of our lives?

Cucuzza, a Free Grace Pastor in St. Cloud, Minnesota, shows in this book that eternal security is true and is based solely on a person trusting

in Christ as one's Savior (see, for example, pp. 24-41, and my comments below).

After laying out the difference in the two positions in the first chapter, the book essentially covers two issues: the eternality of salvation once received by faith alone apart from works (Chapter 2) and the dangers associated with teaching salvation by perseverance (Chapters 3-6).

Chapter 2 is excellent. Covering thirty pages, it is also one of the longest chapters in the book.

Cucuzza mentions Lordship Salvation on a number of occasions and shows why it is unbiblical and dangerous. He quotes from some of the leaders of that movement including MacArthur, Sproul, and Piper.

I wish the author had been a bit clearer on one point. Cucuzza's favorite statement for the condition of eternal life is *trusting in Jesus as Savior* (e.g., pp. 22, 26, 27, 31, 33, 40, 49). What he means by this is not clearly developed, though this statement suggests an answer: "When we believe in what Christ die for us on the cross, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ" (p. 38). Yet a page later he says something different, "We need to trust Him *and believe what He says about our eternal home*" (p. 40, italics added). In light of the title of the book, and the discussion on pages 40-41 ("Is it [the promise of everlasting life that can't be lost] true or not?"), Cucuzza seems to be saying that if we trust that Jesus dealt with our sin problem at Calvary, then we are eternally saved since such trust necessarily includes believe Jesus' promise of a secure eternal home.

I recommend this book.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work. By Darrell Cosden. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006. 148 pp. Paper. \$17.95.

Most Christians throughout the history of the church have truly struggled to bring their spiritual lives into a healthy balance with the everyday matters of work life. Darrell Cosden has written an enriching glimpse of "a theology of work that works" (p. 103). From the beginning of this short work, Cosden engages his readership with a brief history on

his subject then appropriately broadens the scope of his argument. Cosden guides us from the more recent discussion of the matter to his own thought on the relationship of work in the two spheres of concern—the eternal and the earthly. The author has divided his book into three short sections for us, outlining his discussion in an easy to follow way while building his argument inductively.

In the first section, Cosden focuses on explaining the nature of the dualistic thought that has developed in many Christian traditions where the “calling” and “class” tend to divide believers from unity, frustrating them from connecting earthly work with the eternal (pp. 16-48). He then responds to both Roman Catholic and early Protestant thought on earthly work in his second section. Here, Cosden focuses his response to these traditions in view of the Scriptural understanding of Christ as both the “prototype” (p. 54) and “quintessential Adam” (p. 60) for all those who have believed. He devotes much of this section to explain how Luther’s understanding of justification should allow us to work out of love in response *to* (not *for*) our salvation from the penalty of sin. But at the same time, Cosden creates distance from Luther, seeing a theology of earthly work much differently. The concluding section is more practical as it deals with applying the Word of God to self by means of Godly stewardship and a strong focus on missions.

Cosden’s book highlights a few Free Grace issues, but the Judgment Seat of Christ is primary in his consideration (pp. 111-21). In Free Grace theology, one understands that earthly work has both a *present* value (the experience of eternal life now in a perishing body), and a *future* value (the rewards at Christ’s coming, the hope of reigning with Christ, a greater fullness of eternal life in glorification). Cosden is relatively clear on the Judgment Seat in relation to rewards. However, when dealing with the receiving of eternal life, Cosden slightly leans towards a Reformed view at times. This is evident in his unclear explanation of the “right relationship” he suggests a “friend” has to the Master in John 15, but the “servant” *may or may not have* (pp. 121-22). He never clarifies his meaning.

Darrell Cosden has given us a quick look at Christian traditions concerning the area of earthly work. He is usually clear that earthly work is not an addition to justification, but the freedom to thank God for justification daily, “partnering with Christ as co-heirs” (pp. 122-24). Though he is unclear at times with his position on Free Grace issues, this book is

easy to read, user-friendly, and properly places our work in the Lord as earthly work which is not in vain.

William R. Turner

Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Passion for the Gospel: Conversations with Greg Laurie and Chuck Swindoll. By Charles R. Swindoll and Greg Laurie. IFL Publishing House: Plano, TX, 2006. 101 pp. plus 10 prepages. Paper, np.

When I heard this new book advertised on Insight for Living, I was surprised. Why would Chuck Swindoll be doing a book about evangelism with noted Lordship Salvation evangelist Greg Laurie?

After reading the book, I believe the reason Chuck did this is because he has been to Greg's Harvest Crusades and he considers Greg to be on the leading evangelists of our day (p. 3). Chuck even took one of his sons to observe the amazing evangelistic ministry of Greg.

Still, I wonder why Chuck was impressed by Greg's evangelistic *message*. When the two of them discuss the saving message in the book, Greg speaks of confessing one's sins, turning from one's sins, and inviting Jesus into one's life to be Lord of his life. Chuck, however, calls for faith alone in Christ alone and specifically says that turning from sins is not a condition of eternal life.

Here's my guess. Chuck evidently feels that Greg's calls for turning from sins and commitment of life are essentially calls to faith in Christ. While Chuck wouldn't say it that way, he evidently doesn't view Greg's words as misleading or as a false gospel. After all, they wrote this book together as a fund raising piece for their two ministries.

I should mention that Chapter 1 is a transcript of two radio shows that Chuck and Greg did together about evangelism. Chapter 2 is about substitution and it is by Chuck Swindoll, a chapter borrowed from one of his books. Chapter 3 is by Greg Laurie and it about gospel basics, drawn from one of his books. Interestingly Greg here says that what one must do to be born again is contained in two words: follow Jesus. Chapter 4 contains some evangelistic tools from Greg and Chuck's ministry materials. Chapter 5 is a list of some recommended resources from Harvest Ministries and Insight for Living.

I strongly recommend this book for those who enjoy the ministries of Chuck Swindoll and/or Greg Laurie. It is an easy read and quite revealing.

In order to get the book GES had to make a contribution to *Insight for Living*. The book was not listed for sale. Possibly that will change in the future. If not, you too may need to go the contribution route to get it.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

Postmodernism 101. By Heath White. Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, MI 2006. 176 pp. Paper, np.

Considering my own feelings on postmodernism and the effects I've seen of it, I actually enjoyed reading this book. The author makes it clear that he is writing in a very broad sense and he does not go into great detail in any area.

I began with a great deal of skepticism because the author states in the first chapter that even though the Amish lead lives controlled by a great deal of traditionalism, they are still undeniably as Christian as the rest of us (p 16). I think the author started using his broad strokes very early on to use that as an example of how different "sects" of Christianity exist within the church today.

The most helpful chapter, and the most disturbing by far, is chapter four. This chapter begins on page 53 and is titled "Truth, Power, and Morality." Anyone who is confused as to why postmoderns seem to be caught up in relativism will find this very good reading. The author gives good explanations as to why a postmodern finds absolute moral truths to be nonexistent. "Truth is power" is used by postmoderns not to show that power and confidence lie in knowing the truth, but to show that scientists, politicians, and church leaders use "their truth" (and those who believes their teachings) to decide who is worthy of acceptance or not. This, to a postmodern, is abuse of power which is derived from truth. They seem to think that the only viable option left to them is to believe that there are no absolute truths, especially absolute moral truths.

The author then goes on to explain how he uses a logic puzzle to show that relativism is a self-defeating argument, but does not go into

what an alternative argument might be to relativism. The book also mentions how, in response to the logic puzzle, a postmodern might agree that there are some moral absolutes, but no one is capable of understanding them therefore no one has any knowledge of what the absolute moral truths are.

This chapter is also disturbing because the author does not attempt to show the Bible as the source of moral absolutes. The author does admit that it would take too long in his book to go into why there are moral absolutes and he does not feel that he would have all the answers anyway, but no mention is made of the moral absolutes found in the Bible or the inerrancy of Scripture.

In the epilogue, the author writes the following, "It is a fairly safe bet that the general distrust of truth and knowledge that marks postmodernism is temporary. This skeptical syndrome flares up at intervals throughout history; it is a response to intellectual exhaustion and often portends something remarkable and new." I can only hope that something good comes from the postmodern movement, but like they say, "You can put perfume on a pig all day, but in the end, it's still just a pig."

For those who know little about postmodernism, this is a fairly easy read and almost enjoyable at times. There is nothing earth-shattering about any of the revelations the author brings to light, but it would help prepare someone for dealing with the seemingly mindless arguments of postmodernism.

Kyle Kaumeyer
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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

“Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Describe Believers or Unbelievers?” Rene Lopez, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 2007): 59-73.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 6 is one of three vice lists in Paul where the apostle says that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. These passages have long been problem passages since they seem to say that alcoholics or immoral people or even jealous or envious people will go to hell.

Lopez adopts a view different than that held by most Free Grace writers. Hodges and others (including this writer) have suggested that inheriting the kingdom in these passages refers to ruling with Christ in the life to come, not to getting into the kingdom. In terms of the question Lopez asks, we have concluded that the vice lists describe those (believers or unbelievers) who will not rule with Christ.

The author discusses that view, which he calls *the loss of rewards view* (pp. 63-64), as well as *the loss of salvation view* (pp. 59-60), *the lack of salvation view* (pp. 60-61), *the loss of fellowship view* (pp. 61-62), and *the missing the kingdom view* (pp. 62-63). Then he proposes a sixth view, his view, the view that Paul is exhorting believers to live like saints (pp. 64-73).

Evidence cited by the author for his view includes the context which addresses Christians, the relationship between *adikeō* and *adikos*, the meaning of *inherit the kingdom of God*, contrasting elements, and exhortation instead of warning.

Lopez concludes, “Since some Corinthian believers were behaving like unbelievers, Paul exhorted them to live in light of their position in Christ, and not how they were before they knew Him” (p. 73).

I first heard this view around 1980 from Dr. Craig Glickman when I was a seminary student. For a time, I held this view. I switched to the loss of rewards view because I felt that the evidence (esp. Matt 25:34ff; 1 Cor 15:50; and Gal 5:19-21) better supports that position.

The author makes a compelling case for *the live in light of your position* view. While I remain unconvinced, he has given me and all *JOTGES* readers much food for thought. I highly recommend this article.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

“The Warning in Colossians 1:21-23” Charles C. Bing, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 2007): 74-88.

In the opening paragraphs Bing establishes why one’s understanding of this passage is so important. The Arminian and Calvinist interpretations make certainty of one’s eternal destiny impossible.

The section on “The State of the Readers” is helpful (pp. 75-76). Bing shows that Paul clearly identifies the readers as believers.”

In the section on “Five Views of the Warning in Colossians 1:21-23,” Bing succinctly reviews the five major views. The first four reviews are limited to just one or at most two paragraphs. The final position, the rewards view, which is Bing’s view, gets 11 paragraphs covering three pages. Even this is quite brief. However, it is an excellent presentation of the heart of the view.

Bing has given us a fine overview of the major views on this tough text. His article is very easy to follow, irenic, and persuasive.

I strongly recommend this article.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Irving, TX

“Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics”

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 2005): 89-114.

In recent years, multiple publications have been set forth by Evangelicals in an attempt to clarify what it means to do evangelical theology within our current postmodern context. While the verdict is still out on the successfulness of these publications, Kevin Vanhoozer has aided this attempt by painting a very accurate picture, and response, to these current developments.

Before Karl Barth, conservative Evangelicals were seen as the protectors of divine propositional truth from God’s Word against the incursion of liberal theology. Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, and Carl F.H. Henry are but a few of the conservative giants who have been seen as the protectors of the faith against higher criticism and the humanistic interpretations of liberal theology (pp. 95-96). However, with the entrance of Karl Barth in the 20th century (1886-1968), the liberalism of the day was finally quelled; *not* by conservative Evangelicals, but by Barth’s Neo-Orthodoxy and the Post-Liberalism movement that has followed.

The current status of evangelical interpretation and method continues to wrestle with different approaches that seek to see Scripture as both personal/relational and propositional/doctrinal (p. 93, 100). Presently, this current dialogue could be seen as problematic, but the need for the harmonization of these approaches must be met if evangelical theology is to have a credible voice in future generations (p. 93). Vanhoozer describes this process as a pilgrimage which should be engaged by all in this ongoing search for an accurate expression of God’s Word within an evangelical context (p. 92). To some degree, Vanhoozer supports both sides of the debate between conservatives in the mold of Hodge/Henry and the Emergents (such as Carl Raschke), yet Vanhoozer is careful to espouse a conservative view in handling the interpretation of the Scriptures (p. 113).

Vanhoozer reaches conclusions that remain grounded in the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures for healthy interpretation (p. 113). He concludes that Evangelicals will accurately represent the message of the Scriptures when they are approached as a *theodrama* (p. 101, 112) instead of a simple collection of propositional truths, or a book containing wonderful literature (p. 100).

I recommend this article to the Free Grace community since it upholds the Scriptures as the authority for the Christian life, and the Scriptures alone for a working evangelical theological method in a postmodern context.

William R. Turner
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“A Short Primer on Hermeneutics” Thomas Baurain, *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (December 2006): 41-49.

Baurain, Vice President and Academic Dean at Calvary Bible Theological Seminary, does a fine job of defending a literal hermeneutic and of showing its importance to Dispensational theology.

He defines a literal hermeneutic as a normal understanding of what is written (pp. 42-43). The interpreter of the Bible “must come to an understanding of what the author of the biblical passage was communicating, the author’s intended meaning” (p. 43).

I enjoyed his discussion of “Examples of Abnormal Hermeneutics.” For example, he cites Fairbairn as suggesting that the 144,000 witnesses in the Book of Revelation picture “the Lord’s people generally” (p. 47). Baurain points out that while this hypothetically might be possible, the author of Revelation says that there were 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes and the specific tribes are mentioned. “This would seem to be wasted information if all the author were intending to communicate was that the true people of God, whoever they are, will be preserved through the Tribulation period” (p. 47).

In the conclusion Baurain makes the excellent point that “The prophecies in the Old Testament of the first coming of Christ, including His birth, childhood, ministry, death, and resurrection, were all fulfilled literally! There simply are no nonliteral fulfillments of these prophecies in the New Testament. If this does not argue for a biblical basis for the literal method, what does?”

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“The Latest Post-Modern Trend: The Emerging Church” Ron Bigalke, Jr., *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (December 2006): 19-39.

The Emerging Church is something with which every church leader and disciple of Christ should be concerned. Postmodernism is the idea that we aren't sure of anything, that doubts are virtuous, that certainty is arrogance, and that there is no absolute truth. This philosophy rules in higher education around the world. It also controls the media, movies, public education, politics, and, unfortunately, even much of Christianity.

Bigalke does a good job of laying out what the Emerging Church is and why it is a danger. He suggests that “doctrine without practice (application) is dangerous, but practice (application) without doctrine is deadly” (p. 22, fn. 10). The Emerging Church follows the deadly path. The author suggests that the correct biblical position is doctrine with application (here he cites 1 Tim 4:16).

“The biblical means of fulfilling the Great Commission is preaching the propositional truths of Scripture, and offering God-dependent prayer. Therefore if modern church movements manifest opposition for these God-ordained means, then how can one dare think that God is increasing the number of those saved?” (p. 25). He suggests that the Emerging Church Movement lacks “confidence in the power of God's Word to accomplish His purposes” (p. 25).

JOTGES readers will be bothered by his treatment of John 8:30-32ff. He suggests that those whom John says believed in Jesus actually were not regenerated since they only believed in Him as a political Messiah “who would deliver them from the Romans” (p. 25). However, his article in no way hinges in his understanding of that passage.

The most helpful portions of the article were the last three sections. The section entitled “Emphasis on Experience and Unbiblical Practices” (pp. 30-35) deals with contemplative spirituality and mysticism. The material under the heading, “Ancient-Future Faith” (pp. 25-37), shows how this emphasis on mysticism and contemplative spirituality is leading Emerging Churches to adopt Catholic practices. “The Emerging Church also appears to be building a bridge to Roman Catholicism. The inspired Word of God is not the emphasis. Dark and mystical churches, candles, crosses, icons, incense, relics, statues of Mary and ‘saints’ are the emphasis. The sensual and the mystical are the emphasis, and there is little evidence that the Bible is being taught” (p. 37).

The last two pages of the article are “Final Thoughts” (pp. 38-39) and they are excellent. Bigalke points out here, for example, that “53% of ‘Evangelicals’ question objective truth.” “The Bible is esteemed for its mystery, not its propositional truth.” “The Emerging Church is left with Christian sensitivity sessions wherein everyone can share their ignorance of the biblical text and what experience the Bible supposedly created.” Life transformation in the Emerging Church “is not derived from Scripture or the Holy Spirit but internal experiences and displays of power through contemplative spirituality and the musings of ‘Christian’ mystics.” His last sentence is a fitting one: “As a result of careless and unbiblical doctrine and practice, the Emerging Church has relinquished the doctrinal and historical objectivity of the Gospel, which is the foundation of all biblical spirituality.”

I highly recommend this article.

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“Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate: A Critique of Robert Peterson and Other Traditionalist Scholarship,” Glenn Peoples, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:2 (June 2007): 329-347.

“Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate? A Response to Glenn Peoples,” Robert A. Peterson, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:2 (June 2007): 349-355.

Annihilationism is the teaching that those who do not gain access to the kingdom of God will cease to exist after the Great White Throne Judgment. In this view the idea of conscious, eternal torment is a falsehood that has been foisted upon the church by an inaccurate reading of the Bible.

Of course, all it takes is one clear text to prove a doctrine such as conscious, eternal torment. And there are many such texts. Thus I looked forward in these two articles to see these men interact on the meaning of key texts. Unfortunately, for the most part, there wasn't a lot of that.

These deal with a book co-written by Edward Fudge (a leading proponent of Annihilationism) and Robert Peterson entitled *Two Views on Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

Peoples, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Otago in New Zealand, faults Peterson's rejection of annihilationism on three main points: misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and faulty exegesis (pp. 330-41).

Misrepresentation, singular, is well put by Peoples, for remarkably he only cites one example of Peterson supposedly misrepresenting Fudge. Normally a critic would not bother to mention something that is only found once in an entire book. He charges that Peterson inaccurately presents what Fudge is saying about Jesus' death on the cross being a proof of annihilationism.

I found Peterson's response to this charge to be quite convincing. Peoples cited as proof that Peterson misrepresented Fudge the fact that Peterson failed to quote Fudge (p. 330). Indeed Peoples goes so far as to say, "I am unable to point the reader to a quote [by Fudge] that might have been misrepresented to mean this" (pp. 330-31). In other words, Peoples is charging there Peterson completely made something up. This is strong stuff for a scholarly journal like *JETS* to print!

Yet Peterson is unruffled and he graciously responds with a lengthy quote from Fudge that at the very least "might have been misrepresented to mean" what Peterson alleges (p. 350). In fact, the quote Peterson cites convinced this reviewer that his representation of what Fudge said was essentially correct.

Thus I would discount Peoples's charge of misrepresentation as being unsupported by the evidence he cites and refuted by the evidence Peterson cites.

What of misunderstandings (literally "missed points," pp. 332-35)? While Peoples speaks this time of "missed points," plural, he gives but one example, Peterson's misunderstanding of Fudge's argument about Rev 20:10, which says, "The devil...was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

According to Peoples, Fudge's argument is 1) that the beast is a corporate entity, not a person and 2) that corporate entities cannot experience conscious, eternal torment. Thus Rev 20:10 actually teaches annihilationism.

Once again, I find it odd that a critic would stop at just one example of what he considers to be a major flaw in an argument. Even if he wished to devote more attention to one missed point than others, surely he could have given at least a paragraph or so discussion of two or more additional missed *points*.

Peterson graciously acknowledges, "In fairness, I concede that previously I did not understand the full import of this annihilationist argument" (p. 351). He continued, "However, I still do not think that it is a good argument for four reasons..." I found his four arguments to be quite convincing, though due to space restrictions you'll have to consult the article for the four arguments.

Frankly, I would think that a person would have to read his theology into Rev 20:10 to find annihilationism there. Even if the beast represents a kingdom, which he clearly does not, still Peterson is right that even then that corporate entity is made up of multitudes of individuals who are indeed capable of conscious, eternal torment.

Sadly neither Peoples nor Peterson devotes much space to the third and most important issue, exegesis. Peoples gives us 6 pages, though he takes nearly two pages before settling down on a passage. And his discussion of Peterson's failed exegesis is cumbersome to read. Peterson, on the other hand, gives just 2 pages. I could have wished for more details. However, Peterson is clear in his brief explanations.

It seems to this reviewer that Peterson's defense of his interpretation of 2 Thess 1:9 and the phrase, "away from the presence of the Lord," is outstanding. His explanation is quite convincing.

Concerning Peoples's charge of flawed exegesis of 2 Pet 2:6, Peterson shows that Peoples was not accurate when he claimed that Peterson gave no grounds for his conclusion. He shows that had Peoples merely given a fuller quote of what Peterson wrote, the grounds were clearly present. I found Peterson's exegesis to be sound.

I highly recommend these two articles. While it would have been nice if both authors had concentrated more on exegesis, there is plenty in these two articles to give someone an understanding of the reasons why the Scriptures contradict annihilationism.

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“Directives in the New Testament: A Case Study of John1:38,”
David A. Montgomery, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
(June 2007): 275-88.

I have to say, this was a pretty good article. It says a lot for the author that a layman like me was able to understand everything in the article so clearly. It is very well written and shows the author’s dedication to pursuing and clarifying the subject.

Montgomery is showing that a question can basically sound like a request for information, but have a much deeper meaning. “The NT contains many instances of indirect speech, that is, where the intended meaning of a statement differs from its direct meaning.” (p. 276). Montgomery uses the question in John 1:38, “...where are you staying?” to show that the disciples (or soon-to-be disciples) were asking more of Jesus than where He happened to be sleeping that night.

...the disciples’ question differs from its direct meaning, that is, that by their question the two disciples are not asking Jesus for information about where he is staying, but are instead requesting Jesus to do something: allow them to spend time with Him as a first step in becoming His disciples. (p. 276).

I am a big fan of linguistics and how it affects our everyday lives. Montgomery gives a very brief, but meaty example of how linguistic studies show the types of relationships in the Book of John by what was said and by who was saying it.

There is also an excellent chart provided by the author showing the conversations in the Book of John and how they can be viewed (pp. 282-84). Was the speaker talking to someone *equal*, someone *above* him, or to someone *below* him in social standing? These are all questions easily answered by the chart and a basic understanding of linguistics.

I would recommend this article to anyone. I think this would even benefit a nonbeliever because they would see that the Bible isn’t just a bunch of commands and rules, but a book that also shows relationships between the Son of God and His followers.

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“The Place of Lament in the Christian Life” Brian L. Webster and David R. Beach, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October-December 2007): 387-402.

Webster, an OT scholar, and Beach, a counselor, give an excellent discussion of much neglected subject: the lament.

They first discuss various reasons why there is resistance to lament today, including “cultural influences...relational styles...theological short-circuiting...misunderstanding providence and theodicy...mischaracterizing lament as grumbling...[and] misunderstanding the Old Testament and the Church age” (pp. 389-96). I particularly liked the discussion under theological short-circuiting (pp. 391-93). “While contemporary culture may hold the phrase ‘God is with me’ to mean some kind of existential experience, an abstract feeling of God’s presence, this is largely lacking in Scripture” (p. 391). “In the Old Testament to be “with” someone meant to give him success in a task, often an assigned task, and may have also highlighted divine protection. This is generally true in the New Testament as well. For example Jesus’ well-known words, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20), is in the context of a given task, the Great Commission” (pp. 391-92).

The section on misunderstanding the Old Testament and the church age is also very insightful. They show that the cross and resurrection do not eliminate the need for and efficacy of believers crying out to God today in lament (395-96). “The Cross...actually invites lament...Since Christians suffer, is not Christ’s lament a model for the members of His church?” (pp. 396-97).

The article also contains a nice discussion of suggested uses for lament today (pastoral counseling, journaling, prayer, confession, reconciliation, liturgy, pp. 397-400).

I recommend this article.

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