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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE DESERTED ISLAND ILLUSTRATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

I recently met with a pastor friend and his elder board about an illustration related to John 6:47. At the 1999 GES Conference Zane Hodges gave a two-part message entitled, "How to Lead People to Christ, Parts 1 and 2." Both parts were later published in our journal.[1] In the first part, Hodges gave an illustration about a fragment of John 6 washing up on the beach of a deserted island. I will quote his version of the illustration in a moment. Hodges was eventually strongly criticized.[2] Some went so far as calling his message an accursed message.[3] They gave it pejorative names like "the crossless gospel"[4] and "the promise-only gospel."[5]

My pastor friend is in the middle of this controversy. On the one hand, he agrees with the critics that Hodges's message is cross-less and deficient. But, on the other hand, he greatly

[1] *JOTGES*, Autumn 2000 and Spring 2001.

[2] See, for example, *The Grace Family Journal*, Spring 2007, Tom Stegall, "The Tragedy of the Crossless Gospel (Pt. 1)." There are nine parts to this series, ending in a special issue in 2008 (vol. 11, no. 54). These articles later became part of an 800-page book *The Gospel of the Christ*. Hodges's illustration and articles have been discussed in several other books (noted within this article) as well.

[3] Stegall, "The Tragedy of the Crossless Gospel (Pt 1), 336 ("heretical gospel").

[4] Stegall uses this expression over 100 times in his book. For a listing see Bob Wilkin, "A Review of Thomas L. Stegall's *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Content of Saving Faith*," JOTGES (Spring 2010): 5-7.

[5] See, for example, "GES Gospel: Lybrand Open Letter," April 2009, 1, 5, 11, 12.

appreciates all that Hodges wrote and has a high regard for him and for GES.

My friend believes that in that illustration and the article in which it appears, Hodges was suggesting that when evangelizing we should not tell people about Jesus' deity, substitutionary death on the cross, and His bodily resurrection from the dead. He believes that Hodges's point was that if we shared *more* than the promise Jesus made, we would confuse people.

My pastor friend also thinks that Hodges was suggesting that some people actually are born again today without knowing anything more about Jesus other than someone with that name sometime made this promise.

Another friend reviewed this article for me. He asked me if I thought it was *hypothetically* possible to believe in someone named Jesus for everlasting life if you knew absolutely nothing about him. Like Hodges, I would say no, this is like asking if there is such a thing as a round square. That is logically impossible. It is also logically impossible to believe that someone you know nothing about guarantees your eternal destiny because you believe in Him. People need to know enough about the Man named Jesus to be persuaded that He guarantees their eternal destiny.[6] As Hodges argues, that starts with, but is not necessarily limited to, knowledge that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead three days later.

If my pastor friend were alone in his understanding of Hodges's illustration and articles in which it appeared, I would simply speak with him. However, there are a number of people in print who have suggested the same thing.[7] Hence there is a need to revisit the illustration and articles.

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[6] John Niemelä finds these two articles by Hodges to be accurate. And he wrote an article explaining that one needs to know that this Man is more than any ordinary man, or no one would believe Him for everlasting life. He says everyone knows that "Ordinary human beings cannot bestow life everlasting upon others." See "Who Is Able to Guarantee Everlasting Life?" *Grace in Focus* (November-December 2008).

[7] For example, Lybrand, as mentioned in the preceding note, calls Hodges's evangelistic message the *promise-only gospel*. As noted later in this article, several other authors use this designation as well. Hixson calls it *the content-less gospel* (J. B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong* [USA: Xulon Press, 2008], 152 n19). A message that has *no content* and *nothing more than the promise of life* is certainly not what Hodges was advocating. People misunderstood what Hodges was saying.

II. THE ILLUSTRATION RESTATED

This is how Hodges gave the illustration, which he calls "a strange scenario":

> Let me begin with a strange scenario. Try to imagine an unsaved person marooned on a tiny, uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He has never heard about Christianity in his life. One day a wave washes a fragment of paper up onto the beach. It is wet but still partly readable.
>
> On that paper are the words of John 6:43-47. But the only readable portions are: "Jesus therefore answered and said to them" (v 43) and "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (v 47).
>
> Now suppose that our unsaved man somehow becomes convinced that this person called Jesus can guarantee his eternal future, since He promises everlasting life. In other words, he believes Jesus' words in John 6:47. Is he saved?

Notice specifically what he says and what he does not say. Hodges does not say here, nor in the entire article, that all we should tell anyone when evangelizing are the exact words, "'Jesus therefore answered and said to them' (v 43) and 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life' (v 47)."

The fact that even in that short quote he called it "a strange scenario" and spoke hypothetically of this man "somehow becom[ing] convinced" suggests that as the article goes on that it will be clear that Hodges is not recommending that we share a "promise-only gospel" or a "cross-less gospel."

Later in the article Hodges made it very clear that he did not want anyone evangelizing without sharing about Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross and His bodily resurrection. I will give citations showing that in a moment.

III. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ILLUSTRATION

While Biblical illustrations are perfect, the ones we make up often have weaknesses. Hodges's illustration has some weaknesses and some strengths.

One weakness of the illustration is that it is not found in Scripture. I realize that Hodges never would have used this illustration in evangelism. He was sharing it with a believing audience. Still I wish he had chosen a Biblical example like Nathanael (John 1), Nicodemus (John 3), the woman at the well (John 4), or Martha (John 11).

A second weakness is that someone reading the illustration, without reading the remainder of the two articles, might mistakenly think that Hodges was saying that a person *could* be born again by believing in someone named Jesus whom he knew *nothing* about (e.g., when He lived, what He did, how He lived, what else He taught, that this quotation from Him appeared in God's Word, etc.).

Some people think that Hodges's illustration says exactly this. But it does not. What it says is that *if* a person could believe that message, then he would be born again. But Hodges does not say anyone *could* believe that, based on such limited information. Indeed, he explicitly goes on to deny that there is enough information there for a person to believe in Jesus for everlasting life.

The reason Hodges used such a drastic hypothetical was to make sure people understood the core issue. Unfortunately, while people got his core issue, they also stretched the illustration to mean something it was not intended to mean.

A third weakness of the illustration is that it does not say that this note comes from the Bible. The note might have said, "Jesus…said, 'he who believes in Me has everlasting life'" (Holy Bible, Gospel of John, Chapter 6, verses 43, 47)."

A fourth weakness is that it was not necessary to go to the extreme of saying that the man had never heard a thing about Christianity.[8] When Jesus evangelized in Israel, everyone knew

[8] A friend who reviewed this article for me wrote in response to this point, "But that is what the illustration says, 'He has never heard about Christianity in his life.'" Again, Hodges did this so as to stress what he calls "the core issue." He did not say it in order to suggest that a person who knew

of the Hebrew Scriptures (though the Samaritans only considered the Pentateuch Scripture) and of the promised coming Messiah. They all were aware of the promise of a Davidic King who would rule forever over Israel in the Promised Land. While very few understood the prophecies about the death and resurrection of Messiah, or the promise of justification (or everlasting life) by faith in Messiah, the people did have at least a general knowledge of the Old Testament. A comparable situation today might be someone who is aware of the teachings about Jesus' death and resurrection, but who does not know that everlasting life cannot be lost or that everlasting life is received simply by believing in Jesus, apart from works before or after the new birth.

While I appreciate the concerns of those who disagree, I do not believe these weaknesses are fatal to Hodges's point, especially when read in the context of the entirety of the two articles. The four strengths of the illustration are much more significant.

First, the illustration and articles got a lot of people to think about what a person must believe to be born again. Even those who disagree were driven back to the Scriptures, which is a good thing.

Second, the illustration requires people to think through the importance of John's Gospel in evangelism. If John's Gospel has an evangelistic purpose (John 20:30-31), then surely it must be front and center in any discussion of what someone must believe to be born again.

Third, it shows people what they should be aiming to persuade people of: that Jesus guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him. It is not good for people to be unclear about where they are going in evangelism. I know that many people will not try to share their faith because they do not know what a person must believe. Hodges's brief illustration points out where we should be headed.

Fourth, Hodges showed that faith in the Lord's substitutionary death and bodily resurrection does not automatically result in everlasting life. If we merely tell people of Jesus' death and resurrection, and do not tell them what we are believing Jesus *for,* then our evangelism is incomplete.

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zero about Christianity or Judaism or the Bible could actually come to faith absent more information. The rest of the two articles make that conclusion abundantly clear.

While John Piper is certainly not in agreement with Zane Hodges on what a person must do to have everlasting life, he agrees with him that a person must believe in Jesus Christ *for* the right thing. Commenting on N. T. Wright's view that a person is justified if he merely believes in Jesus' death and resurrection, Piper says,

> But there is a misleading ambiguity in Wright's statement that we are saved not by believing in justification by faith but by believing in Jesus' death and resurrection. The ambiguity is that it leaves undefined what we believe in Jesus' death and resurrection for. It is not saving faith to believe in Jesus merely for prosperity or health or a better marriage. In Wright's passion to liberate the gospel from mere individualism and to make it historical and global, he leaves it vague for individual sinners.[9]

Piper's point is that we must believe in Jesus *for justification by faith*, although his understanding of justification by faith is not something that can provide anyone with certainty.[10] Hodges's point is that we must believe in Jesus for everlasting life, or the equivalent (justification that is secure, forgiveness that cannot be lost, a guaranteed spot in Jesus' kingdom, etc.).

IV. THE ILLUSTRATION WAS NOT PROMOTING A *PROMISE-ONLY* METHOD OF EVANGELIZING

Stegall suggests that Zane Hodges had "personal displeasure over this cross-centered approach to evangelism."[11] By "cross-centered approach to evangelism," Stegall seems to mean that the cross, not the promise of everlasting life, should be the core issue in evangelism.

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[9] John Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 85-86.

[10] Unfortunately, Piper believes that faith includes commitment, obedience, and perseverance. Thus while he thinks we must be persuaded of *initial* justification by faith, he also believes we must be persuaded of final justification by works.

[11] Thomas L. Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ* (Milwaukie, WS: Grace Gospel Press, 2009), 36.

While it is true that Hodges saw the promise of everlasting life to the believer as central (he calls it the "core issue")[12]—we might call his view "the *promise-centered* approach to evangelism"—Stegall goes farther. He says that Hodges advocated the *promise-only* gospel.[13] Other writers, including Hixson,[14] Lybrand,[15] and Halsey,[16] use this *promise-only gospel* expression as well.

Hodges's point was not that we should proclaim *only* the promise of life. His point was that persuading someone of the promise of life is *the goal* of our evangelistic efforts. However, as he said in both articles, Hodges believed one needed to know about Jesus' death on the cross and bodily resurrection from the dead in order to be persuaded of that promise. The expression *the promise-only gospel* is an unfortunate misreading of what Hodges wrote.

In the first part of his article Hodges had an entire section entitled, "Preaching the Cross." There he says, "In the light of what we have just said, *should we preach the cross of Christ? The answer to that is emphatically yes.* And the most obvious reason for doing so is that this is what Paul and the other Apostles did."[17]

Why did Paul and the other Apostles preach the cross of Christ? They did so for the same reason that Hodges did: in order to persuade people that Jesus guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him (see, for example, Acts 10:39-40, 43 [compare 11:14]; 13:28-37, 38-39, 46; 15:7-11; 16:30-32).

Hodges continued,

> Why should men trust Christ for eternal life? The gospel gives us the wonderful answer. They should do so because Jesus has bought their salvation at the cost of His own precious blood. And God has placed His seal on the work of the cross by raising Jesus from the dead. As

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[12] Hodges, Part 1, 7.

[13] Stegall, 105, 106, 127.

[14] Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, 152 n19.

[15] "Lybrand Open Letter," 5, 11, 12.

[16] J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire, and Roy Zuck, Editors, *Freely by His Grace* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), s.v., "What Is Free Grace Theology?" by Michael D. Halsey, 12.

[17] Hodges, Part 1, 10 (emphasis added).

> Paul states: He "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25).
>
> The preaching of the cross greatly facilitates the process of bringing men to faith in God's Son.[18]

Hodges did not see the gospel as *antithetical* to the promise of everlasting life as some understood him to be saying. Instead, he saw the gospel as *integral* to the promise of life. The reason why the promise of life is true is because Jesus took away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). The reason why believers are guaranteed to be raised from the dead themselves (John 11:15) is because Jesus Himself is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20, 23). His resurrection means that we too will rise from the dead (and that His sacrifice was valid, since apart from the resurrection His shed blood would have been ineffective).

Hodges did not call his view "the promise-only view" or anything like it. In these two articles, he called what a person must believe to be born again *the message of faith in Christ*,[19] and he called the message which gets people to believe the message of faith in Christ *the gospel*.[20] In his view the core issue is Jesus' promise of everlasting life to the believer, and the cross and resurrection lead people to believe that promise.

In a section of Part 1 of his two articles entitled, "Dealing with Souls," Hodges shared about his personal practice of evangelism. He wrote,

> I find it not only useful, *but indeed essential*, to explain that the Lord Jesus Christ bought our way to heaven by paying for all our sins. In recent years I have liked to emphasize that He paid for all the sins we would ever commit from the day of our birth to the day of our death.

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[18] Ibid., 10-11.

[19] Ibid., 7.

[20] Ibid., 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12. In both articles Hodges used the expression *the gospel* to refer to the message of Christ's death and resurrection. However, in many of his books, especially his first three (now called *A Free Grace Primer* [Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2011]), he repeatedly used the expression *the gospel* to refer to the saving message. Note that his second book shows this in the title itself: *The Gospel Under Siege*.

> This serves to stress the completeness of the payment He made. It is usually only in the light of so perfect a payment that people can come to see the reasonableness of a salvation that is absolutely free.[21]

Notice the words *but indeed essential*. The word *essential* means "absolutely necessary, indispensable."[22] Hodges considered the preaching of the cross to be absolutely necessary. He considered it indispensable to clarity in evangelism.

Why does Hodges say that preaching the cross is essential if it is not the core message which must be believed to be born again? Hodges considered it essential to preach the cross because people will not believe the promise of life without believing in the cross of Christ. The cross explains why the promise is true.

Maybe it is time that people read his two articles again. They are available free online at our website. In fact, there is even a third article about this illustration. Two years later Hodges presented a paper at the GES 2001 annual conference. It was entitled, "The Spirit of Antichrist: Decoupling Jesus from the Christ." In it he has a section entitled, "The Danger of Losing the Historicity of the Gospel." The first subheading in that section is "Back to the Deserted Island." There Hodges writes,

> 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.[23]

That article is also available free online at our website.

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[21] Hodges, Part I: 11. Emphasis added.

[22] Dictionary.com, s.v., "essential."

[23] Zane C. Hodges, "The Spirit of Antichrist: Decoupling Jesus from the Christ," *JOTGES* (Autumn 2007): 42.

V. WHAT IS THE REAL POINT OF THE ILLUSTRATION?

Hodges put it this way:

> What is my point? That we should not preach the cross of Christ to men? Not at all. I will make it emphatically clear a little later on that I think we should. Instead, I am arguing that we need to focus on the core issue in bringing men and women to faith and eternal life. What is that core issue?[24]

Notice that he specifically says that this point is not that we should cease to preach the cross of Christ when we evangelize. His point is that we must be clear what we are seeking to persuade people about. In his view we are to seek to persuade people of the core issue, which he went on to define:

> Very simply it [the core issue] is this: We want people to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. Of course, we would like them to believe a lot more than this, but this at least must be believed. Our failure to clearly define our goal in evangelism can have a negative or impeding effect on our efforts to lead people to simple faith in Christ.[25]

Let's recall what he went on to say about the cross of Christ:

> Are you ready for this? John never uses either word [*euangelion*, gospel, or *euangelizein*, to preach the gospel] in his Gospel. Why? Because, as I have already suggested, John makes the Person of Jesus, not a set of doctrines, the object of the faith that brings eternal life.[26] Fundamentally he

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[24] Hodges, Part 1, 7.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Hodges is not suggesting here that the core issue is non-propositional (i.e., not a doctrine). Indeed, in his book *The Gospel Under Siege*, he specifically speaks of "the saving proposition to be believed" (*A Free Grace Primer*, 295 n10). If we say that the Lord Jesus guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it, we have stated a proposition, a doctrine. Hodges's point is that this proposition is essentially *personal*. We believe in a Person for what He promises us, everlasting life. A friend who reviewed this article suggested that Hodges is here denying that one must believe in the Person

> is trying to get people to believe in Jesus for their eternal salvation.
>
> But this is precisely where preaching the cross becomes so important. Why should men trust Christ for eternal life? The gospel gives us the wonderful answer. They should do so because Jesus has bought their salvation at the cost of His own precious blood. And God has placed His seal on the work of the cross by raising Jesus from the dead. As Paul states: He "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom 4:25).
>
> The preaching of the cross greatly facilitates the process of bringing men to faith in God's Son.[27]

VI. INTENDED APPLICATIONS OF THE ILLUSTRATION

Here is a summary of some of the applications Hodges expected from his messages on "How to Lead People to Christ":

1. Share Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead *as a means to showing them why the Lord Jesus indeed gives everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him*.[28]
2. When you share the cross and empty tomb, do not tell people that whoever believes that Jesus died on the cross for his sins and rose bodily from the dead is necessarily born again. A person might believe in works salvation and yet still believe in Jesus' death and resurrection.[29]

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and work of Christ. A careful reading shows that what Hodges is denying is that the work of Christ is the core issue (unless we consider the granting of everlasting life to the believer to be a work, which it is). It is the work of Christ (e.g., His miracles, His sinless life, His teachings, His death on the cross for our sins, His bodily resurrection on the third day, His post-resurrection appearances) that convinces people that the Person of Christ is trustworthy when He promises everlasting life to the believer.

[27] Ibid., 10-11.

[28] Ibid., 6-7, 10-12.

[29] Hodges, Part 2, 9-11.

3. Make sure to stress that what the Lord promises is a totally free gift, that it is not of works. The Lord Jesus paid it all.[30]
4. Make sure to mention the eternality of the gift.[31] We must share with people that what Jesus gives the one who believes in Him is everlasting and can never be lost. Whether we speak of everlasting life, salvation, eternal salvation, heaven, justification (being declared once and for all righteous by God), or whatever, we must stress the eternality of what the Lord promises. It cannot be lost or given back under any circumstances.
5. Do not press for a "decision."[32] Faith is not a decision. Simply share the good news and the promise of everlasting life and then leave the results up to God. Do not think a person must tell you whether he believes or not. Give people time to think about this. Let them ask questions. Keep the dialogue open.

VII. SOME AREAS OF ACTUAL DISAGREEMENT EXIST

While there has been some misunderstanding of Hodges's illustration and the two articles in which it appeared, there remain a few areas of disagreement based on a correct understanding of what he wrote.

A. Are All Who Believe that Christ Died for Our Sins Born Again?

In the second article on how to lead people to Christ, Hodges was discussing the idea some have that all who believe that Christ died on the cross are born again. Hodges was uncomfortable with that approach to evangelism. The first reason he was uncomfortable, he said, was because it is not true:

> For one thing, is there anyone anywhere in a Christian church (unless it is radically liberal) who doesn't believe that Jesus died on the

[30] Hodges, Part 1, 11-12, Part 2, 18.
[31] Hodges, Part 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17.
[32] Ibid., 17.

> cross? For that matter, even some really liberal theologians would consider that a true statement, although they might balk at the doctrine of the resurrection. You see why I am uncomfortable, I hope.[33]

Hodges's second reason for discomfort is that there is no verse in the Bible that says whoever believes Jesus died on the cross is born again.[34]

The third reason he was uncomfortable with this approach is that the precise object of saving faith is the Lord Jesus, who promises everlasting life to all who believe in Him.[35]

George Meisinger disagrees: "Apparently Wilkin rejects the idea that believing Jesus died for one's sins is a sufficient object for saving faith."[36] His view is that 1 Cor 15:3-7 states the core issue. Believing that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3c), which he calls the "first aspect of evangelistic content," is thus one of four truths that, if believed, results in the new birth. The other three truths are that Christ was buried (1 Cor 15:4a, the "second aspect"), that He rose from the dead (1 Cor 15:4b, the "third aspect"), and that He was seen after His resurrection by many people (1 Cor 15:5-7, the "fourth aspect"). Whoever believes those precise things is born again, even if he does not believe that Christ died *on the cross*[37] or died *by shedding His blood*,[38] and even if the person does not believe the promise that what he receives is everlasting.[39]

Others disagree with both Hodges and Meisinger. Hixson, for example, says that believing in Christ's substitutionary death

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[33] Ibid., 9.

[34] Ibid., 10.

[35] Ibid., 11, 15-18.

[36] Hixson, Whitmire, and Zuck, Editors, *Freely by His Grace*, s.v., "A Church Age Model of Evangelistic Content?" by George E. Meisinger, 76.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 74. Indeed, if all one must believe is that Christ died for his sins, was buried, rose, and was seen, then one need not believe Him for *anything*, temporary or everlasting. However, Meisinger understands *Christ's death for our sins* to imply the one who believes these four truths *receives forgiveness of sins*, at least temporary forgiveness. He writes, "The Lord's crucifixion for our sins means that we are sinners in need of forgiveness and 'for' (*hyper*) speaks of how His substitutionary death justly dealt with our sins before the divine tribunal of a righteous God" (p. 75).

on the cross is necessary, but it is not sufficient. He also believes that faith in Christ's promise of everlasting life is necessary, but not enough. Hixson suggests one must believe in Christ's sinlessness, His deity, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, and His promise of everlasting life.[40] However, unlike Meisinger, he is not convinced that one must believe in Jesus' burial or post-resurrection appearances.[41] It is not clear whether Hixson agrees with Meisinger that one need not believe that Jesus *died on the cross* or that He died *by shedding His blood*.[42]

Jonathan Perreault agrees with Meisinger that one must also believe that Jesus was buried (1 Cor 15:4). He calls the evangelistic message of Stegall and Hixson *the groundless gospel*.[43] Yet contrary to Meisinger he believes that one must believe in the promise of everlasting life in order to be born again.

B. Must One Believe That What He Receives from Christ Is Everlasting?

This is a significant issue as well.

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[40] Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, 84, 100, 104, 205.

[41] Ibid., 80. After quoting 1 Cor 15:1-8 he writes, "It is self-evident when one compares Scripture with Scripture that Paul does not intend to include all nine of these facts as part of the precise content of saving faith, since nowhere are individuals exhorted, for example, to express faith that Jesus "was seen by Cephas" in order to be saved." The seven optional truths are that Christ was buried and that he was seen by Cephas, the twelve, over 500 brethren at once, James, all the apostles, and finally, by Saul/Paul. The two essential truths are that Christ died for our sins and that He rose again the third day. That Hixson does not underline the twice-repeated phrase "according to the Scriptures" shows that he does not consider belief that Jesus' death and resurrection were prophesied in the OT to be part of the content of saving faith either.

[42] In *Getting the Gospel Wrong* Hixson repeatedly indicates that one of the things a person must believe is that "Christ…died and rose again to pay one's personal penalty for sin" (e.g., 84, 100, 104, 205; see esp. 85-90). In none of the places in which he says this does he say that one must believe that He died *on the cross* or that He *shed His blood* for us. In fact, in his five-page explanation of what he means by the expression "the Son of God who died and rose again" (pp. 85-90), Hixson does not mention the cross or the blood of Christ.

[43] See, for example, his blog site Free Grace Free Speech on April 12, 2011, "Beware of Wolves Within Free Grace." http://freegracefreespeech.blogspot.com/2011/04/wolf-attack.html.

Hodges called the promise of everlasting life "the core issue" in evangelism. In his opinion, this is what a person is believing Jesus for. He wrote:

> What is that core issue?
>
> Very simply it is this: We want people to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. Of course, we would like them to believe a lot more than this, but this at least must be believed. Our failure to clearly define our goal in evangelism can have a negative or impeding effect on our efforts to lead people to simple faith in Christ.[44]

He concluded the first article with these words:

> Nevertheless, let it never be forgotten: If anyone has faith in Jesus as the One who secures his or her eternal destiny, that person is born of God. Jesus has never yet failed anyone who trusted in His name for eternal salvation. And He never will.[45]

As mentioned above, some in the Free Grace movement (e.g., Hixson) consider belief in the promise of life as essential, but not sufficient.[46] Still others consider belief in the promise of life (or the eternality of the gift) to be non essential. Meisinger says,

> Niemelä says that eternal life becomes the possession of "everyone who believes in Jesus *for that free gift*" (italics added). However, eternal life is the result of faith, not part of the object of faith. Nowhere does Scripture claim that one must believe in eternal life to get eternal life, or in the eternality of the gift before the Lord gives the gift.[47]

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[44] Hodges, Part 1, 7.

[45] Hodges, part 1, 12.

[46] It is not always easy to determine which people consider belief in the eternality of the gift essential and which do not. For example, I once cited Pastor Dennis Rokser as believing that. Shortly after the article appeared Dennis graciously emailed me to let me know that I had unwittingly misrepresented him. While he clearly believes and teaches eternal security, he indicated that he does not hold that one must believe that what one receives from Christ (e.g., forgiveness, relationship, salvation, everlasting life, heaven) is everlasting.

[47] Hixson, Whitmire, and Zuck, Editors, *Freely by His Grace*, s.v., "A Church Age Model of Evangelistic Content?" by George E. Meisinger, 74-75.

Some Free Grace theologians who say that one need not believe that what he receives is eternal nonetheless qualify that statement if asked. One told me that the person who believes that he must work to keep everlasting life (or to make it to heaven, etc.) does not yet have everlasting life.[48] Another told me that he doesn't know whether such a person is born again. God knows about such people. But even though neither man considers the eternity of the gift to be the core issue, both indicate they always proclaim that when they evangelize.

VIII. "A MOST LIBERATING APPROACH TO EVANGELISM"

My pastor friend thought that the liberating approach of which Hodges spoke was an evangelistic message that was devoid of the cross or resurrection of Christ and that was limited to the promise of life only. That drove me back to Hodges's articles.

Near the end of Part 2 Hodges said, "I find this a most liberating approach to evangelism." By *this* he meant what he had just written:

> I work on the conviction that if a person understands God's provision for salvation through the cross of Christ, it will be easier for him or her to believe in Jesus for eternal life.
>
> But the bottom line is this: I want people to know that the moment they believe in Christ for this free gift, they are saved and saved forever.
>
> Let me add one final word. I find this *a most liberating approach to evangelism*. I have done my part if I have presented the message clearly. But faith in the heart is the work of God's Spirit

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On the contrary, Niemelä and others suggest that there are *many* verses which claim that one must believe in the eternality of the gift before the Lord gives it. See, for example, John 4:10-14; John 5:39-40; 6:35; 11:25-27; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16 ("as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him *for everlasting life*," emphasis added).

[48] He explained that as long as a person has not thought about whether salvation/everlasting life/justification/heaven is secure or not, then he can be born again without believing in the eternality of the gift. But, if a person already believes in a form of works salvation, then he must believe in the eternality of the life in order to be born again.

> and not a function of my technique or of my evangelistic dynamism.[49]

Hodges preached the cross when he evangelized and he did so in order to lead people to believe in Jesus for the promise of everlasting life.

Why did he find such an approach "liberating"? Because, as he says in the last paragraph cited, he knows what it is that he must communicate to present the message clearly.

When I was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ we used *The Four Spiritual Laws* to evangelize. All the staff and all the students used it. Aside from adding in a personal illustration, everyone essentially read the booklet word for word. Why did hundreds of thousands of people read a booklet to people? The reason was because they did not know any other way to present the message of Christ clearly.

I too have found the approach that Hodges suggests liberating. Is that a cross-less gospel? No, it is not. Is it a promise-only gospel? No. It is a *promise-central* gospel. The cross and resurrection are presented as the proof that the promise of everlasting life is true. But the ultimate aim is to get people to understand what the promise is, everlasting life to the one who believes in Jesus.

IX. CONCLUSION

I hope Free Grace people reread Hodges's two, or really three, articles. If they do, I believe they will find a practical and Biblical approach to evangelism that in no way *belittles* the work of Christ on the cross or His bodily resurrection from the dead. Indeed, this approach *exalts* the shed blood of Christ and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

I have apologized before, and I do so again now, for the tone in some of the articles I've written and published on this issue. At times the tone was not as irenic or winsome as it should have been. I've tried in this article to watch my tone. And others have checked it for me. But if this too offends some, please know that is not my intent.

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[49]Hodges, Part 2: 18. Emphasis added.

We should love the Lord because we should never get over extreme gratitude that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins to make us savable. We should rejoice daily in the certainty of our eternal destiny, which we find in the promise the Lord Jesus made, a promise of life we know is true because of the cross and empty tomb.

My thanks to my pastor friend for drawing me back to this illustration.[50] I believe this may well have been divinely intended, for I had determined a few years ago that it was time to put this issue to bed because it has proved so divisive. Now I believe I was wrong. This remains an important issue and I do not believe it is divisive if what Hodges was actually saying is understood.

[50] My thanks also to a number of people who interacted with a conference message I gave by the same title. Those comments helped me improve this article significantly. Also I appreciate the advice given by various people after they read a pre-publication copy of this article.

CHEAP GRACE OR CHEAP LAW? DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND GERHARD FORDE ON THE NATURE OF LAW AND GOSPEL

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I. INTRODUCTION

The epithet of *cheap grace* is often used to derogatively label the message of the free gift of everlasting life. But one seldom hears about the far more insidious danger of preaching *cheap law*. What is cheap law, and why should we be wary of it?

The debate between cheap grace and cheap law primarily arises within Lutheran circles, as exemplified by the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) and Gerhard Forde (1927-2005). This paper will contrast Bonhoeffer's critique of cheap grace with Forde's claim that putting any conditions on the gospel means preaching a cheap law.

II. BONHOEFFER ARGUED THAT CHEAP GRACE PRODUCED MORAL LAXITY

In the mid-1930s, under the creeping shadow of the Nationalist Socialist German Worker's Party (i.e. the Nazis), Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian, wrote the following foreboding words in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*: "We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ."[1]

What is this 'cheap grace' he so grimly warned about?

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller and Irmgard Booth (New York: Collier, 1963), 57.

For Bonhoeffer, cheap grace meant the kind of preaching that indiscriminately offers the promise of salvation without requiring a change in behavior. By treating God's grace as if it were a common good, cheap grace preaching did not liberate its hearers from sin so much as left them all the more secure in them:

> Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack's wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be, if it were not cheap?[2]

The Lutheran Church of his day, Bonhoeffer says, was marked by the debilitating theological presumption that God's forgiveness was granted as a matter of course, and was received simply through assent to the system that doled it out, apart from personal commitment to following Christ. Cheap grace meant "forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be itself sufficient to secure remission of sins."[3] For Bonhoeffer, this was a perversion of the great Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Crucially, Bonhoeffer accused this false theological system of leading to moral laxity and worse. People were not asked to obey Christ, and so didn't. The results were spiritually disastrous. By proclaiming forgiveness without the need for repentance, or a change in their desires, cheap grace left sinners just as they were found, i.e. untransformed and secure in their sins. This created a nominal Christendom filled with professing "Christians" who were little more than spiritual corpses:

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[2] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 45.

[3] Ibid., 45.

> What had happened to all those warnings of Luther's against preaching the gospel in such a manner as to make men rest secure in their ungodly living? Was there ever a more terrible or disastrous instance of the Christianizing of the world than this? What are those three thousands of Saxons put to death by Charlemagne compared with the millions of spiritual corpses in our country to-day? . . . Cheap grace has turned out to be utterly merciless to our Evangelical Church.[4]

Nowhere was this spiritual disaster more evident than in the enthusiastic support so-called German Christians gave to the Nazis, a regime so vile it became a byword for evil itself. It was bewildering to think that people who were supposed to believe in justification by faith in Christ, could become spiritually depraved enough to celebrate a man like Hitler. How could the gospel have borne such bitter fruit among Luther's heirs?

For Bonhoeffer, it was because the gospel was not being preached. And given the gravity of this spiritual malady, he argued the only cure for cheap grace was to make it more costly. Costly grace was desperately needed if the churches were to survive: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace."[5]

Rather than provide forgiveness to all comers, Bonhoeffer believed that conditions must be put on its reception. Repentance, church discipline, and confession were all essential.[6] Above all, the message of grace must be conditioned on *discipleship*. It was precisely this lack of discipleship that perverted and cheapened the very nature of grace: "Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship."[7]

Not that discipleship had to be *added* to the offer of grace. According to Bonhoeffer, grace itself was being misunderstood,

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[4] Ibid., 54.

[5] Ibid., 45.

[6] "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Ibid., 47

[7] Ibid., 53.

for the promise of forgiveness included a costly call to follow Christ:

> Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.[8]

Hence, far from securing us in ungodliness, God's grace compels us to obey Christ's commands and to follow Him: "Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden light.'"[9] Grace and discipleship are two sides of the same coin. One cannot truly receive grace without undertaking to follow Christ. The Lutheran churches may have accepted the importance of faith, but it left the life of faith by the wayside. As Bonhoeffer wrote: "Luther had said that grace alone can save; his followers took up his doctrine and repeated it word for word. But they left out its invariable corollary, the obligation of discipleship."[10]

Given the times in which he lived, it is easy to sympathize with Bonhoeffer's concerns. Clearly, a lack of discipleship did negatively affect the churches. But though he recognized the symptoms, did he correctly diagnose the disease? And could Bonhoeffer's cure have been worse than the disease itself?

III. FORDE ARGUED THAT COSTLY GRACE PRODUCES A HYPOCRITICAL VIEW OF THE LAW'S DEMAND

One criticism of Bonhoeffer's call for costly grace was that it effectively made grace depend upon law. Not that Bonhoeffer was advocating a return to the Mosaic law. But he did imply that one needs some kind of law in order to receive grace. The two must be mixed together and made to depend on each other. Hence, he emphasized the Christian commands and imperatives associated with discipleship.

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[8] Ibid., 47.

[9] Ibid., 48.

[10] Ibid., 53.

However, according to Gerhard Forde[11] (pronounced *Fur-dee*) any such mixing is anathema. Mingling law and grace is the surest way to ruin both. Indeed, the effects of putting law-like conditions on God's grace are depressingly predictable. Far from leading to costly grace, *it actually leads to the preaching of cheap law.*

Wherever grace is made to become more *costly* the law must be *cheapened*, and both the nature of grace and the nature of the law will be fundamentally changed.[12] Hence, Forde was wary of any attempt to compromise the freeness of the gospel offer of forgiveness by making it conditional on law, seeing it as a misguided mixing of Law and Gospel.[13]

According to Forde (following Luther), 'law' is more encompassing than the Mosaic law. It includes all commands, imperatives, and 'oughts'. For Luther, "'law'" did not mean merely laws but anything and everything that accuses."[14] The law says, "Do this or else." But the gospel only says, "You are forgiven." The forgiveness of the gospel must never be mixed with the curses of the law. Forde believed that cheap law preaching commits two errors.

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[11] Forde taught systematic theology at Luther Seminary, and was known as a proponent of Radical Lutheranism, which might be characterized by three aspects: reaffirming the radical nature of justification by faith alone, reviving the tradition of the *theologia crucis*, and reinvigorating the Lutheran hermeneutic of law and gospel. Gerhard Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, edited by Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 3-16.

[12] Forde did not use the term "cheap law." But that concept neatly summarizes his critique. It was suggested to me in conversation by Mr. Philippe DeBlois, a Lutheran layman and publisher.

[13] The Lutheran Law/Gospel hermeneutic is distinct from allegorical (Catholic, Orthodox), covenantal (Reformed), quadrilateral (Wesleyan), and dispensational (Plymouth Brethren, etc.) hermeneutics. For more information, see the classic work by C. F. W. Walther, *Law And Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), and a modern summary by John T. Pless, *Handling the Word of Truth: Law and Gospel in the Church Today* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004).

[14] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 222.

A. Cheap Law as a Christological Error

First, Forde contends that cheap law preaching is a Christological error. Properly understood, the law is meant to lead the sinner to Christ. How? The law demands perfection. But no one has ever, or could ever, meet that demand. Only Christ was sinless. But that was the purpose of the law all along. It pointed to the need for Christ. As such, Christ is the *telos* and the *finis* of the law, because only Christ is "the realization and fulfillment of that to which law can only point."[15]

But in cheap law preaching, that Christological end is denied. When the reception of grace is made to depend on some performance by the sinner, the assumption is that sinners can adequately meet the law's standard. But that is only possible if the law is made to demand something less than Christ's perfect righteousness. In which case, cheap law preaching effectively severs Christ from being the *telos* of the law. Instead of an unyielding reflection of God's unchanging holy character, the law becomes little more than a wax nose to be manipulated at will. Rather than reflect the holiness of God, cheap law preaching changes the law to suit the sinner, who tries to play hide and seek with its demands. This is a perversion of the law.

B. Cheap Law as Covert Antinomianism

Second, Forde claims that cheap law preaching is a covert form of antinomianism. Admittedly, that is an odd accusation to make, since to be antinomian means being *against* the law. But how can cheap law be antinomian if it favors the law?

Forde distinguishes between two kinds of antinomianism: overt and covert.

Overt antinomianism tries to do away with the law entirely. It denies the necessity of law in any sense, whether the Ten Commandments or the moral law. Clearly, cheap law preachers don't qualify as overt antinomians.

Covert antinomianism is a different animal. According to Forde, this form of antinomianism retains the law but in an altered form. Most often, it tries to avoid law talk altogether, only to preach it under a different name (e.g., as "discipleship"). And sometimes the law is misleadingly called the "gospel":

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[15] Forde, *Radical Gospel*, 60.

"we talk about 'the teachings of the gospel' instead of speaking forthrightly about the commandments of God."[16] Covert antinomianism does not deny the law, but changes its content to better suit the sinner: "Instead of a clear *end* to the law, covert antinomianism tries to ameliorate the law's stringency by a *change* of the law, in either content or function."[17]

Just so, cheap law preaching superficially seems to favor the law, but undermines it in practice by limiting its demands and putting it to a different purpose. This is antinomianism in its truest form:

> What is antinomianism, after all? In essence, it is a theological attempt to bring the law to heel short of death by some kind of manipulation, overt and covert. If one can't end the law, one seeks to tone it down, to alter it, to apply it casuistically… One disarms the law and makes it into a gentle guide which we use in our quest for virtue. Thus domesticated as the "house pet" of the pious, the law indeed remains but it has lost its teeth.[18]

This is precisely what cheap law preachers do. They preach the law but tone down its demands. But if Forde believes that costly grace/cheap law preaching is a distortion of the gospel message, what is his proposed solution?

IV. THE SOLUTION: THE LAW ALWAYS ACCUSES

The solution requires that we understand the law's true purpose. We must begin by recognizing that cheap law preaching rests on a mistake, namely, that the law was given to save us from sin. "We think that the law is the remedy for sin. If we could just get our act together we could break the slavery and be free at last."[19] But that is something the law cannot do.

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[16] Ibid., 61.

[17] Forde, *Preached God*, 220.

[18] Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 47-48.

[19] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B.

Positively, the law can do many things:

> It can preserve society. It can restrain evil. It can even help us to reach out to give aid beyond our normal reach. It may preserve, restrain, prevent, and so forth. Yet, it is not a remedy for sin. As a matter of fact, it just makes sin worse.[20]

But the law cannot give a person everlasting life. According to Forde, it was not even meant to convince sinners of the necessity of divine help to help them along the way to paradise. Rather, the law was given to utterly crush man. It was meant to hammer his wicked heart to dust and to dispel in him every pretense to salvation by works. The law was meant to *kill*. As Paul says, the law is a ministry of death (2 Cor 3:7).

Forde's understanding of the law's purpose is derived from the Lutheran interpretation of Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. There Paul emphasized that no one could be justified before God by doing the law (Gal 2:16). Such a course of action was hopeless because it was not the law's purpose. As Forde explains:

> The law, [Paul] insists, could not stop sin. As a matter of fact, it came in precisely to expose sin and even to make it worse so it would be shown to be sinful beyond measure. But that permits an opening for grace, because where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.[21]

Paul made clear that the law could never give a person life, or make them righteous (Gal 3:21). On the contrary, by the law was knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20). Without a law to tell us the difference between right and wrong, sins like coveting would go unnoticed (Rom 7:7). Hence, Paul says that the law was actually given to *increase* sin (Rom 5:20). This was done, not to save us, but precisely so that God's wrath would come (Rom 4:15). The law's purpose was not to relieve man of sin's burden, but

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Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), 88.

[20] Forde, *Captivation*, 88.

[21] Forde, *Radical Gospel*, 143.

to make the burden unbearable, so as to leave the sinner completely condemned before God. "Death, not laws, puts an end to sin."[22]

Hence, the law is not an invitation of cooperation between God and man, but an implicit denial that any such cooperation is possible.

> The law did not stop sin but only made sin worse. In so doing the law showed sin to be exceedingly sinful. The law exposed the depth of sin by showing it to be ineradicable by human power. Indeed, the law increased sin so as to bring it into confrontation with its sole remedy: that where sin abounded grace might much more abound.[23]

Rather than act as a *condition* for receiving God's grace (as cheap law preachers hold), the law is meant to dispel every thought of self-fulfillment, self-aggrandizement, self-progression, and self-deification. The law proclaims the absolute futility of all schemes of salvation by works righteousness. Writes Forde:

> The law… is not a remedy for sin. We always tend to forget this. The law may restrain us from doing evil deeds. It may even induce us to do good deeds. It may hold the world together while it is waiting for the gospel. But it does not save us because it cannot cure sin. It cannot fix the broken relationship. For all the good it does, indeed, maybe even *in* the good it does, it only makes sin worse.[24]

The only door to eternal salvation left open by the law is the door of grace in Christ, a grace that does not complete or supplements man's works, but excludes them entirely. "And if grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Rom 11:6).

The difference between law and grace could not be more striking. And so, according to Forde, the proper response to the preaching of "cheap law" is to preach the law as God meant it

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[22] Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 79.

[23] Forde, *Proclamation*, 78.

[24] Forde, *Radical Gospel*, 143.

to be preached, not as tailor-made to suit the sinner, but as utterly unyielding as God's holy character. If one must preach the law, said Forde, then preach a law that kills and does not make alive. Preach a law that demands perfection, yet gives no help to attain it. Preach a law that curses to death, and grounds to ash, anyone who falls short of its towering heights. In sum, preach a law *that only Christ can fulfill*.

Then, after the law has done its killing, after it has demolished all the sinner's pretension to salvation by works and has utterly shut all the false paths of works-righteousness, then, and only then, may the harrowed and humbled offender finally have ears to hear the message of grace. Then they may be prepared to put their trust in Christ's promise of eternal life, and not in their own efforts. But even here there is a danger:

> If one begins with the law in the sense of trying to establish need or grovel about in "gloom, despair, and agony" one rarely gets out of the hole and usually ends up just prolonging the agony of the Old Adam by capitulating. If one tries to shift to gospel first, that will only be misused by the Old Being to solidify its defenses. What is one to do?[25]

In good Luther fashion, Forde believed that after preaching the law, the thing to do is to preach the unconditional gospel of freely given grace.

V. CHEAP GRACE IS TOO COSTLY

Along with his criticisms of cheap law, Forde also criticizes the notion of cheap grace. The problem with cheap grace preaching is not that it offers grace with too few strings attached. In order for grace to be *cheap*, it would still have to *cost* something. But God does not sell His grace. He gives it away freely, as a gift. So the problem with cheap grace is not that it costs too little, but that it costs anything at all. Says Forde: "Is it not 'cheap grace'? No! It's not cheap, it's *free*! "Cheap grace," you see, is not improved by making it inexpensive, a 'bargain basement'

[25] Forde, *Justification*, 93.

special. It's *free*."[26] Hence, both cheap grace and cheap law preaching obscure the radical freeness of God's grace in Christ.

Forde makes the point that it is precisely the free gift of justification that establishes the unyielding demands of the law. Just as the law curses us absolutely, leaving no room for thinking that works can save us, so too are we justified absolutely, leaving no doubt about our salvation or our standing as sinners. Only sinners who are categorically condemned by the law need to be categorically justified by faith apart from works. And so, we can preach the law without mercy, precisely because Christ fulfilled the law in order to offer mercy to all:

> Precisely because the gospel is an unconditional promise, justification an unconditional gift, faith sees law in its absolute clarity, stringency, and strength. Precisely because Christ (and Christ alone!) gives perfectly that to which the law points, there can be no reason for or attempt to tamper with the law. When the end is given, the law is established.[27]

Put another way, cheap grace and cheap law run afoul of the *simul iustus et peccator*, the phrase Luther used to describe the believer as someone simultaneously condemned by the law as a sinner, and yet justified as a saint:

> Above all, the *simul iustus et peccator* brings with it an understanding of sin that undermines all ordinary ideas of progress according to moral or legal schemes. The *iustitia* exists *simultaneously* with the *peccatum*. The unconditional act of justification exposes; by declaring us to be just, it reveals us as sinners. In the light of the totality of justification, sin is confessed simultaneously as a total state. The justifying deed therefore does not remove sin in the sense one might accord a moral or legal scheme; it exposes it.[28]

We are at once both absolutely condemned as sinners, and absolutely justified before God. We must be justified by faith, precisely because we are sinners with no way of justifying

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[26] Ibid., 34.

[27] Forde, *Preached God*, 219.

[28] Forde, *Justification*, 43.

ourselves. Justification must be imputed to us as an unconditional gift, precisely because there is no grounds for our justification in our behavior.[29] As shocking as it sounds, one is made right with God, not through activities like discipleship, but by ceasing to work altogether:

> who has heard of such a thing – that one is made right with God just by stopping all activity, being still and listening? What the words say to us, really, is that for once in your life you must just shut up and listen to God, listen to the announcement: You are just before God for Jesus' sake![30]

This kind of grace is not cheap. It is free.

VI. FOR THE NEIGHBOR

The doctrine of free grace seems to leave no room for works. Bonhoeffer's whole concern was to encourage authentic Christian living amidst a nominal Christendom. How does one do *that* while holding to the *simul*? Doesn't the *simul* and free grace discourage good works and lead to moral laxity?

Not so, thinks Forde. While it is true that our eternal salvation does not depend on doing good works, that is precisely what motivates us to do good. Rather than ask the question, "What must I do in order to be saved," Forde thinks we should ask: "What are you going to do, now that you don't *have to* do anything?"[31] It is the unconditionality of the gospel promise that inspires us to do good. "The unconditional gift opens up an entirely different view of God's will and God's commandments. What we are to do, now that we don't have to do anything for ourselves, is God's will."[32] We are motivated by the fact that God loves us, and gives us His grace in Christ, even though (or because!) we are helpless sinners. And because of Christ's promise of free grace we are spontaneously inspired to do good:

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[29] Ibid., 50.
[30] Ibid., 86.
[31] Ibid., 56.
[32] Ibid., 58.

> Such a faith will begin to see the fantastic magnitude of the divine act, the miracle of a God who nevertheless does business with sinners, and actually begin, however hesitatingly and falteringly, to love God from the heart, to hate sin and the self of sin, and to hope for that righteousness which it knows full well it can never attain by any known scheme of moral or virtuous progress – the righteousness of faith. Such a faith is a death and the beginning of resurrection precisely because it is a belief in the speaking of God which defies all empirical evidence – *faith in the promise* [italics added].[33]

We will do good to others because it will come to us naturally, spontaneously, as the result of being shown grace in Christ, without the fear or legalism of typical moralities.

> Faith doesn't ask about good works, but does them without all the theological fuss and bother. Good works are works done in faith, the faith which has simply gotten over looking at itself and its "progress" and begun to look at the neighbor. Good works should be quite as natural and spontaneous as a parent running to pick up and comfort a child who has fallen and gotten hurt. One doesn't stop to think about it. One doesn't even worry about whether it is a good work or not – one just does it. And after it is over, one forgets about it completely. That is what good works are like.[34]

God does not need our good works. But our neighbors do. We are God's hands to do good to our fellow men: "the commandments of God do not lead one on a quest for personal holiness and virtue, but precisely into the world of the neighbor."[35]

The idea that the Christian will spontaneously do good works does not mean we won't fall, stumble, or sin. We remain sinners. But the solution to this falling away isn't to make grace more costly by preaching a cheap law. The solution is to return again and again to the freeness of the gospel: "In actuality we do sin,

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[33] Ibid., 53.

[34] Ibid., 55.

[35] Ibid., 58.

fall away, and lose trust," says Forde, "*so that we do need the gospel again and again*."[36] That is the transforming truth that lukewarm Christians need to hear.

VII. APPLICATION TO LORDSHIP SALVATION

The Lutheran debate over cheap grace and cheap law helps to illuminate the debate between Free Grace Theology and Lordship Salvation.[37]

First, the debate suggests that Lordship Salvation is a form of cheap law preaching. Calling people to submit, commit, surrender, obey, or follow Christ in order to be saved (or to prove that they are saved), is nothing less than calling people to obey the law for their salvation. And insofar as the conditions being demanded fall short of a call for perfection, it means preaching a cheap version of the law. Adopting the term "cheap law" to describe Lordship theology emphasizes the way that Lordship Salvation distorts the true demands of the law.

Second, the debate suggests that it is Lordship Salvation that actually preaches "cheap grace." [38] Lordship Salvation cheapens

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[36] Forde, *Proclamation*, 79.

[37] Readers of this journal do not need to be told what this debate has involved. Interested parties may go to www.faithalone.org for a wealth of articles about the debate.

[38] I would go further and question whether what Lordship Salvation calls "grace" bears any relationship to Biblical grace. After all, grace is unmerited favor, the good that God shows towards the undeserving. As sinners, we have voluntarily chosen to rebel against God. And yet God loves us and sends Christ to die for us, and He offers us eternal life. There is a clear fact of our guilt, and God's clear counter-act of grace.

But now consider how many Lordship Salvation teachers are Calvinists who believe in unconditional election. They believe that God sovereignly chooses to save some and condemn others, for His own glory. Indeed, they generally believe God causes all things to come to pass. It is hard to see how the idea of merit even applies to such a scheme. If God is the one who decrees that we should all be sinners, and then decides who will be saved or damned, it seems He is the one who is ultimately responsible for a person's actions. There is no morally meaningful sense of responsibility under this scheme. Without responsibility, there can be no merit. And without merit, there can be no notion of unmerited favor, i.e. grace.

Hence, I would say that Lordship teachers don't actually believe in *grace*, (though they use the word). Rather, they believe in *power*. The elect are not saved by grace (unmerited favor), they are saved by God's causal power to effect what He desires.

grace by making it depend upon imperfect human works, a standard of behavior that is something less than perfection.

Third, the debate shows that Lordship Salvation involves a Christological error. By making salvation depend upon obedience to a diminished and deformed version of the law, Lordship teachers are effectively denying that the law demands Christ's righteousness. And so, denying the law's Christological purpose and end, they commit a Christological error.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the kinds of issues raised in the Lordship Salvation debate have parallels with the debate between Bonhoeffer and Forde. Bonhoeffer's call for costly grace is precisely what Lordship Salvation demands as a solution to modern moral laxity in the churches. And Forde's analysis of the theological errors lying behind such calls is to say what it truly is: cheap law.

The right response to moral laxity is not to make grace more costly by preaching a cheap law, but to return to the gospel promise of free grace. Only belief in the promise of justification by faith alone apart from works will truly inspire backslidden Christians to live for God and to do good towards their neighbors.

WE BELIEVE IN: GOOD WORKS[1]

ARTHUR L. FARSTAD

(1935-1998)

> "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
>
> —Ephesians 2:10

I. INTRODUCTION

Bible-believing Protestants believe in good works as a normal *fruit* of salvation, but grace alone as the *root*. The Reformers were clear on this, even if their descendants are not always so. In taking a firm stand against Rome's salvation by faith plus works (their seven-fold sacramental system) Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the English Reformers were crystal-clear on this very important topic. Would that it were still true in most "Protestant" quarters. Even the conservative remnants of the so-called mainline denominations and the generally smaller, but typically more Biblical, groups seem to have drifted from *sola gratia*.

If salvation were by grace through faith *plus* a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or a gift of $50 to the Church, we would be saying through all eternity, "Am I glad I made that pilgrimage (or gave that gift)!" We would share the glory of our salvation. And God does not wish to share His glory with anyone—even with us!

In stressing the grace-alone aspect of salvation we are always in danger of becoming (or at least appearing) uninterested in good works. The opening verse of this paper shows that we were specifically *created* for good works. Hence they must be important. Before examining what good works are, who does them, and with what result, for newer readers of our Journal we would

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[1] Reprinted from the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society (*Autumn 1989), 3-12. Dr. Art Farstad was the founding Editor of this Journal and continued to edit it until he went Home in 1998.

like to underscore one of our strongest emphases, *the finished work of Christ*.

II. THE GREATEST GOOD WORK

The only reason a Christian can do any work that can be considered *good* in God's eyes is because he or she is building on the foundation of the once-for-all good work of Christ.

In John 6:28, after Jesus fed the 5,000 with the five loaves and two fishes, the Jews asked Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" A very good question deserving a clear, concise answer. If ever there was an opportunity for our Lord to stress the necessity for keeping the *law* (or part of the law) or availing oneself of the grace said to come through *baptism* (or *holy communion*, etc.) or total submission to His *Lordship*, or *character-building*, or ten or fifteen other "faith plus" systems that Christendom has devised—this was it.

But note carefully His response: "Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the *work* of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He sent [emphasis supplied]."'

Believing in the One whom God the Father sent is the only "work" He gives them. How can this be? It can be because, when Jesus dares to predicate acceptance with God upon belief in Himself, He knows what He will shortly do to accomplish the "greatest work" of all—redemption at Calvary.

And that "work" *has been* accomplished. Thus, when Jesus cried out on the Cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) the perfect tense of the Greek verb (*tetelestai*) implied a completed deed with lasting results. He wasn't merely saying that His life was over. He had finished the work of redemption. The Book of Hebrews stresses the same truth—the "once-and-for-all" character of the work of our Lord at Calvary (Heb 7:27; 9:26, 28; 10:10, 12). For us to add our poor efforts to that infinite sacrifice—however well-meant they might be—is a great insult to God.

Because Christ has paid it all and done it all for our salvation, through faith in Him we are enabled to do the good works for which He has created us.

III. THE NATURE OF GOOD WORKS

Exactly what constitutes *good* works from a Biblical standpoint? How can we define the subject? A good work is one done by one of God's people, for God's sake, and in God's will. A "good work" is a "God work." The classic French *Dictionnaire Larousse* has an old motto that is helpful: "A [definition] without examples is a skeleton."[2]

Assuming that every Christian reader of this article wants to actually *do* good works, let us try to flesh out this skeleton outline with some Biblical examples of good works.

A. Our Lord's Example

"[He] went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). When threatened by His enemies with stoning, Jesus said, "For which of these good works do you stone Me?" (John 10:32). What good works did He mean? He *fed the hungry* in the feeding of both the 5,000 and the 4,000, and He *healed the sick*. We cannot do either in the same way He did, but nevertheless we can provide food for the hungry. Traditionally Christian missions have also supplied doctors and nurses to undeveloped areas. In fact, hospitals and orphanages are both byproducts of Christianity. They did not exist before the days of the Church.

Jesus Himself appreciates the good works we do for the poor—and gives credit as if it were done directly to Him.

In the famous Parable of the Sheep and the Goats Jesus tells the sheep why He wanted to reward them:

> "…for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it

[2] "Un dictionnaire sans exemples est un squelette" refers to the entire body of definitions, but it is equally true of individual words.

> to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt 25:35-40).

B. Early Christian Examples

Feeding the Hungry

In Acts 6 the destitute widows in the Church at Jerusalem were fed by the generosity of the congregation. Generally speaking, the Church has been active in feeding the hungry through all her long history, a fact which is often overlooked by her many critics.

Clothing the Poor

In Acts 9:36-42 we have the account of a woman named Tabitha or Dorcas (Aramaic and Greek for *gazelle*) who "was full of good works and charitable deeds" (v 36). The good work for which she has been remembered is clothing the poor widows: "And all the widows stood by him [Peter] weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" (v 39).

My mother, who was a typical old-fashioned European in her skill with the needle, belonged for years to the "Dorcas Sewing Circle" in our congregation. Untold millions of believing women (and men!) have been and are active in clothing the world's underprivileged, at home and abroad. The King takes notice.

Prison Ministries

"Remember the prisoners," writes the author of Hebrews, "as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb 13:3). There have been prisons since earliest history. Christians themselves have often been prisoners for their faith (as in Hebrews), but Christians in countries with freedom of religion have been in the vanguard of trying to reach and help people behind bars.

Various prison ministries spread the gospel and Bible studies among prisoners and they thus alleviate the root causes for which people are behind bars in the first place. Many who wouldn't go near a church while on the outside have received a fresh beginning in life through accepting salvation in prison.

Hospitality

Taking people into your home is a good work that demands patience and kindness and a willingness to put up with inconvenience.

Elders are to be hospitable men (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8), but all Christians who are able should practice this good work (1 Pet 1:9). Military personnel away from home, students (especially internationals), traveling Christians—all need to find a hospitable reception in Christian homes.

In early Church days the inns were often virtually brothels, and so itinerant preachers, prophets, and ordinary believers, would be put up in Christian homes.

At least one denomination (the Mennonites) has a good reputation for practicing this even in today's culture of clean motels and hotels. They have this idiom: "Mennoniting it across the country." I have seen similar hospitality among the Brethren Assemblies and other Biblically-oriented fellowships.

Sharing

"Do not forget," writes the author of Hebrews, "to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb 13:16).

Sharing takes in an enormous spectrum of good deeds. A person with a Christ-like heart is ready for new and creative good deeds—or, more often, variations on an ancient theme by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since space forbids detailing more good works than these, I close this section with some good words from that great Germanic giant of God, Martin Luther. Luther maintained that the "noblest of all good works is to believe in Christ."[3] All other good works flow from this. The Reformer protested against limiting good works to "praying in church, fasting, and giving alms," and held that these could also include "laboring at one's trade, coming and going, eating, drinking, and sleeping, and all the other acts that help nourish the body or are generally useful." Anything that the believer does to the glory of God is a good work.

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[3] This and the following quotations are from Luther's tract entitled "Sermon on Good Works."

C. The Importance of Good Works

In the "Letters of our Lord" (Revelation 2, 3), Jesus again and again writes, "I know your works." Even corrupt Thyatira had many good works. Ephesus had maintained her good works but cooled in her ardor for the Lord. This is always a danger—getting so caught up in charities that the supreme *charitas*, love for Christ, is dimmed in the daily grind of duties. To be put on the "dole," Christian widows had to have a reputation for good works (1 Tim 5:10).

As is well known, the Pastoral Epistles are especially rich in exhortations to good works. Consider, for example, the following verses, which I have boldfaced in places to emphasize the theme: "Let them do good, that they be **rich in good works**, ready to give, willing to share" (1 Tim 6:18). Titus is told by senior missionary Paul to show himself "to be a **pattern of good works**" (Titus 2:7).

The very purpose of Christ's redemption, as we saw in this article's theme verse, was to create a people to be like Him, going about doing good. Paul expresses this in Titus 2:14: "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, **zealous for good works**."

An occasional good deed is not enough. Neither is starting out well and then letting our good deeds slide and gradually forgetting to do them.

We must "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Heb 10:24). In the last chapter of Titus, Paul says twice within a few verses that "our people" have to keep at it:

> This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to **maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable to men…. And let our people also learn to **maintain good works**, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful (3:8, 14).

Using our Lord's examples, illustrations from the early Christians, and NT exhortations, I have tried to put some meat on the bare bones of a purely verbal definition. This material is merely suggestive.

Eternity alone will be "time" enough to recount the untold billions of good deeds—ordinary, creative, and occasionally unique—that God's people have done.

IV. THE GOOD WORKER

Many of the things encouraged in our previous discussion have been and are practiced by people who are clearly not believers in the Biblical sense, or even professing Christians at all. Jews, Muslims, and even humanists can do many nice things. The same outward act can be done by a believer and an unbeliever, yet only one deed will be counted as a good work in God's eyes because it springs from His Spirit. What Shakespeare calls "the milk of human kindness" is an observable trait. Sometimes unbelievers are more active in doing nice deeds than Christians, and people judge accordingly. However, the comparison should not be between the best that a refined or religious unbeliever can do versus what a lazy, immature, or carnal believer is doing, but what would be the difference *in the same person* before and after salvation and sanctification. This is hard to gauge, but many Christians struggling with a bad temper, lust, sharp tongue, or selfishness, are quick to point out how completely hopeless they were before their conversion.

Some people by nature seem endowed with the milk of human kindness and actually enjoy helping others, often with mixed motives, however. But when a basically selfish person does good works for Christ's sake, he is "doing what comes supernaturally."[4]

The goals to which a practicer of good works should strive are amply presented and elaborated in the NT, especially, as we have noted, in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Again and again in these three short books, Christians are commanded or encouraged to maintain good works.

A. Trained by Saving Grace

A passage that succinctly and beautifully summarizes the kind of person who should be doing good works is Titus 2:11-12. The paragraph heading for Titus 2:11-15 in *The Greek New*

[4] The phrase is from a book title by Dr. Frye, former pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas.

Testament According to the Majority Text, "Trained by Saving Grace," nicely sets the tone:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

Our English word *pedagogy* comes from the verb translated "teaching" here. It is teaching, training, or discipline. Some contexts suggest self-denial ("just say no!"). Good works are hard to do. By nature we would much rather cushion our lives with all the creature-comforts we can afford (or *can't* afford in this age of plastic money).

The Selfward Lifestyle

The first adverb that Paul uses describes the selfward attitude of one who wishes to be a good worker for God: *soberly* (*sōphronōs*). This word suggests a serious (not morbid), sound-minded manner of life with deep consideration of eternal values. Our present conduct will greatly affect our future rewards and position in God's kingdom. As someone has well said, "Time is the embryo of eternity."

The Manward Lifestyle

The word *righteously* (*dikaiōs*) stresses how we are to deal with our fellow men—both saved and unsaved. Our relationship with others should always be fair and just, which is at least part of the somewhat theological word "righteous." Righteous living is a positive necessity if we are to treat others as we would like to be treated. We should not be satisfied with a legal fulfillment of the minimum requirements of fair play. We should be actively doing "good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).

If we don't strive to do right by ourselves we will not treat other people properly either. Actually our personal lives stem from our condition in God's sight, which is the third aspect in an ascending scale of life values for the doer of good works.

The Godward Lifestyle

Paul uses the word *godly* (*eusebōs*) for the third and most important part of a Christian's doings. The word may be translated "piously" or "devoutly," and comes from roots meaning "good"

(*eu-*) and "worship" (*seb-*). The idea is that we do good works for God's sake, being inspired by His promptings.

If we are well-adjusted to God's will we will be doing good works whether they are known to others or not. We should never "advertise" our good works. As our Lord said regarding giving, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matt 6:3). This command has been honored largely in the breach. Much of Christendom encourages giving with outward recognition: "To the glory of God AND ____." Furthermore, the "AND" part (glory to the giver) is generally what people notice.

To help us maintain our good works when all around seem bent on self-aggrandizement and pampering self (for, after all, "You deserve it," say the TV commercials), an incentive is given in Titus 2:13, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

B. Good Works Observed

I hope I will be forgiven two anecdotes about a good worker to whom I had the good fortune of being related. Of my late Uncle George it was said, "He went about doing good." He was a bachelor who lived in a brownstone house in the Bronx with his sister, Anna.

Uncle George worked very hard all week as a gifted mason (he helped build St. Patrick's Cathedral and the United Nations Building). On Saturdays, instead of taking it easy, he would buy fruit and coffee cake and visit elderly shut-in folks from the old country (in this case Norway) and also, from time to time, elderly *Swedish*[5] folk as well.

Two incidents stand out from my boyhood out East. Once a Danish sailor named Magnus, who knew no English, got his leg caught in between a subway train and the platform. It was so badly mangled that the doctor said it would almost certainly have to be amputated. Uncle George took Magnus into his brownstone, gave him *his* room, and said, "*Nei, da!*" (Nothing doing!). Through care and mostly prayer, Magnus's leg was saved. After a long recovery he went back to his wife and family in Denmark.

One blustery winter day, wearing his new, expensive overcoat ($40 was a lot in those days), Uncle George was accosted by a

[5] Scandinavians will be aware of the rivalry here!

shivering tramp on the windy streets of the Big Apple. Yes, you guessed it. He took off his coat, gave it to a man most people would call a "bum," and went home shivering himself. "Tante" Anna was scandalized. "And your new coat, too, George!" But I'm sure Uncle George is glad now.

I think Uncle George would have liked the following motto by John Wesley. It deserves to be lettered in calligraphy and put up in every Christian home:

DO ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN,
IN ALL THE WAYS YOU CAN,
TO ALL THE PEOPLE YOU CAN,
AS LONG AS EVER YOU CAN.

When Christ comes, all of these good works will be duly rewarded. It will be worth it all then.

V. REWARDS FOR GOOD WORKS

To be rewarded, our works don't have to be big, impressive, or cause great expense.

Listen to Jesus: "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matt 10:42). A cup of cold water! Not a hard thing to do. But notice it is *cold* water, not lukewarm—a beautiful little touch.

First Corinthians 3 is the central passage for rewarding a believer's good works:

> Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (vv 12-15).

Some of our works are showy and to be seen by others. Some are done for the wrong reason. God knows our hearts. I believe each believer will receive some reward. Even death-bed

converts, like the thief on the cross, have the fruits of their dying confession.

Years ago a seminary student had the following dream which was related to the class by our Greek professor:

> The young man was being "graded" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the *Bema*). When his turn to be reviewed came up, an angel wheeled out something resembling a booth at a county fair bedecked with fruits, flowers, and ribbons. This represented his good works, and the young man was pleased because it looked quite impressive. Then the angel put a match to it, and to the seminary student's dismay, the whole thing went up in smoke! Soon it was just a little pile of charred embers and ashes. Crestfallen, the student was about to despair, when the angel pulled out a little rake and started to sift through the ashes. From the charred remains he retrieved several lovely precious jewels—those works which had withstood the fire.

Only a dream. Yet it has a good lesson for all Christians. Do practice good works—but do so out of love for Christ, your fellow-men, and especially your fellow-Christians: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).

VI. CONCLUSION

Yes, we who believe in salvation by faith alone do also believe in good works. But we are careful to maintain the great gap between the finished work of Christ and the good works for which we have been created. His work is the basis for our salvation by faith apart from works. It is also the basis for good works after our conversion.

One of the evangelical stalwarts of the last generation, Dr. W. H. Griffith Thomas, shared the following little poem on faith and works with his daughter Winifred:

> I will not work my soul to save,
> For that my Lord has done;

But I will work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son!

THE TWO MODES OF HUMANITY PART 1: THE VIEW DELINEATED AND SUPPORTED

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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, mankind has longed for immortality and speculated about how to achieve it. This deeply rooted desire may be explained by an insight inferred from Genesis 1 and 2, namely, that God intended mankind to live forever in a natural and innocent state (i.e., in non-glorified bodies, able to reproduce and also to suffer injuries, yet sealed in a state of innocence such that they never would sin). Could God's original plan for natural humanity ever be restored?

Some dispensational premillennialists, from the 19th century to the present, have taught that it will be. They believe there will be two modes of humanity in the eternal state. The first mode will be that of a sanctified but natural humanity, who will marry and have children, and will continue to populate the new earth. The second mode will be that of a sanctified and glorified humanity, who no longer marry or reproduce, among whom will be "overcomers" who will rule with Christ over the new heaven and new earth and the capital city, New Jerusalem.

Some interpreters have strongly objected to these conclusions. Many find such ideas to be shocking, and not a little controversial. It certainly does not comport with the mainstream of Christian tradition (i.e., among non-Dispensationalists). Nevertheless, it bears further examination. Hence, this paper

will explore the Biblical and theological support for the view of two modes of humanity in the eternal state.[1]

II. SUMMARY OF THE TWO MODES VIEW

Despite slight variations among its proponents, a survey of the supportive literature yields several main areas of agreement concerning the idea of two modes of humanity in the eternal state.

All agree that the Millennial Kingdom will have believers from previous dispensations in resurrected/glorified bodies who no longer sin. These people will not marry and will not have children.

There is also agreement that the Millennium will also include people who survived the Tribulation and so entered into the Millennium in their natural bodies. Consequently, Dispensationalists have long taught and believed that during the Millennium people will marry and have children. As F. S. Elmore explained "… two peoples of God as to mode of existence will continue through the millennium. This is a necessity of premillennial interpretation."[2] The question is, while this may be true of the Millennial period, is it possible the two modes of existence will continue into the Eternal Kingdom?[3]

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[1] This is the first article of a three-part series. The second article will survey the supportive tradition beginning with John Nelson Darby and continuing with George N. H. Peters, J. A. Seiss, Clarence Larkin, Herman A. Hoyt, Robert L. Thomas, and many others. The third article will explore objections to the view from some interpreters such as John Walvoord, Craig Blaising, Tony Garland, David L. Turner, Floyd S. Elmore, and Joseph Dillow.

[2] Floyd Sanders Elmore, "A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby" (Th.D. Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 309.

[3] Editor's note: I personally do not consider the Millennium to be a separate kingdom from the eternal kingdom. I understand Daniel to be saying, for example, that the fifth and final world kingdom, the kingdom of Messiah, will be one kingdom, not two (cf. Dan 2:44; 7:27; 9:24; 12:12-13). The Millennium is the first thousand years of the eternal kingdom. Peter says as much in 2 Pet 1:11: "for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Peter calls the Millennium "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Hence in my view the question should be whether the existence of two types of humans in the first thousand years of the everlasting kingdom will continue as that kingdom moves to the new earth.

Lewis Sperry Chafer appeared to raise the possibility that it may. In a statement in his *Systematic Theology*, he said this about the Gentiles of the Kingdom in the eternal state,

> A peculiar and distinguished group of Gentiles are those of the last generation which appear before the throne of Christ's glory at the end of the tribulation, and on the basis of their ministry to Israel are received into the earthly kingdom. This kingdom, it is said by the King, is one prepared for these Gentiles from the foundation of the world. A purpose which thus originates in eternity past may well be expected to continue into eternity to come.[4]

The Eternal Kingdom will begin after the dissolution of the present creation and the reconstruction of a new heaven and earth. In the Eternal Kingdom, humanity will consist of glorified believers and the believers from the end of the millennial age who are brought over in natural bodies. Robert Govett put it this way, "Thus also among mankind as settled in the new earth, there are two great classes: the risen, and those still in the flesh."[5]

However, millennial age believers in their natural bodies will be transformed so as to be immortal and incapable of sin, yet still capable of procreation. Robert Vacendak commented, "They will be like Adam and Eve before they sinned, but without the ability to sin. As such, they will procreate…"[6]

These transformed people will make up the nations of the new earth spoken of in Revelation 21-22. They will marry and have children of the same transformed nature who will populate the new earth. As E. R. Craven wrote, "The nations will consist of men in the flesh, freed from sin and the curse, begetting a holy seed and dwelling in blessedness under the government of the

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[4] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Volume IV, 416.

[5] Robert Govett, *Govett on Revelation* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., 1981, 1861, Originally published in London England, 1861, under the title *The Apocalypse: Expounded By Scripture*, under the pseudonym Matheetees), Vol. IV, 472.

[6] Robert Vacendak, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1330.

New Jerusalem."[7] Bob Bryant, pastor of Cypress Valley Bible Church in Marshall Texas, in a paper presented at the 2009 Grace Evangelical Society Conference agreed:

> The nations on the earth are spoken of in Revelation 21:22–22:3. It seems that the people referred to as *the nations*, will be people in natural bodies, not glorified bodies; will be without sin, like unfallen Adam and Eve; will marry and have children who will populate the new earth…[8]

It is also possible these new human beings may go on to colonize other planets. Concerning this possibility Clarence Larkin wrote, "God intended the human race to populate the Earth, and when it became too thickly populated, to use the surplus population to colonize other spheres."[9] Herman Hoyt concurred, "The creation of the new heaven may provide other habitable spheres just as will the creation of the new earth."[10]

These transformed yet natural people of the nations will still have need of the restorative powers of the leaves of the Tree of Life:

> In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2).[11]

Why would immortal people need *healing*? J. A. Seiss suggested that it will be for the enhancement of their lives: "Life-leaves are for the conservation and augmentation of Life-blessedness of

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[7] John Peter Lange, *The Revelation of John*, Ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960, Originally published by T. & T. Clark, 1870), 391. E. R. Craven was an editor who enlarged Lange's commentary.

[8] Bob Bryant, unpublished GES 2009 Conference message manuscript.

[9] Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1919), 206.

[10] Herman A. Hoyt, *The End Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 230.

[11] This verse is obviously puzzling to those who do not believe that there will be people in natural bodies. Why would glorified saints need healing?

men on earth, as the Life-fruits are for the joy of the saints in heaven."[12]

In contrast to these natural people, Christ and the resurrected/glorified overcomers of the previous dispensations will rule the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the capital city. As J. A. Seiss commented, "But these glorified ones are to 'reign to the ages of the ages'…and as they cannot reign without subjects, so nations on earth must last coequally with their regency."[13]

In sum, there are certain common elements to the two modes view. These include belief that both glorified saints and natural survivors of the Tribulation will be in the Millennial Kingdom; that the survivors who enter the Millennium will continue to marry and have children; that marrying and childbirth may continue into the Eternal State; and that this state of affairs reaffirms God's original plan for Adam and Eve in the Garden.

III. SUPPORT FOR THE TWO MODES VIEW

Proponents support the view by referring to many Biblical texts and by making theological inferences. Let us go over each in turn.

A. BIBLICAL TEXTS

A survey of the literature shows that many Biblical texts support the idea of two modes of human in eternity. Here is a selection of ten such texts with brief explanations for each.

First, the creation account of Genesis 1-2 presents God's original plan for sinless humanity to procreate, fill the earth, and rule over all creation. This plan was interrupted by the entrance of sin. George N. H. Peters in *The Theocratic Kingdom* developed the argument that a complete redemption would involve the restoration of the human race back to the state that was forfeited by sin. Proposition 152 is entitled, "This Kingdom is connected with the perpetuation of the human race." In Observation 2 of that proposition he acknowledged, "Holding to

[12] J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1900, 1977), 507.

[13] Ibid., 511.

a restoration of the race to that which was forfeited by sin, our opinion is guided mainly by the account preceding the fall."[14]

Second, God promised Abraham, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven" (Gen 26:4; see also 15:5; 22:17). The fulfillment of the promise suggests an ever-expanding population of Abraham's descendants through time and perhaps into the eternal state. In Gen 17:7 God specifically stated, "I will establish My Covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant…" The promises would be more than just figures of speech but part of an everlasting covenant for innumerable offspring. Alexander Patterson concluded,

> But here in this eternal view is the literal fulfillment of the promise upon which the covenant to Abraham was based. It is not rhetoric. It is not hyperbole. It is actual certitude…the population of the universe would be as innumerable…as the sand of the sea or the dust of the earth.[15]

Third, the language of Ps 102:25-28 refers to a new heavens and new earth where, "The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You." The implication is that these servants of God would continue to have children in the new heavens and new earth.

Fourth, in the prophecy of Isa 9:7, we read, "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace…from then on and forevermore." The ongoing increase of this government suggests an ever-expanding population. This would begin on the new earth and then continue on into the heavens. Because there is no end to this increase, this government will continually grow in territory and population.

Fifth, Isa 65:17-25 and 66:22 describe the creation of "the new heavens and the new earth," its people, their children, and their descendants. From his vantage point, Isaiah appears to see both the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom. It could be inferred that aspects of the natural state may carry from one

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[14] George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884, Reprinted with *Preface* by Wilber Smith by Kregel Publications, 1952), 537-38.

[15] Alexander Patterson, *The Greater life and Work of Christ: As Revealed in Scripture, Man and Nature* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1896), 400-401.

to the other. There may be a continuation of the Gentile nations and Israel in a perfected natural state capable of procreation of godly offspring in the new heavens and the new earth.[16]

Sixth, Ezek 37:24-28 uses "forever" language concerning the land and the prince,

> …and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever…

The literal fulfillment of this promise seems to require the multiplication of the people "forever" in the land, with sons begetting their own sons, and so on.

Seventh, Jesus said in Mark 10:14, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." It can be argued that at least part of what the Lord is saying is that God wants to see children forever in His kingdom. Bob Wilkin wrote,

> God loves children and will want to see children forever (but there would be no babies, toddlers, and small children on the new earth if everyone was a glorified person)…Jesus said that the kingdom is for children…[17]

Eighth, Matt 22:30 has led many to conclude that the Lord Jesus definitely stated that childbearing will end after the Millennium. There the Lord was responding to a test from some Sadducees about Levirate marriage. He said that they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven."

It is often assumed that the only possible interpretation of those words is that in eternity future on the new earth there will be no marrying and hence no childbirth. Yet that interpretation is far from obvious. The words "in the resurrection"

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[16] See Peters, prop 152 obs. 6, 547.

[17] Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 81.

are key. The Sadducees, who did not believe in bodily resurrection, were asking about whose husband a woman would have in eternity since she had had seven. The Lord's point is that *resurrected* people won't be married (and hence won't have children either). To conclude from that verse that there will be no marriage or children *at all* begs the question. Will there also be *non-resurrected* people on the new earth? Matthew 22:30 certainly does not exclude that possibility. And there are many texts in Scripture, as we have seen, which imply that there will indeed be childbearing forever in Christ's kingdom. Simply put, the teaching of Christ in Matt 22:30 that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" applies to glorified humanity, not to natural sanctified humanity.

The same is true of what Paul says in 1 Cor 15:50: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." *Flesh and blood* is here related to *inheriting* the kingdom. It applies to the glorified humanity that will reign with Christ during the Millennium and on the new earth (from the New Jerusalem). It does not refer to natural sanctified humanity on the new earth. The residents of the New Jerusalem (Heb 11:16; 12:22-23) will be a glorified/resurrected humanity. Seiss stated of the occupants of the City,

> All these are there, not in flesh and blood, not returned to an earthly corporeal life, but in resurrection transfiguration, made like to the angels, like to their Redeemer now in glory, and having their homeplace and palace in the Golden City…[18]

And as Peters observed,

> Should the inquiry be started, by what principle of justice these elect saints are so highly honored above the righteous of the Millennial and succeeding ages, the answer is given in the Word in the principles announced, and in the difference of the dispensations…[19]

He explained that these saints were trained through trial, suffering, and obedience like their Lord. The people of the

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[18] Seiss, 491.

[19] Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, Prop. 154, Obs. 10, 590.

millennial age are not subject to the same privations and temptations, and those of the ages to follow have suffering removed and aid and strength supplied by this very rulership.

Ninth, Eph 2:7 and 3:21 refer to Christ showing the exceeding riches of His grace toward those who believed in this age to all generations in the ages to come, forever and ever. This implies continuing generations of humankind in the ages to come alongside the glorified/resurrected humanity of this age. Seiss commented,

> Paul speaks with all boldness of '*the generations of the age of the ages*.' (Eph. 3:21) After the termination of the present Aeon, he contemplates many more Aeons…and those interminable years he fills up with generations and generations.[20]

Tenth, some might say that there is no direct statement in Revelation 21-22 (the material dealing with the new earth), that indicate there will be children and childbearing in the eternal state. Of course, it doesn't say that there won't be, either.

The people of Rev 21:3-4 could be a natural sanctified humanity on the new earth. They would consist of believers brought over into the eternal state from the millennial period in now sinless natural bodies. There is no reference in Revelation 20-22 to the resurrection of millennial believers. The first resurrection of 20:4-6 is completed prior to the Millennium. The second resurrection of Rev 20:11-15 is for non-believers.

The nations on the new earth in Rev 21:24, 26 would likewise be composed of a natural sanctified humanity, and be distinguished from the residents of the New Jerusalem. They walk by the light of the New Jerusalem and bring their tribute to it. Seiss drew the implication,

> And if by *'kings of the earth'* we are to understand sub-kings belonging to unglorified humanity, the statement implies that the homage and gratitude of earthly royalty will then devote everything of greatness and glory that it possesses to the service and honour of that city.[21]

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[20] Seiss, 486.

[21] Seiss, 501.

Robert Thomas wondered, "The change of character of the nations and the kings prompts an investigation regarding their identity."[22] He considered nine possibilities and concluded,

> None of the earlier proposals has any direct support. In fact, this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent, but there is one further theory which seems to satisfy the available criteria best.[23]

This theory is that "the nations" are saved people who survive the millennial kingdom and who are transformed and brought over into the eternal state as un-resurrected human beings who will be ruled over by God's resurrected saints.

The leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations in Rev 22:2 would be for the use of the natural sanctified humanity. In the words of Seiss,

> The meaning is not that the nations are full of sicknesses and ailments; for these remains of the curse are gone then, though it may be from the virtue of these leaves. The meaning rather is the preservation of health and comfort, and not that maladies then exist to be removed.[24]

Thomas surmised that this healing,

> must connote a promoting of the health of the nations…This agrees with the identification of the nations proposed in the discussion of 21:24 above. Those who have entered the new heaven and the new earth in an un-resurrected state will have a means for perpetuating their health.[25]

B. THEOLOGICAL INFERENCE AND THEODICY

Some theologians, such as Peters, Seiss, and others, have argued that complete redemption requires the perpetuation of the human race into the eternal state.[26] That is because redemp-

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[22] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 476.

[23] Ibid., 478.

[24] Seiss, 507.

[25] Thomas, 485.

[26] See Peters, Prop 152 obs.1, 535; Seiss 483.

tion must include a restoration of the things lost by sin, such as God's command that Adam and Eve be fruitful and multiply (i.e. fill the earth with children). It is believed that God still plans to carry out His original design of making the race holy in its natural capacity, so as not to leave Satan victorious in any way. This is a possible theological inference concerning the unchangeableness of God's original creative purpose.[27]

The ultimate fulfillment of God's original creative purpose suggests an eternal distinction between the two modes of humanity.[28] Moreover, an eternal state with two modes of humanity would be dynamic and expanding as compared to a static view that locks in all who arrive at the eternal state into a mode of humanity which precludes the propagation of the race.

The theology of humanity's two modes may also help towards developing a theodicy, i.e., a defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in light of the problem of evil. In an insightful essay, Norman Geisler discusses how a dispensational approach helps to vindicate God's goodness and justice despite the presence of evil in the world.[29] It suggests why God permitted suffering for so long, and helps explain the problem of how men can be truly free in heaven while guaranteeing that evil will never break out again. Geisler, after summarizing the Scriptural support for the dispensations, writes:

> Now if that is true, as the foregoing Scriptures would indicate, what does it prove? It seems to indicate exactly what every complete theodicy would like to show, namely, that God surely had just grounds before all His creatures to put away sin forever, because He has proved to all that it is never right to disobey His will. God has tried evil in every age and condition and has proved

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[27] The science of theology involves making inferences. For good discussions concerning theological inferences see "Rules of Affinity" by Paul Henebury at http://sharperiron.org/tags/series-affinity and "Theological Inferences" by Malcom Yarnell at http://baptisttheologians.blogspot.com/2012/06/theological-inferences-be-careful-when.html (accessed 11/27/2012).

[28] Though ultimately preferring the one eternal mode of humanity view, F. S. Elmore admits that both scriptural texts and theological inference suggest the two mode of humanity view, 310-311.

[29] Norman L. Geisler, "God, Evil and Dispensations" in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, edited by Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press), 95-112.

> how evil it is. Or, to put it another way, the only way to defeat evil is to permit it. The only way to defeat it completely is to try it completely. One cannot defeat an opponent unless he is willing to get into the "ring" with him. Hence, God allowed evil into the ring of human history for a seven-round (seven-dispensation) championship bout, winner takes all. It was in the sixth round that a knockout punch was given (by the cross and resurrection), and the staggered foe was floored forever at the end of the seventh round.
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> In this dispensational drama, God is the victor, and all good men are the benefactors. Evil is defeated, God is justified, and the universe is secured forever from another outbreak of evil. What makes it justly secure? God makes it secure. He is omnipotent, and He will not allow another outburst.[30]

A bit later Geisler continues,

> Redeemed men are given the grace to overcome sin. They can overcome sin in this life progressively (sanctification) and will overcome it by God's grace in the next life permanently (glorification). Likewise, God is overcoming evil in His universe both progressively (through seven dispensations) and permanently (in the new heaven and new earth, Revelation 22). God is doing that in order to secure the universe once and for all from all evil influence and to produce a permanent and greater good—all in accord with His eternal glory.[31]

Geisler does not address the matter of two modes of humanity in the eternal state. Nevertheless, the concept of theodicy may apply to the view. God would render both a glorified/resurrected humanity and a natural sanctified humanity incapable of sin in the eternal state. The justification for this would be that

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[30] Ibid., 105-106. Editor's note: It is not clear what Geisler means by "good men" here. Is he speaking of overcoming believers? Is he suggesting that all believers are in some sense *good*? See the quote associated with note 31. He may simply mean *all regenerate men*, that is, men who *can overcome sin in this life*.

[31] Ibid., 109.

God permitted the full revelation of evil and fully and finally dealt with it in the "Great Rebellion."[32] A glorified humanity would forever rule with Him over an ever-expanding natural humanity in a new heaven and a new earth free of all evil and kept from all evil. Along the same lines, Bob Bryant offers what could be understood as a theodicy:

> God allowed for "The Great Rebellion" so that, for all eternity, He could be glorified for all that He is among an ever-expanding population of people. Resurrected people will be the special trophies of His grace who will bring glory to Him as God of creation, God of salvation, and God of resurrection.[33]

IV. CONCLUSION

From earliest times mankind has sought for immortality in a natural state. Perhaps this goes back to God's original intention at the creation of man. The Fall brought death. Will God's restoration of creation involve an eternal future for a natural perfected humanity?

Though controversial, the view of two modes of humanity in the eternal state is one that should be accurately represented, respectfully engaged, and humbly acknowledged as a possibility, in light of Biblical and theological evidence. Our attitude should be that of George N. H. Peters, who said, "So far as the ordering of God in the matter is concerned, we are willing cordially to accept of the same, whatever it may be."[34]

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[32] In his book, *The Omega Reunion*, Frank Carmical called the present era through the Millennium, "The Great Rebellion." See, *The Omega Reunion* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1986). A review of the book can be found on the internet at http://www.faithalone.org/journal/bookreviews/carmical.htm (accessed 11/8/2012).

[33] Bryant, unpublished GES 2009 Conference message manuscript, conclusion.

[34] Peters, 538.

SEEKER FRIENDLY CHURCHES AND THE PROBLEM OF UNREGENERATE CONGREGATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Is the structure of the typical American Evangelical church Biblical? In a misguided attempt to reach the lost, many churches today have become "seeker-friendly." Worship has been replaced with entertainment, Biblical preaching has given way to motivational speeches, and attendees have been left feeling emotionally warm, but ignorant of Scripture, all for the sake of catering to the whims of the lost. As a result, membership has grown in quantity, while spiritual maturity has plummeted in quality. The result has been a change in the nature of the Church. Rather than being an assembly of believers, many have become mixed congregations of the unregenerate and the immature. This paper will argue that catering to the lost within the Church has resulted in unregenerate congregations that are no longer equipped to mobilize the saints "for the work of the ministry" (Eph 4:12) outside of the Church.

II. HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM!

Joel Osteen is one of America's most famous preachers. He pastors Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas which broadcasts its services to 200 million homes in the United States alone.[1] In perusing Osteen's personal website and examining his "What

[1] Lakewood Church, "Our History," [on-line]; accessed 26 November 2012, available from http://ww2.lakewood.cc/pages/new-here/our-history.aspx.

We Believe" section,[2] one would expect to hear a solid, conservative, Bible-believing pastor preach a "true to the text" message from God's Word.

However, on June 20, 2005, Osteen appeared on "Larry King Live" and was asked by a caller why he had been "sidestepping" King's questions regarding "how one gets to Heaven." King followed up this caller's question by asking if sincere Jews, Muslims, or atheists will be going to Heaven. Osteen responded by saying,

> I would present my way, but, I'm going to let
> God be the judge of that.
> I don't know.
> I don't know.[3]

Despite repeated prompts by King, Osteen failed to clearly communicate the gospel. This is troubling to say the least. It is even more troubling given the fact that attendance at Lakewood Church has grown since the interview. In 2005, Lakewood averaged a weekly attendance of 32,000 people.[4] But those numbers skyrocketed to 44,800 in 2010.[5] It seems a lack of gospel clarity and a refusal to acknowledge Christ as the only way of salvation has mass appeal.

Consider a second case. Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois recently undertook a survey to measure the spiritual growth of their church body. It was also meant to identify any barriers that were preventing growth from happening. The findings were alarming insofar as they revealed an important discrepancy between how Willow Creek was meeting the needs of believers versus unbelievers:

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[2] Joel Osteen, "What We Believe," [on-line]; accessed 26 November 2012, available from http://ww2.joelosteen.com/About/Pages/WhatWeBelieve.aspx.

[3] II Tim316, "Joel Osteen Says Jesus Christ Is Not the Only Way," YouTube Video, 1:03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwL1DThtxYg (accessed November 26, 2012).

[4] Apologetics Index, "Joel Osteen, Lakewood Church: Largest, Fastest-Growing Megachurch," [on-line]; accessed 29 November 2012, available from http://www.apologeticsindex.org/230-lakewood-church.

[5] Kate Shellnutt, "Megachurches Getting Bigger; Lakewood Quadruples in Size Since 2000," [on-line]; accessed 29 November 2012, available from http://blog.chron.com/believeitornot/2011/03/megachurches-getting-bigger-lakewood-quadruples-in-size-since-2000/.

> The study shows that while Willow has been successfully meeting the spiritual needs of those who describe themselves as "exploring Christianity" or "growing in Christ," it has been less successful at doing so with those who self-report as being "close to Christ" or "Christ-centered." In fact, one-fourth of the last two groups say that they are either "stalled" in their spiritual growth and/or "dissatisfied" with the church.[6]

People who fit the "exploring Christianity" category are those who do not yet believe in Christ (i.e., the lost and unregenerate). Hence, the study revealed that while the lost were actively participating at Willow Creek Church and are even being catered to, the "Christ-centered" (i.e., believers) were "stalled" and "dissatisfied." Apparently, there was a neglect of substantial preaching of the Word, which resulted in starving believers, while the lost were either not coming to Christ, or not leaving the church. Pandering to the lost within the walls of Willow Creek created a sermonic "ceiling" that limited the exposition of the whole counsel of God's Word and kept the content at the "milk" level. By prioritizing ministering to the lost, rather than equipping believers, this kind of ministry has inverted the Biblical pyramid for church growth and evangelism. And the results were clearly unacceptable.

While Lakewood Church and Willow Creek Church do not represent the whole American Evangelical landscape, it is surely significant that they rank among the largest Evangelical congregations in America, and they are some of the foremost examples of seeker-friendly churches.

This pandering to the unregenerate, and lack of substantial Biblical preaching, is compounded by an emphasis on manipulating language in order to steer the direction of church ministries. For instance, people are told to "connect" with one another. The latest generation is an "emerging" generation. And the lost are said to be "exploring their spiritual potential."

Likewise, congregational worship has been fitted to appeal to the lost. Some churches have even promoted themselves as

[6] Philip Yancey, "What *Reveal* Reveals: Criticisms of Willow's Latest Self-Study Do Not Undermine Its Value," [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2012, available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/march/11.27.html.

having a "multisensory experience" for their time of singing praises to the Lord. Some claim that your personal "spiritual perceptions" are what is most important. This turns the emphasis to finding "truth" that fits one's current theology, rather than having one's theology shaped by the objective truths found in Scripture.[7] Why should a church desire a "seeker-sensitive" approach to worship? As Ed Dobson explains,

> We wanted a musical style that would elicit a response. Unchurched people come to a service hesitantly. Their mind-set is "you're not going to get me." Their defenses are up. We felt that a style of music that would get them moving in a physical way (nodding heads and tapping feet) would help break down their defenses.[8]

It is clear from Scripture (Ps 150:3-5) that the instruments used and the styles preferred are not the issue. What matters is the motivation behind such statements. Church music that is molded for the purpose of reaching the lost ultimately puts the emphasis on the unregenerate, when the real motivation should be praising God. In response to Dobson's "seeker-sensitive" musical philosophy, David M. Doran writes,

> This is precisely the type of argument that Paul would have rejected categorically. We must stop trusting in our ingenuity and begin to trust once again in the power of God in the gospel. We should have every confidence that it is fully sufficient and capable of "constantly bearing fruit and increasing" (Col 1:6).[9]

This kind of dangerous musical manipulation can be found in New Spring Church in South Carolina. They opened one of their church services with "Rock and Roll All Night" by the 70s rock band KISS.[10] As the music played, the screens in the

[7] For an excellent article regarding these trends and shifts, see Mal Couch, "The Contemporary Music Scene," *Conservative Theological Journal* Vol. 8, (2004), 293-301.

[8] Ed Dobson, *Starting a Seeker Sensitive Service* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 42-43.

[9] David M. Doran, "Market-Driven Ministry: Blessing or Curse, Part II," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* Vol. 1 (1996), 193.

[10] Ken Silva, "Perry Noble's New Spring Worship Band Rocks with Kiss," [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2012, available from http://apprising.

sanctuary flashed pictures of KISS in full makeup, at one point showing a member of the band spitting "blood" and fire, while another smashed guitars. What possible connection could there have been between praising Jesus and a party song that wants to "drive you crazy?"[11] How is the Lord worshiped, much less pleased in this act? "What accord has Christ with Belial" (2 Cor 6:15)? And yet, this type of worship is actively developed in the churches. And no wonder. The result has been that New Spring's attendance has grown 60% in the past year.[12] But attendance and conversion are two different issues.

John MacArthur summarizes the case against pandering to the unregenerate:

> There is simply no warrant in Scripture for adapting weekly church services to the preference of unbelievers. Indeed, the practice seems to be contrary to the spirit of everything Scripture says about the assembly of believers. When the church comes together on the Lord's Day, that is no time to entertain the lost, amuse the brethren, or otherwise cater to the 'felt needs' of those in attendance. This is when we should bow before our God as a congregation and honor Him with our worship.[13]

One of the fundamental problems with this entire approach to worship is a lack of pastoral responsibility. "Pastoral responsibility, which includes fidelity to Scripture alone, was never meant to be a popularity contest," writes Scott Newman. He adds,

> If the line is drawn in any manner that is permanent, it will be done in the local church by pastors committed to the orthodox understanding

org/2012/08/29/perry-nobles-newspring-worship-band-rocks-with-kiss/.

[11] Another example of New Spring's "creative" approach to worship can be found in viewing their Easter Sunday welcome to the tune of AC/DC's "Highway To Hell." See http://youtu.be/2vUt4pJgHZQ. New Spring's pastor, Perry Noble offers his "explanation" for such an approach at http://youtu.be/y1RHwxOuL_Y.

[12] Perry Noble, "A Letter From Pastor P to New Spring Church," [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2012, available from http://www.perrynoble.com/blog/a-letter-from-pastor-p-to-newspring-church6.

[13] John F. MacArthur, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 185.

> of theology and Biblical interpretation. Resolved to resist the call of the church growth experts, or seeker sensitive professionals, the pastor-teacher must give himself over to a thorough study of the Bible that is sound exegetically and orthodox hermeneutically.[14]

III. THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING DISCIPLESHIP

Does catering to the lost within the worship service strengthen the Church or weaken it? The answer seems to be that the Church is weakened. Spiritual maturity among the congregants lags as discipleship for the believer suffers. This is evident in research conducted by George Barna. He has shown that expectation for growth and discipleship in today's churches is low, if non-existent. Barna notes that "less than one out of every five self-identified Christians (18%) claims to be totally committed to investing in their own spiritual development."[15] In another published survey, Barna notes that, "Not quite half of all born-again adults participate in either a small group or Sunday school class during a typical week."[16] These statistics are worrying. A lack of commitment to growing in sound Biblical doctrine indicates where Evangelical thinking has gone wrong.

Discipleship is vital for the health of the local church. "The fundamental condition for effective ministry is a commitment to a life of discipleship on the part of individual members and the church as a whole," writes Brenda Colijn. She continues,

> We must be sensitive to the brokenness of everyone who responds to the gospel; many

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[14] Scott Newman, "The Scandal of Reason- Part II: A Response to Post-Modern Evangelicalism," *Conservative Theological Journal* Vol. 2, (1998), 64.

[15] Barna Group, "Self Described Christians Dominate America but Wrestle with Four Aspects of Spiritual Depth," [on-line]; accessed 27 November 2012, available from http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/524-self-described-christians-dominate-america-but-wrestle-with-four-aspects-of-spiritual-depth.

[16] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 64.

> people need to fully grasp the message of God's grace before they can hear God's demands. Yet in the face of our culture, which encourages lack of commitment, the church must proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as his disciples (Rom 10:9–10; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:5–11).[17]

This kind of commitment is missing from the Evangelical church. It is precisely a failure to make disciples that has caused Christian views to be pushed to the back of the line when addressing politics, art, music, economic policy, etc.

The contemporary disillusionment with commitment to the local church has often been blamed on the church itself. This follows the trend of avoiding personal responsibility by finding a "scapegoat" to blame in order to clear one's conscience. As Walter Chantry writes,

> There is no perfect church in doctrine or graciousness. It is easy to blame our indecision, lack of discipline and lack of commitment on the local church. But spiritual weakness and a sense of alienation from God's people are quite often traceable to a very elementary failure in those who criticize the church. If we do not devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship and if we do not continue to meet together, the most aggressive nomadic search for inner satisfaction is destined to failure.[18]

Rather than leave the church they are attending in order to find a better congregation, a better approach would be to devote one's self to the betterment of the congregation they are attending and endure through the trying times for the sake of the potential growth at hand (James 1:2-4). Sadly, many choose to abandon ship at the first sign of difficulty, minimizing opportunities for discipleship.

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[17] Brenda B. Colijn, "A Biblical and Contemporary Model of Ministry," *Ashland Theological Journal* Vol. 27 (1995), 5.

[18] Walter J. Chantry, "The Nomadic Search for a Local Church," *Reformation and Revival* Vol. 3 (1994), 86.

IV. MISUNDERSTANDING THE MAKEUP OF THE CHURCH

The Church is the assembly of the saved. It gathers to worship the Savior. It is not meant to be made up of the unregenerate. As Daniel Akin writes,

> The membership of the local church is made up of those who confess Christ as Savior and Lord, and whose lives give evidence of conversion. Baptist commitment to this principle set them apart from the magisterial Reformers, but they did so because of their commitment to the witness of the New Testament. There is no hint whatsoever of unregenerate church membership in the Bible.[19]

The idea that the Church is separate from the lost is clear from Paul's interaction with the "unbelievers in Judea" in Rom 15:31. Paul delivered a monetary gift to the church in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25) and asked for the Roman Christians to pray for him that he "may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea" (Rom 15:31). It is obvious here (and in Acts 21:27-36) that first century unbelievers were not fond of Christians and their ministry endeavors. More often than not, they hated the Church.

This animosity between the Church and the unregenerate can also be seen in Acts 5 after the incident with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Word of their sudden death spread throughout and beyond the fellowship of the church (Acts 1:11). Luke writes in vv 13 and 14 that "none of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." The natural question is who are "they" that dared not to join them? Tom Constable writes, "The 'rest' (Gr. *hoi loipoi*), probably the unbelieving Jews, steered clear of the Christians because of the Jewish leaders' opposition (4:18) and the apostles' power (vv. 1–10). The 'people' (Gr. *ho laos*), the responsive Jews, honored the believers."[20] It is the unbelievers who dared not to join them, and yet "more than ever believers

[19] Daniel L. Akin, "The Future of Southern Baptists: Mandates for what we should be in the Twenty First Century," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 9, (2005), 70.

[20] Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Acts 5:13.

were added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). This implies that the believers in the church assembly were out in the marketplace, evangelizing the lost, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those around them, giving the opportunity for the unbelievers to hear the Word and be saved (Rom 10:17; Jas 1:18). But the unregenerate were not part of the congregation. And the church did not cater, pander, or otherwise manipulate its language in order to bring the lost to faith in Christ. That was accomplished by building up Christians, through cultivating a holy character, and by developing a harmonious fellowship between brethren in the church, all of which helped empower the church to go out and preach everlasting life to the lost.

Pastorally speaking, this should be uncontroversial. In Col 1:28, Paul clearly states, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." This is, or ought to be, the mission statement of every pastor and church that has been called by God. The pastor/teacher is responsible for the guidance of the saints (Heb 13:17) and is accountable before the Father for the stewardship of Christ's local body. The pastor sets the tone for the worship gathering of the saints by directing all to the Savior. But this mission cannot be fulfilled by congregations that adjust their music and message to cater to unbelievers.

V. THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF AN UNREGENERATE CONGREGATION

It is one thing to have seekers visit a worship service. It is another thing to shape that worship service to please the lost. This approach stifles discipleship. And it effectively makes evangelism the responsibility of the pastor, rather than the congregation. After all, how can an unregenerate congregation evangelize itself?

Ephesians 4:11-16 serves as a classic passage in understanding the Biblical roles of the pastor/teacher, as well as the body that makes up the local church. Paul writes that the reason that pastor/teachers have been supplied by God to the church is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry (which includes evangelism), for building up the body of Christ (which consists of mutual edification and discipleship)." Earl Radmacher explains,

> To each individual member of the body 'is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:7).' Because of the sovereign distribution of the gifts, every member is absolutely indispensible to the function of the whole. Then, to the church are given specially gifted men (cf. Eph. 4:11) as a provision for its spiritual increase. They are to equip the members, and the members are to be actively engaged in carrying out the work of the ministry.[21]

We often overlook (or fail to notice) that there is a role in the church of "evangelist" that needs to be fulfilled in order to have a properly functioning Body of Christ (Eph 4:11). While one's mind may immediately gravitate towards the ministry of Billy Graham or Luis Palau, the context pushes for an evangelist to be amongst the local assembly and not one who would be considered more of a parachurch counterpart. William Combs notes that "Their work is often described as being of an itinerant nature since they evangelized and founded churches in multiple locations."[22] But the mention of Philip the evangelist in Acts 21:8 and the command given to Timothy (2 Tim 4:5) seems to disagree. It instead confirms the local nature of the evangelist's role and calling.

The vitality of the "evangelist" is evident from the fact that it is mentioned as one of four callings for the equipping of "the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). The calling of evangelist has been neglected within the local church, and the role has been forced upon the pastor/teacher.[23] In fact, some churches have hired their pastor with the specific expectation that he is to also conduct all evangelism

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[21] Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1996), 275-76.

[22] William C. Combs, "The Biblical Role of the Evangelist," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* Vol. 7 (2002), 40.

[23] While Timothy is exhorted by Paul to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5), one cannot presume that every pastor/teacher should also fulfill the office of evangelist in the local church. There is no discrepancy that the pastor/teacher has a personal responsibility as a believer in Christ to evangelize. In fact, Paul's main thrust in this passage (Eph 4:7-16) is that God has blessed the church with many different gifts to be exercised among each other for the mutual building up. But this responsibility is not to be the basis for overextending one's calling and gifts when another in the congregation is capable and equipped to fulfill this role. By overextending the pastor/

himself, only to leave unfulfilled his call to equip the saints to minister to the lost. Rather than build up believers, sermons have been forced to pander to the lost in attendance, hindering those who are saved and/or maturing from striving forward and working out their salvation (Phil 2:12). The end result is an ignorant congregation that attends church on Sunday, but who do not guide their lives by the truth on Monday. This is shameful considering that the potential of the church for evangelism is greatest only when she is walking in obedience to the Lord, something the unregenerate cannot do.

Too often the metaphor of "dumb sheep" has been employed as a common description of the local congregation. With the expectation of the pastor to constantly preach "come to Jesus" sermons every Sunday, the equipping and edifying of the saints has caused a malaise to overtake the church at large.[24] While Paul may have claimed to know nothing among the Corinthians except "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2), he by no means left the church in an elementary state, but encouraged them on to maturity (1 Cor 15:58 makes an excellent case for this). Just because the sheep start out ignorant does not mean that they must stay that way. Yet, this is the expectation to which many in the Evangelical realm have become accustomed. Being called to so much more, Christianity is settling for so much less.

There are limitless opportunities for mature Christians to engage the culture with truth, love, and intelligence. By helping believers develop a Biblical worldview, they could help serve the Lord's purposes in more effective ways. Nancy Pearcey writes,

> Apologetics involves not only defending the Christian faith but also critiquing other faiths or worldviews. Part of the task of evangelism is to free people from the power of false worldviews by diagnosing the points where they fail to stack up against reality.[25]

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teacher into this realm, maturity among the sheep is stifled due to the proverbial "square peg" being forced into the round hole.

[24] This comment should be read with the understanding that there is nothing wrong with calling the unregenerate to believe in Christ for the free gift of eternal life. However, this message being constantly preached to the regenerate will eventually create doubt in the very assurance that the message of Life gives.

[25] Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 134.

Imagining the impact that a well-equipped, committed, prayerful church could have in taking the gospel to their circles of influence creates a vision of effective, servant-oriented ministry that is worth striving for. "Christ's ministry sets the pattern for the church's mission," writes Edward Hayes. He adds,

> Jesus the Sovereign came to serve (Matt 20:28). The style of church mission is thus set firmly in a servant mold. A servant church is in contrast to a church obsessed with its own power. Following the explicit words of our Lord, the church is to be a preaching, witnessing, caring, discipling church. There is no avoiding it: Evangelism is the mission of the church. Sinners are not commanded to go to church; the church is commanded to go to sinners.[26]

It is not that the lost are not welcome in the church building .(This would make the church a segregationist movement that would resemble the logical conclusions of Calvinism rather than the heart of Christ.) But meeting their tastes and desires is not the purpose of the worship meeting. Believers must go out to the lost, so they can be won to faith in Christ, be brought into the church for the nurturing of their faith, and then be equipped to take the gospel message to their circles of influence. Mal Couch echoes these sentiments when he writes,

> Going into homes with the message of Christ may be the most effective way of witnessing. House evangelism is personal, intimate, and probably more productive than simply passing out tracts on the street corner. Paul practiced home evangelism. He told the Ephesian elders that he was "teaching [them] publicly from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).[27]

That is the Bible's church-growth strategy.

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[26] Edward L. Hayes, *Understanding Christian Theology*. ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1189.

[27] Mal Couch, *A Pastor's Manual on Doing Church* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2002), 75.

VI. WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO THE FREE GRACE BELIEVER?

The responsibility for sound discipleship has an even greater responsibility for those in the Free Grace movement. Only the Free Grace movement preaches a gospel unadulterated by works. With the growing influence of Lordship Salvation and the Reformed/Covenant theology in publishing and new media, faithfulness to sound discipleship and the equipping of the saints is not just essential to the survival of the local church, but to the good news of eternal life as communicated in Scripture. With the dominance of Lordship hermeneutics and Reformed/Covenant biases, an insufficient Savior is being promoted, thus laying shifting ground for spiritual growth. This is a losing battle in the flesh that will end in defeat. Only the Free Grace camp proclaims the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to save an individual completely and stands firmly upon the power of God's declaration to justify completely. The Bible designates Jesus Christ as an all-sufficient Savior. This, we boldly proclaim, is the crux of the Free Grace movement. An all-sufficient Savior provides a solid basis for assurance, and allows the believer to grow. "To put it simply," writes Zane Hodges, "the assurance of salvation is fundamental to all New Testament morality. It is the fixed point of reference out of which Christian obedience must flow."[28]

The Free Grace camp has been given a privileged understanding of God's truth, not so that we can keep it to ourselves, but for the purpose of equipping and edifying those around us for the sake of reaching the lost. We must not neglect this responsibility.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Church is not made up of the unregenerate. It is an assembly of regenerate people who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for the free gift of everlasting life. To think the Church is a place that must accommodate itself to the desires of lost people is to deny the very core of Biblical ecclesiology.

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[28] Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 98.

By changing the Church into a vehicle for catering to the lost, we inevitably compromise truth. As entertainment increases, commitment will decrease. As numbers swell, discipleship will wane. And all the while, the gospel will get lost amidst the empty musings of clever public speakers. But believers are not called to compromise the Church for the lost. Instead, believers are called to be equipped (Eph 4:12), to go out (Matt 28:19-20), and to live the Christian truth among a pagan world, prepared to give an answer for the hope held by every believer in Christ (1 Pet 3:14-16). This is the essence of the Church's mission. As Bruce Metzger summarizes:

> The concept of 'church' belongs primarily to a religious and not merely to a sociological or institutional dimension. As the body of Christ and as the Messianic bride invited to participate in the gifts of the Kingdom, the church is not merely a fellowship of persons of good will, a purely voluntary association, a social club.[29]

The Church is the Body of Christ, to be presented to Him "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).

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[29] Bruce M. Metzger, "The Development of Institutional Organization in the Early Church," *Ashland Theological Journal* Vol. 6 (1973), 14.

Book Reviews

Jesus + Nothing = Everything. By Tullian Tchividjian. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. 220 pp. Hardcover, $18.99.

Tullian Tchividjian is Billy Graham's grandson and the Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. His book, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* concerns the dangers of legalism and the importance of looking to Christ alone for our justification and sanctification.

The book grew out of the difficulties Tchividjian experienced when he became the Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge. Under the pressure of members calling for his dismissal, Tchividjian rediscovered the supremacy of Christ while reading through Paul's epistle to the Colossians.

Tchividjian says that every person has desires that they seek to fill with things in the world (i.e., they seek for everything). But the world ultimately leaves us empty (i.e., with nothing). This is also true for those who seek to combine the Christian faith with some other cause, such as social justice, environmental concerns, social mobility, etc. The true fulfillment of these desires is for Christ to be our all in all (i.e., everything). Hence, the title, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything.*

Tchividjian explains that we must understand that through faith we are positionally in Christ. As such, Jesus is our righteousness, justification, sanctification, and everything else we could need.

Tchividjian makes excellent points about the centrality of justification, and makes the welcome suggestion that to be justified means being eternally secure: "To be justified means that you're forever right with God, eternally *in*" (p. 139). He goes on to say, "Among many other things, this means that God's acceptance of us cannot be gained by our successes nor forfeited by our failures" (p. 140). To say that justification makes us "forever right" and "eternally *in,*" and adding that it cannot be "forfeited," surely suggests belief in eternal security, though he does not explicitly endorse that doctrine.

In keeping with these claims, Tchividjian is opposed to calls for obedience based on fear and guilt. Rather, we should be motivated by the assurance of being saved by God's free grace. We should "obey from the secure basis of grace, not guilt" (p. 141). He adds, "It's always the gospel of God's free grace that should motivate our right doing; otherwise we're nothing better than Pharisees, making sure we're keeping all the rules, mainly because when we do, we feel better about ourselves—especially when we compare ourselves to those who aren't doing right" (p. 153).

Tchividjian's thoughts on sanctification are less helpful. People familiar with the Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde (see Lazar, "Cheap Grace or Cheap Law? Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gerhard Forde on the Nature of Law and Gospel," in this journal, pp. 21-36) will immediately recognize his influence on Tchividjian's views. Forde had an unusual view of sanctification. He believed that sanctification was "*the art of getting used to justification*" (Forde, *Preached God*, 226 [italics in text]). Tchividjian seems to adopt the same perspective, such as when he writes, "the hard work of Christian growth consists primarily in being daily grasped by the fact that God's love for us isn't conditioned by anything we do or don't do. Sanctification is the hard work of giving up on our efforts at self-justification" (p. 172). One does not make progress in the Christian life according to the normal standards of behavioral modification. Rather, one reaches Christian maturity by becoming more aware that eternal salvation is by faith apart from our works, because Christ's finished work made it possible.

There is some truth in what Tchividjian says, especially given his contrast with behavioral modification approaches to sanctification. But Tchividjian seems too paralyzed by the fear of legalism to consider the proper role of works in the Christian life. And so he leaves out pivotal teachings about the role of eternal rewards (Rev 22:12), the law of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-8), divine discipline (Heb 12:6), and the need for abiding in fellowship with Christ (John 15:4). This may be because without a premillennial hermeneutic one cannot make sense of the warning and rewards passages in Scripture. But more generally, it may be because he travels in Reformed circles (he graduated from Reformed Theological Seminary and is ordained in the

Presbyterian Church in America). Given the legalistic tendencies in Reformed thought (created especially by the doctrine of election), any talk of works will tend to distract away from Christ's work, to the believer's performance, in order to ascertain whether one is among the elect.

If Tchividjian were to adopt a Free Grace view—where the question of eternal destiny is settled at the moment of faith in Christ, while the question of eternal rewards remains open—then he could get to the real business of Christian living, and understanding that how we live has temporal and eternal consequences, without the pretense of thinking works save us or prove that we are saved.

In sum, while some of the book's content comes across as filler, and while its main points could have been made in a third of the space, Tchividjian makes a valuable contribution to the radical freeness of the gospel promise. While he does not present a Free Grace perspective, his approach to justification and his attacks on legalism are complementary to our own, and that makes this book an edifying resource to be drawn upon in support of Free Grace arguments.

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Essays in Anthropology: Variations on a Theme. By Robert Spaemann. Translated by Guido de Graaf and James Mumford. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010. 94 pp. Paper, $15.00. ***Love & the Dignity of Human Life: On Nature and Natural Law***. By Robert Spaemann, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012. 69 pp. Paper, $12.00.

Robert Spaemann is considered to be one of Germany's foremost Catholic philosophers, known for his work in Christian ethics, and increasingly known among American evangelicals for his defense of human dignity against practices such as abortion and euthanasia. The two works under review are short collections of articles and lectures dealing especially with the importance and foundations of human dignity. In *Essays on Anthropology*, Spaemann treats the topics of human nature,

human dignity, and evolution(ism). In *Love & Dignity*, he again addresses human nature and dignity, explores the problem of defining death as "brain death," and reflects upon the nature of love. Here I would like to concentrate on his defense of human dignity.

Spaemann disputes the tendency of modern secular ethicists to think of human dignity as an empirically verifiable quality. Such ethicists do not believe in *human* dignity as such. Rather, they hold to the importance of the dignity of *persons*. A person, they say, is defined as a being that can exercise certain mental functions, such as being self-aware, able to reason, or have a desire to live.

Whether or not a particular human is also a person depends on observing their behavior, or by testing for brain activity. Unfortunately, not all humans have higher mental functions, either because they do not yet have a brain (e.g., embryos), or because their brains are not sufficiently developed for self-consciousness (e.g., fetuses), or because their brains have become too damaged to support consciousness (e.g., coma patients). Humans with an active mental life are persons. Humans without a mental life are not. Only *human persons* have dignity and a right to life. Human who are not also persons can be killed with impunity, by being aborted or euthanized.

Spaemann disagrees with this line of reasoning. He notes how it defeats the purpose of having human rights at all:

> Human rights depend on the fact that no one is authorized to define the circle of those who are entitled to them and those who aren't. Hence these rights, though rooted in our personhood, must nevertheless be granted to each being born of woman, and this from the first moment of his purely natural existence, it being unnecessary to superimpose additional qualitative criteria (*Essays*, 22).

Spaemann does not believe that dignity is a property that can be empirically verified. Still less should it be equated with civil or human rights as such. Rather, he takes human dignity to be the transcendental ground for all of our rights and duties (*Love*, 27), containing within itself the basis for all natural rights (*Essays*, 51).

What is the source of human dignity? Spaemann believes it arises with *freedom*. This is the capacity for assuming moral responsibility for our actions. Unlike plants and animals, humans are free to engage in intentional actions. We can propose or reject plans, purposes, and desires. We can choose to engage in actions that cause things to happen, in accordance with our desired ends. And in doing that, we assume that we are ends in ourselves, something to be valued for our own sake.

In deliberating how best to act, a person can transcend their immediate desires and relativize them, seeing these in light of the desires and purposes of others. We can then choose to pursue these ends, even to the point of self-sacrifice (*Essays*, 59).

If someone can assume responsibility for their actions in this way, Spaemann considers them to be a *subject*, someone who ought not be treated or used as a mere *object*. Someone who is free in this sense, is an end in himself *absolutely* (*Essays*, 56).

Spaemann also suggests how this freedom points towards the religious and theological nature of dignity. Human nature is "anticipatory," striving to become that which is presently beyond it. Spaemann describes this form of self-transcendence as "ecstatic" (*Essays*, 16).

But what are we striving towards? Interpreted theologically, Spaemann says that human nature strives for the divine likeness, and participation in what is eternal (*Essays*, 16). Hence, Spaemann believes that dignity is a fundamentally religious concept (*Essays*, 57). Atheism, unable to account for the Absolute, "deprives human dignity of its foundation," and so prevents secular society from reflecting "on good reasons to protect human life" (*Essays*, 72).

But what about human beings living at the so-called margins of life? Not every human being can engage in the self-transcending actions that Spaemann describes. Do they also possess dignity? Spaemann answers in the affirmative, saying that *all* living human beings possess a measure of dignity, even if they cannot immediately exercise their capacity for assuming responsibility. No matter how young, sick, or damaged a human being is, he cannot lose the *potential* for self-transcending moral dispositions and concrete actions. That potential belongs to human nature as such (*Essay*, 61). Hence, all humans possess dignity by virtue of their nature.

Spaemann offers the further, but weaker argument that the 'I,' the personality that arises out of our human nature, does not start "at a datable moment within the human timeline" (*Essays*, 62). There is no point at which one can say the 'person' began here, so it is better to say that every being born of a woman has the aptitude for freedom, and therefore deserves a minimal level of respect.

Now these arguments, even though not fully fleshed out, may be agreeable to those of us who support a culture of life. But they will not convince secular ethicists. Many secularists are only too happy to bite the bullet and deny the notion of human rights altogether. They prefer to speak of *personal* rights. More often than not, they also endorse rights for animals. And they are actively trying to deny rights to embryos, fetuses, and the comatose. So when Spaemann warns that criteriological approaches to human rights defeats the purpose of human rights, many secular ethicists would agree, and say that is precisely what they would like to achieve. And while they may admit that we cannot pinpoint the beginning of personhood, criteriological tests can still serve to give a useful and scientific approximation of whether something is a person, which is better than evaluations based on shaky metaphysical claims.

I suspect that Spaemann has been gaining attention, not because his work is especially ground-breaking or convincing, but because, being a German professor, he provides an academically respectable reference for evangelical Christians to cite in defense of their view. If you are interested in Christian ethics, you should become familiar with Spaemann. He addresses subjects other than human dignity, and while you may not come away convinced by his arguments, you will most likely learn something from them. Either of these short works would be a good place to start familiarizing yourself with Spaemann's work. I prefer his *Essays*, which are more polished than the lectures compiled in *Love & the Dignity of Human Life*.

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Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You are Saved. By J. D. Greear. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2013. 128 pp. Hardcover, $12.99.

The blurbs about this book make it sound like a Free Grace primer on assurance. Note the promising title and subtitle. Yet the book takes a mild Lordship Salvation view of assurance.

The book has five full pages of endorsements. These include well known people like Pastor Matt Chandler (The Village Church), Pastor David Platt (author of *Radical*, an extreme Lordship Salvation book), Pastor Mark Dever, Dr. Daniel Akin (President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), and Roger David (President of Student Life). There is also an impressive foreword by Dr. Paige Patterson, President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The first chapter is entitled "Baptized Four Times." In it the author says, "By the time I reached the age of eighteen I had probably 'asked Jesus into my heart' five thousand times. I started somewhere around age four…" (p. 1). This chapter is a nice corrective to the popular notion that one is born again by inviting Jesus into his heart. Unfortunately the author says "the one thing necessary for salvation [is] a posture of repentance toward and faith in His finished work" (pp. 8-9). Why the condition is repentance and faith, and not simply faith, is not explained until a later chapter.

In the second chapter Greear argues convincingly that God wants us to have assurance of our eternal destiny. His conclusion of the chapter says that there are "two components of assurance" (p. 24). He identifies those as "Belief in [God's] testimony about eternal life" [1 John 5:10-12] and "Evidences of eternal life at work in us." The latter is where real confusion enters. If assurance is based at least in part on works, and if even the works of the regenerate are imperfect, then how could you ever *know for sure you are saved* as the subtitle of the book suggests?

Chapter 3 is the best one in the book: "Jesus in My Place." In it the author argues that faith in Jesus Christ who died as our substitute on the cross is the sole condition of everlasting life and of assurance. Unfortunately, the last two sentences in the chapter undermine the good work done to that point: "But what

exactly, you may wonder, does it mean to believe? That's where we will next turn" (p. 38).

If saving faith is some mysterious unknowable thing, then assurance can no longer be found in believing the testimony of God concerning His Son as Greear had earlier indicated (p. 24). In Chapter 4 the author argues that "Biblical belief is the assumption of a new posture toward the Lordship of Christ and His finished work on the cross" (p. 40). While the first part of that suggests Lordship Salvation, Greear in the rest of the chapter primarily suggests that faith is being convinced that salvation is by faith alone (esp. pp. 50-52). The author basically sees saving faith as being convinced that all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life, though there are passing references to works being required. For example, notice this statement: "A dramatic change of life and radical commitment to the mission is always the fruit of a heart changed by faith" (p. 50). Yet the author turns around and says that if our assurance is based on our commitment to Christ, "the question of 'how much is enough?' will be inescapable" (p. 51). The author seems to be trying hard to present simple faith in Christ as the sole condition of everlasting life and assurance, yet he keeps giving caveats that contradict that.

Repentance is the subject of Chapter 5. This is surely the worst chapter in the book. Greear suggests that repentance is not "simply praying a sinner's prayer," "feeling sorry about our sin," "confession of sin," "getting religious," "partial surrender," or "perfection" (pp. 57-64). If that isn't confusing enough, the author then says that repentance "is the absence of settled defiance [toward God]," "not just about stopping sin but also starting to follow Jesus," and "a Spirit-fueled change of desires." Since he believes that repentance is a co-condition of everlasting life, thus to be born again one must believe in Jesus and he must yield his life to Christ (no settled defiance), start following Christ, and desire to please God with his life. Greear says that to be born again one must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ, citing Mark 8:34-35 as though those were evangelistic verses (p. 67).

Chapter 5 ends with a question similar to the one that ended chapter 3: "Have you really repented?" (p. 73). Of course, the reader cannot be sure if repentance is yielding to Christ,

following Christ, or a change of desires. No matter how yielded, one is not perfect. No matter how much one follows, His discipleship is flawed. No matter how well one's desires conform with Scripture, those desires are never challenged by the flesh within us.

The question of eternal security on the one hand and warning passages on the other is the issue in chapter 6. The author then adopts the normal Calvinist position that eternal security is true, but only for those who endure. Note this section title: "The Faith that Saves Is the Faith that Endures to the End" (p. 81). Later the author discusses "The 'Real' Doctrine of Eternal Security" (pp. 86-88). "Salvation is a posture of repentance and faith toward Christ that you adopt at your conversion and maintain for a lifetime" (p. 87). Notice that *you* maintain your repentance and faith, *not God*. That is "the real doctrine of eternal security." In my view that is eternal *insecurity*—at least until death. Not till death could anyone know his eternal destiny under this way of thinking.

It should be noted that Greear feels the need to give a disclaimer after the quote I just cited. After saying we must "maintain [repentance and faith] for a lifetime" in order to have eternal salvation, he adds, "If you permanently abandon that posture [of repentance and faith toward Christ] later in life, your faith was likely not saving faith" (p. 87). *Likely?* All through the book the author has said that endurance in faith and good works is *required* to prove you are really born again. He has repeatedly said that those who experience a permanent abandonment of faith and good works will go to hell. But now that result is merely *likely*? Why so? The next three paragraphs go on to say that unless one perseveres, he *definitely* "will not end up in heaven" (pp. 87-88). Contradiction and confusion like this are the fruit of a tradition that tries to meld faith and good works into co-conditions of everlasting life.

Like nearly all contemporary books on assurance, this one has a chapter on various tests of whether one is born again. Chapter 7 is entitled, "The Evidence You Have Believed" (p. 94). These evidences are said to include "a love for God" and "a love for others" (pp. 96-102). Like a good pastor, the author now deals with a logical concern, "but I still love sin" (pp. 102-103). His encouragement is that "believers can and do struggle with just

about any kind of sinful lust" (p. 103). He goes further, saying, "In fact, the presence of the struggle itself can be affirmation that God's Spirit is at work within you." He concludes this section saying, "Often the strongest evidence of my growth in grace is my growth in the knowledge of my need for grace" (p. 103).

Chapter 7 ends with a section entitled "It takes a village to identify regeneration" (p. 103). Greear then makes this amazing admission, "Identifying the evidences of true regeneration in your life can be difficult, if not impossible, to do on your own" (p. 103). His conclusion is that we need others in the local church to help us see if we are born again. How this would help, I fail to see. Would not a group of legalists tend to cut each other down and question whether others are really born again (cf. Gal 5:13-15)? If I doubt that I have evidences of true regeneration, would I likely confidently pronounce that someone else is truly regenerate based on seeing their flawed works? Would I not fear giving people false assurance?

The last chapter is what to do "when you continue to doubt" (p. 105). Greear admits that he still wonders "*Am I **really** saved*?" (p. 105, emphasis his). I suppose the author is trying to show the reader that he understands their pain. However, it strikes me that if even the author cannot remain sure of his own eternal destiny, and he is an expert, how could I possibly hope to remain sure? The last paragraph is excellent, however: "Keep your eyes on Him. He is faithful. He said, 'It is finished'" (p. 112).

This book is both good and bad. There are places in which the author sounds like he believes in assurance by faith alone, apart from works. But most of the time the author says that assurance is found in our desires and our works.

I do not recommend this book for unbelievers or for anyone struggling with assurance. However, I highly recommend it for any well-grounded believer since it will show them the terrible mess that Evangelicals have made of assurance today. If this is one of the better books on assurance today, and it surely is, then it shows we need more books on assurance.

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Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings. By Joseph Dillow. [USA]: NP, 2012. 1094 pp. Paper, $36.95.[1]

This massive work is a much expanded and revised version of Dillow's earlier best-selling book *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Though that first version had over 600 pages and was pricey, it has sold over 25,000 copies.

Dr. Fred Chay, the President of the Free Grace Alliance says this about *Final Destiny* on the back cover: "This work is extensive in its argumentation, expansive in its canonical scope, and immensely expanded from its first edition. It is an exceptional work, and a majestic achievement of both exegetical and biblical theology." I agree.

Whether intentional or not, this book has the same number of chapters in it that the Bible has books, sixty-six. Those chapters are divided into three volumes. Volume one is on salvation (pp. 1-417 = Chaps. 1-28). By *salvation* Dillow means not simply or even primarily regeneration, but instead his primary emphasis concerning *salvation* is on ruling with Christ in the life to come (see esp. pp. 148-59). The second volume covers the vital theme of assurance (pp. 418-738 = Chaps. 29-47). Here the author is considering assurance of everlasting life. There are many new and outstanding elements in this section. Volume three concerns *destiny* (pp. 739-1028 = Chaps. 48-66). Here Dillow is discussing parables and themes related to ruling with Christ. In this section he discusses "the outer darkness" (pp. 758-779), the parables of the ten virgins (pp. 789-807), the talents and the minas (p. 808-14), and the judgment of the sheep and the goats (pp. 815-25). In this section he also has four chapters on Gehenna (pp. 826-99), and three chapters on treasures in heaven (pp. 929-62) and on rewards and merit (pp. 977-89).

There are many outstanding features of this book, including: approximately 2,000 verses of Scripture mentioned or discussed in the book (see the 12 page, four columns per page, Scripture index), excellent extended discussion of hundreds of *problem passages*, and a good explanation throughout about why neither Calvinism nor Arminianism correctly handles passages dealing

[1] Editor's note: Due to some errors discovered in the review of this book published in our last journal, we are putting in a revised review that corrects those errors.

with assurance, rewards, and self-examination. Here are a few citations I will be citing often in my speaking: "assurance is faith and faith is assurance" (p. 425), "the whole quest for assurance based on self-examination is doomed…" (p. 462), "degrees of intimacy [with God] will naturally carry over into eternity future" (p. 932), "obviously something is amiss with a doctrine that cannot account for many contradictions to its main tenet, the impossibility of perseverance in carnality" (p. 521), "anathema…means to be subject to some type of temporal judgment including severance *from* fellowship with Christ" (p. 909, italics his), "two of the most important needs of man are for security and significance" (p. 1014), and "when believers do not animate their faith with works, James does not say their faith is nonexistent; he says it is useless" (p. 416).

There are a few things with which *JOTGES* readers may not agree.

First, Dillow suggests that "repentance is a necessary precursor to saving faith" (p. 51). He says that one must admit his sinfulness and guilt (p. 51) and "must have a desire for moral change" (p. 52, favorably quoting a missionary friend in Romania). "There must be an acknowledgement of sin and a desire to be different" (p. 53). "A nonbeliever must admit his sin to God, acknowledge he is wrong, and be willing to seek a new way of life" (p. 54). In my estimation Dillow's discussion of repentance is inconsistent with the rest of the book.

Interestingly, unlike authors who sprinkle references to repentance and faith as conditions of everlasting life throughout their books, the author never mentions them together. In addition, he only mentions repentance *in relation to the new birth* in this one place in the entire book, the chapter on repentance (pp. 33-54). He does have a few references to the repentance of born-again people in other places (e.g., pp. 529-32, 633, 692) and to the repentance of first century Jews (whether believing or unbelieving) in order to escape the deadly temporal judgment that ultimately came upon Israel in AD 66-70 (pp. 325ff.).

Dillow mentions the Gospel of John in this chapter (pp. 33-34), and he does once mention that the words *repent* and *repentance* are not found even once there (p. 35). But Dillow informed me in an email that *Final Destiny* mentions that *the concept of repentance* is found in John's Gospel, I have been unable to find

that statement. Many *JOTGES* readers will not agree that the concept of repentance appears in John as a condition of everlasting life.

Second, Dillow suggests that entering the kingdom does not refer to entering the kingdom *per se*—since he believes that even faithless believers will indeed enter the kingdom (see, for example, pp. 277-78), but to *richly* entering the kingdom as one who will rule with Christ (e.g., pp. 100, 139, 241-64, 335, 882) or even to entering into a rich experience of life now (pp. 252-55), which in his view is essentially the same as entering into a kingdom way of living here and now (pp. 255-56). This is how he understands Matt 5:20, Matt 7:21-23, the rich young ruler's interaction with Jesus, and many other texts as well. While such a view is certainly not inconsistent with the Free Grace view, it is hard for this reviewer to see why entering the kingdom does not simply refer to entering the kingdom. When a *rich entrance* to the kingdom is in view, it can be directly stated as in 2 Pet 1:10-11. In addition, the alternate Free Grace understandings of texts like those mentioned above seem more consistent with the context (e.g., compare Matt 7:15-20 with Matt 7:21-23).

It is helpful to realize that what led the author to these views on what *entering the kingdom means* is his understanding that a number of passages in the NT seem to condition "entering the kingdom" upon good works. Dillow does not feel that the views of Hodges and others on those passages—the idea that they were pre-evangelistic, showing the impossibility of kingdom entrance by works—were convincing. Nor does he agree with the Free Grace views of the old Brethren writers who argued that unfaithful believers will not be in the Millennium. Thus after much meditation and study, he came up with another Free Grace understanding of such texts.

Third, Dillow suggests that Gehenna does not refer to Hades or the lake of fire. Of course, he does believe those places exist and he believes in conscious eternal torment for those who die in unbelief. But he does not believe that Gehenna refers to those places or to eternal torment.

He suggests that Gehenna has three different references: to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (pp. 867-70), to the judgment of faithless believers, either at the Bema or in this life in terms of temporal judgment (pp. 870-77), and as a metaphor for

burning internal sinful desires (pp. 877-79). While I do not find any single piece of evidence cited to be a compelling argument that Gehenna does not refer to Hades or the lake of fire, there is tremendous value in the various books and articles cited and I do believe that more work is needed on this important word which is only found in the Synoptic Gospels (11 times) and in Jas 3:6.

This is an amazing work. It is a resource which should be on the desk of all Free Grace pastors and educators, as well as lay people who are serious students of the Word. (It is probably too deep, however, for brand-new believers.) I highly recommend it. It is well worth reading.

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Freely by His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology. Edited by J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire, and Roy B. Zuck. Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2012. 615 pp. Hardcover, $29.95.

Fourteen authors (one of whom is the late Lewis Sperry Chafer) contributed one or more chapters to this work. Three of those authors, J. B. Hixson, Dennis Rokser, and Thomas Stegall, contributed two chapters each.

There does not appear to be any sort of flow between the chapters. Chapter 1 is "What Is Free Grace Theology?" Then there are chapters on grace, gospel, the content of evangelism, Lordship Salvation, salvation and discipleship, saving faith, repentance, regeneration, eternal security, assurance, sin, sanctification, rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ, traditional Dispensationalism, the link between Dispensationalism and Free Grace, and grace in missions, evangelism, and disciple-making. A number of these chapters are revisions or reprints of earlier work by the authors.

There is much to like in this book. Chafer's chapter on grace is outstanding, as is Bing's chapter on Lordship Salvation.

The discussion of saving faith by Hixson deals almost exclusively with what it is not. Though the discussion covers 42 pages

(pp. 146-87), he only devotes slightly over a page (p. 145 and the top of p. 146) to what saving faith is. In addition, he presents a complicated statement of what the object of saving faith is (p. 145). Yet this chapter has much to be commended. Hixson does say that saving faith is not a determination to obey and is not repentance.

Seymour's discussion of repentance is a very solid explanation of the change of mind view. He rightly points out that repentance is missing from John's Gospel and hence it cannot be an independent condition of everlasting life (p. 212). He also affirms the evangelistic purpose of the Fourth Gospel (p. 212). The only real drawback in this chapter is that Seymour does not discuss the view of Zane Hodges and others that repentance is turning from sins and that it is not a condition of everlasting life.

Anderson's chapter on regeneration and the order of salvation is a bit pedantic at first, but when he gets to discussing regeneration in the Bible it becomes very readable and practical. He makes a great point on the difference between divine enablement that opens one's heart so he can believe and the Calvinist doctrine that regeneration precedes faith (p. 240; see also p. 242). He also makes an excellent observation when he shows how Calvinist R. C. Sproul misuses an article on the Greek word for drawing, *elkō* (p. 241).

There are two chapters by Dennis Rokser, the Pastor of the church that published the book. Rokser wrote on eternal security and assurance. While he begins with Paul and stresses Paul's discussion of eternal security, he does have a nice discussion of passages in John in which the Lord preached eternal security (pp. 264-72). A small misstep was his use of 1 Pet 1:3-5 to prove that Peter held to eternal security (pp. 257-59). That passage is talking about a different type of salvation, ruling with Christ in the life to come (cf. 1 Pet 1:9).

Though Rokser does not discuss the issue of whether assurance is of the essence of saving faith, he does a good job of showing that assurance is based on the promise of everlasting life to the believer and not to works or feelings (pp. 296-99). He does, however, speak of works as being "secondary evidences" of our eternal salvation (pp. 302-303). While I know what he means (GES once spoke of works as providing secondary confirmation

to our assurance in our affirmations), that is probably not part of classic Free Grace theology. Good works are not the basis for assurance in a primary or secondary sense. Our assurance is solely based on the promises in God's Word.

Rokser's discussion of hindrances to assurance (pp. 308-322) and of problem passages (pp. 322-39) is excellent.

Stallard shows that the Free Grace position is not soft on sin. He also quotes somewhat favorably a *Grace in Focus* article by me in which I said, "It is an insult to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross to make our sins the issue in evangelism" (p. 350). He feels this is overstatement (p. 351), but he evidently agrees that by His death on the cross the Lord Jesus removed the sin barrier and made people savable.

Some *JOTGES* readers may find a few areas of disagreement with Tom Stegall in his chapter, "Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ." For example, he argues that in Revelation 2-3 *all believers are overcomers* (pp. 463-68). That is not a widely held view in Free Grace circles. Yet most will be pleased with the chapter as a whole since the discussion is well ordered and reasonably thorough.

Tommy Ice's chapter on Dispensationalism is excellent and so is Tom Stegall's chapter on Dispensationalism and Free Grace Theology. But why two chapters on this subject? Why didn't the editors simply ask Ice (or Stegall) to write one chapter covering Dispensationalism and its importance to Free Grace theology?

There are a few areas of concern in this book.

One concern is the repeated reference by several of the authors to the so-called "crossless gospel." Such a designation is inaccurate. Zane Hodges clearly proclaimed the cross of Christ when he evangelized and he told others to do so as well. To suggest that he or GES proclaims a *crossless* or *contentless* or *promise-only* evangelistic message is misleading.

In the opening chapter, for example, there is a long note by Mike Halsey that covers nearly two pages in tiny print (pp. 12-13). He makes this crossless gospel charge. Then, without providing any reference, he says that GES calls our view "the refined view" (p. 12 n 23). Yet I have never called my view "the refined view." Nor has GES. Nor did Zane Hodges or anyone else I know. Hopefully if this book is reprinted Halsey will give a citation showing someone who calls his view "the refined view."

Hixson in his chapter, "What Is the Gospel?" has an endnote that runs over two full pages (pp. 59-61 endnote 1) in which he discusses "some theologians [who] have departed from the biblical view of the gospel…" Like Halsey he refers to this as "the crossless gospel." He also calls it "the promise-only gospel," "the contentless gospel," "the minimalist gospel," and "the refined gospel." He too makes the spurious claim, without any documentation, that "the refined gospel" is the label that Hodges, GES, and others have adopted for their view.

In his chapter on evangelism, Meisinger too takes up the crossless gospel charge, though he calls it "a groundless gospel" (p. 71). However, in a surprising twist, Meisinger argues that concerning Jesus' death one must merely believe that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3c). He specifically indicates that one need not believe that Christ died *on the cross*, or even that He *shed His blood* for us (p. 76). It is puzzling why the editors allowed this into the book. They strongly argue elsewhere that one must believe *in the cross* to be born again. Almost everyone who argues that one must believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead also argues that one must know *how He died*. If He had died by poisoning, hanging, suffocation, or any method other than dying on a cross by the shedding of blood, there could be no redemption and no removal of the sin barrier.

Meisinger sometimes uses specialized vocabulary from the late R. B. Thieme with no explanation, referring to "Phase 1 and Phase 2 truth" (p. 68 n. 12) and to "'saved' in a proper Phase 2 sense" (p. 71, note 18). For those not familiar with the shorthand of R. B. Thieme, these notes would be difficult if not impossible to understand.

Concerning the eternality of the promise of life, Meisinger indicates that I misrepresented him when I wrote that he held that "the person who believes in Jesus Christ and the five essentials for the gift of salvation…has it even if he does not believe that what he has received is eternal" (p. 65 n 2). Then after eight pages in which he says one must believe those essentials to be born again, he says, "Eternal life is the result of faith, not part of the object of faith. *Nowhere does Scripture claim that one must believe* in eternal life to get eternal life, or *in the eternality of the gift* before the Lord gives the gift" (pp. 73-74, italics

added). It seems that Meisinger either misunderstands what I was claiming or he contradicts himself.

A second concern is the book's reliance on *tradition*. The subtitle bears this out with its reference to "Classical Free Grace Theology." Several of the contributors appeal to what is and is not part of classic Free Grace theology (e.g., the first concern mentioned above).

The Free Grace position is not bound to some tradition. If believers today discover new insights, the Free Grace position will change somewhat, at least for those believers. To suggest that there is some tradition that we all agree upon, that is fixed, and that we all cling to is not only incorrect, it is dangerous. We must all be Bereans (Acts 17:11).

Despite these two concerns, I recommend this book. It is a good resource for well-grounded people. Because of the objections just mentioned, I would not recommend this book for people who are not yet Free Grace, or for new believers.

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Paul's Letter to the Romans. By Colin G. Kruse. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012. 627 pp. Hardcover, $52.00.

I had been impressed by a quote I'd seen earlier from Kruse on 2 Cor 5:11. That made me think this commentary would be a good one.

I like this commentary, but a few caveats are in order. First, Kruse takes the normal Lordship Salvation view. He says there is such a thing as final judgment and final justification (p. 183). Paul, in his view, always spoke of everlasting life as a possible future reward for perseverance (p. 287). "Authentic faith for Paul always involved obedience and faithfulness" (p. 75). Second, Kruse's understanding of the theme of the book is similar to the typical salvation from eternal condemnation view (p. 33, though see comments below). Third, though the author does not fully embrace the new perspective on Paul, he also only has minor

reservations to it (pp. 21-22). Fourth, he sees the promise that "all Israel will be saved" not as referring to the nation of Israel, but "by 'all Israel' Paul means the Jewish elect of all ages" (p. 443).

However, there is so much to like about this commentary that those weaknesses are, in my opinion, far overshadowed by the strengths. First, Kruse has a goldmine of quotes and references to the current literature. Second, he is not locked in to restating what others say. For example, on the theme of the book he says, "The center, heart, and organizing principle of Pauline theology is the action of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ to deal with the effects of human sin, *individually, communally, and cosmically*. In brief, as far as Romans is concerned, the *centrum Paulinum* is the gospel of God *comprehensively conceived*" (p. 33, italics added). While this is similar to what most say, he goes beyond embracing, at least in part, the view of the theme taken by Lopez, Hodges, and other Free Grace proponents. Third, he has many excellent excurses on things like grace (pp. 185-86), Rom 16:7 and whether Junia was an apostle (pp. 565, 567), and eternal life in the Pauline corpus (p. 287, though he fails to explain the texts he quotes and his summary is incorrect). Fourth, Kruse often indicates how many times Paul uses key words and lists all the other uses, which is very helpful.

I believe this is one of the top commentaries on Romans. I highly recommend it.

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Is There a Doctor in the House? An Insider's Story and Advice on Becoming a Bible Scholar. By Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 156 pp. Paper, $18.99.

The title grabbed my attention. I wanted to see what a famous NT scholar would say about doctoral studies.

Witherington received his doctorate from Durham University in England under the famed C. K. Barrett (pp. 27-31). In this work he advocates considering a degree from overseas since it is typically cheaper and faster than a doctorate earned in the U.S.

There are many interesting personal anecdotes and pieces of advice in this book for prospective doctoral students. For that reason, this book is highly desirable for anyone planning on a doctorate in Biblical or theological studies. It is an easy and enjoyable read.

Witherington is Methodist and though he is Evangelical, there is no evidence in this book that he holds to a Free Grace view of justification. The closest we get is his statement, "I am a saved and forgiven person" (p. 123). But coming from his Methodist tradition, this might mean something like *I have reason to believe that right now I am in good standing with God.* The issue of his eternal destiny is never broached in this book as far as I could see.

He says three semi-liberal things (I'd say *liberal*, but today those called *conservative Evangelicals* say these things) that caught my attention. First, he indicates that the Gospel accounts are not always historically accurate if judged according to modern standards of historiography (pp. 61-62). Since he believes the Synoptic authors were not seeking to be historically *precise* (i.e., accurate), "we must allow these accounts to be imprecise [i.e., inaccurate] if the authors were not trying to be precise" (p. 62). For example, Witherington thinks it insignificant whether Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed once or twice (pp. 61-62). The author feels it is silly to try to harmonize the accounts since precision was never intended.

Second, he indicates that we should be guided by the Scriptures only, *Sola Scriptura* in Latin, sort of. He qualifies this, possibly to appease his Charismatic readers, "If rule one really is *sola scriptura*, evangelicals are right to take a dim view of pneumatic [i.e., Charismatic and Pentecostal] claims that *go against* [italics his] the explicit teaching of the Bible" (p. 95). Notice the wiggle room there. Special revelation that doesn't *go against the explicit teaching of the Bible* is evidently not to be challenged. What if a supposed revelation goes against *the implicit teaching of Scripture*? Or, what if someone claims special revelation that is not consistent or inconsistent with Scripture? Say a young man tells a young woman that God told him that he was to marry her, a not so uncommon experience in certain circles. Should the young woman take this as a command from God since it is not against some explicit teaching in Scripture?

What if she does not want to marry him? Should she "take a dim view of [his] pneumatic claim"? What of church councils? Should they be regarded as inspired as long as they do not contradict the explicit teaching of Scripture?

Third, concerning who is qualified to teach the Bible, he writes, "If it sounds as if I am suggesting that one has to be a genuine Christian *or devout Jew* [italics mine] to properly teach, preach, or write about the Bible, I am indeed suggesting that that should be the desideratum [that which is desired or wanted]" (p. 125). Does Witherington believe that devout Jews who do not believe in Jesus make excellent Bible teachers? That is what he implies. Why should an unregenerate Jew, no matter how devout, be a good Bible teacher? Or, possibly Witherington believes that devout Jews are born again even if they do not believe in Jesus Christ. Either way, this is a puzzling statement.

In terms of the Free Grace issue, he makes this excellent observation concerning the words *save* and *salvation*: "in most ancient Greek literature [they are] not to give someone the gift of everlasting life…[but] to 'help,' to 'heal,' to 'rescue' from danger" (p. 46). But then when he goes to the NT, he greatly weakens the point: "Even in the NT *there are times* [italics mine] when the less theological language is used" (p. 46). He implies that the normal NT uses concerns the gift of everlasting life, but that on rare occasion it refers to help, healing, or rescue from danger. The truth is that 70% of the time the latter is in view.

I recommend this book for anyone planning or even contemplating a doctorate in NT, OT, or theology, or for the spouse of such a person.

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Theology the Lutheran Way. By Oswald Bayer. Edited and translated by Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C Mattes. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. 302 pp. Paper, $34.00.

Oswald Bayer is professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen, in Germany. A well-known Luther

scholar, Bayer has attempted to combat what he views as the modern deformation of theology. This occurs whenever theology is influenced by methods that neither serve, nor are shaped by, the gospel. Bayer gives the examples of transforming the gospel into an existential encounter (Schleirmacher), moralism (Kant), or a theoretical system (Hegel). In *Theology the Lutheran Way,* he emphasizes the linguistic nature of theology, and explains why its ultimate subject is *the promise of God.*

Drawing on the work of J. L. Austin (the Oxford philosopher and proponent of Ordinary Language Philosophy), Bayer calls attention to the distinction between two kinds of speech acts: those that are constative and those that are performative.

A *constative* speech act describes a state of affairs but does not actually bring it about. For example, uttering the sentence: "Peter and Chloe exchanged vows," describes the moment in which Peter and Chloe were married, but does not *make* them married.

By contrast, a *performative* utterance actually brings a new situation about. Bayer's primary example of a performative utterance is a promise. Thus, when Peter and Chloe promise each other, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," they are not describing anything, but creating a new "marital" state of affairs that did not exist before. Their promises actually create a new situation.

Bayer explains that this understanding of the nature of promises (*promissio*) revolutionized Luther's approach to theology, beginning with the sacrament of absolution. This is the sacrament where a priest pronounces a repentant sinner to be forgiven.

At first, Luther thought the priest was merely describing a forgiveness that had already taken place. That is, the priest would look for signs of true repentance, and then reassure the penitent that God had already forgiven him. But later, Luther began to think of absolution as a performative speech act, one that *brings about* what it promises. On this view, the priest actually accomplished the forgiveness through the declaration of absolution.

> [T]he absolution is seen as a speech act that first constitutes, brings about, a state of affairs, by creating a relationship between the one in whose

> name it is spoke and the one to whom it is spoken and who believes the promise (p. 130).

When the priest pronounced forgiveness on God's authority, and that promise is believed, a new situation is created whereby the penitent was actually forgiven by God.

This understanding of the promise of absolution affected Luther's view of the gospel. For Bayer, as for many readers of this journal, the proper object of saving faith is not descriptions of Christ's life, but the promise of everlasting life. Bayer's analysis of promise-making sheds light on a number of areas of disagreement in Free Grace circles over the precise object of saving faith.

First, Bayer's analysis clarifies why it is in the very nature of the gospel to be received by faith apart from works. As Bayer explains, following Luther: "The gospel, strictly speaking, is a promise without any demand, a pure promise (*promissio*), a gift" (p. 125). Promises do not demand. They give. They do not call us to act. They ask us to believe the promise being made, apart from our works.

Second, understanding the nature of promise-making also shows why assurance is essential to saving faith. Bayer quotes Luther on the grounds of our assurance:

> And this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves (*nos extra nos*), so that we depend not on our own strength, conscience, mind, person, or works, but on what is outside ourselves (*extra nos*), that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive (p. 130).

Believing the promise means believing that it is addressed to you, true for you, not because of your nature, but because of God's faithfulness. Believing the promise also means being assured that it is true. It would be logically impossible to both believe the promise and not be assured that it was true. Hence, assurance is of the essence of faith in the promise.

Third, Bayer's analysis helps to explain why the facts of Jesus' life are not the core message of the gospel. The gospel contains a number of descriptions of Jesus' life, of Who He was, and what He did. These descriptions are constative utterances.

They describe historical truths, but do not create a new situation, i.e., put one in relationship to God.

But the message of everlasting life is not a descriptive statement, it is a promise (p. 132). As such, it is a performative utterance—it gives what it promises. Once you believe in Jesus for everlasting life, you actually receive that life. You become regenerate and are placed in a new relationship with Him.

Fourth, understanding the nature of promises also explains the nature of saving faith. Critics of Free Grace theology often say that we erroneously exclude things like sorrow from sin, turning away, and obedience from our definition of faith (see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, ch 35). Their definition of faith is different from our own because they have a different understanding of what the gospel is. Bayer argues that our definition of saving faith will depend on how we understand the nature of the gospel: "If the word becomes an appeal, faith becomes its performance in action. If the word becomes a demonstration, faith becomes insight; if it becomes a statement, faith becomes knowledge. Finally, if the word becomes an expression, faith becomes a ground of existence or a ground of experience given with human being as such. *Only if the word is promise (promissio) is faith really faith* [italics added]" (p. 139).

If people think the gospel message is an appeal to action, they will naturally think that faith itself is an action in response to it. If they think the gospel is a historical description of something that happened long ago, then faith will be defined as knowledge of that historical fact. If they think the gospel is an existential encounter, they will take faith as reception of that encounter.

By contrast, if the gospel message is understood as a promise, then faith will be understood as faith. Promises can only be believed. They create a new situation between the one making the promise, and the one who believes the promise, but that is not because of an action undertaken by the believer. It is by faith alone. Hence, Bayer claims the only way for faith to retain its true character as faith, is for the gospel to be a promise.

Bayer makes a number of remarkable suggestions about how best to understand theology and the gospel. But readers be warned, *this is an extremely difficult book*. Bayer is a German academic, and writes like one. He is well versed in contemporary philosophy and theology and engages those subjects at the highest levels. Most people (including this reviewer) will

find it hard to follow Bayer's arguments. Nevertheless, Bayer's treatment of the gospel as a performative utterance helps to clarify why the message of everlasting life is the proper object of saving faith, and why only faith apart from works can receive it. Recommended for advanced readers.

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Discovering the Mystery of the Unity of God: A Theological Study of the Plurality and Tri-Unity of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. By John B. Metzger. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2010. 905 pp. Hardcover, $49.95.

I was introduced to this book by the author. I spoke at Grace Bible Church in Charlotte, NC and John Metzger was present. He graciously sent me a copy of this book to review.

This is a major work. It is somewhat like *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, except this work is directed to unbelieving Jews. The main points of the work are two: 1) God is presented in the Hebrew Scriptures as one Being, but three Persons, and 2) Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah and is a divine Person, variously called Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord, the Branch, the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, and so on.

There are many strengths of this work. There are 1926 footnotes. In these notes are an amazing amount of excellent sources. The work contains many outstanding quotes from these sources. The work is very thorough. The language is very friendly to unbelieving Jews (e.g., the Tanakh, the Hebrew Scriptures, B.C.E., C.E., G-d, Hebrew words printed in Hebrew, etc.).

The discussion of the angel of the Lord is outstanding. Metzger makes a great case that this is the pre-incarnate Messiah, Yeshua (pp. 105-106, 212, 247). He points out something I'd not thought of before, that *the Angel of the Lord* no longer is found in Scripture once the Incarnation occurs. (*An angel of the Lord* does appear after the incarnation. But never again *The angel*

of the Lord.) This material is contained within four chapters dealing with theophanies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

He makes a good case for two Yahwehs in the Hebrew Scriptures, one, God the Father and the other, God the Son.

His presentation side by side of the genealogies of Joseph and Mary (Miriam) is excellent (pp. 597-98).

The last sentence in the Conclusion (called *Summary*) is beautiful: "Stan Telchin, a Jewish believer in Messiah, has said that the greatest act of anti-Semitism that the Church could commit is to withhold the Gospel of Messiah from the Jewish people" (p. 668).

There are also a few minor weaknesses. Since the book is written to Jewish unbelievers, the words are a bit foreign to Christian ears. The book is very slow to develop because of the intended audience. Metzger could make the same points to a Christian audience in a third of the pages and it would be an easier read. The great size of the book is a bit daunting. Finally, the $49.95 price, though actually cheap for a thousand page hardcover book, may be a bit high for some.

In Appendix 1, Metzger evangelizes his unbelieving Jewish readers. While the discussion is overall quite friendly to the Free Grace position, the author is a bit fuzzy at the end. He writes, "Go to the Father and confess that you're a sinner, separated from Him, and acknowledge that Jesus is your Saviour [sic] from sin, your Redeemer. *Ask Him to come into your heart and life as your Messiah and Lord*" (p. 686, italics added). That is certainly not as clear at it might have been. Fortunately, however, it is followed immediately by quotes of John 1:12; 3:16-17, 36.

I recommend this book for pastors and evangelists and church leaders. It is a super resource for Jewish evangelism.

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