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**A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF *THE RISE AND
FALL OF DISPENSATIONALISM*
BY DANIEL G. HUMMEL**

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

Most readers of the *JOTGES* call themselves dispensationalists. Dispensationalism is often associated with Free Grace theology. In *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, Daniel Hummel does not argue that it “fell” because it was not Biblical, even though he is not a dispensationalist. His point is that it is no longer a dominant force in Evangelicalism today as it once was, but is relegated to a small and irrelevant group of adherents. Hummel does not openly say so, but it is clear he thinks this is a good development.

Instead of addressing the Biblical merits, or lack thereof, of dispensationalism, Hummel explains how it impacted the Evangelical movement and the culture of the United States. This is seen in the subtitle of the book: *How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation*.

In this article, I would like to summarize Hummel’s discussion on the history of dispensationalism with special emphasis on how that history impacted the Free Grace movement. I would also like to analyze his conclusions.

II. THE RISE OF DISPENSATIONALISM

The beginning of dispensationalism can be traced back to the 1830s, with the Plymouth Brethren in Ireland and England. J. N. Darby developed the system, with a different view of the church, the millennium, and a dualism between heaven and earth (p. 21). He did not see the world getting better, as did the postmillennialists of his day. The Christian was to look forward to the imminent Rapture of the church into heaven, which would be followed by a Tribulation on earth. Other premillennialists of the day (old premillennialists) said Christ would return after a period of trouble on earth. The old premillennialists did not adopt the other teachings of Darby.

Darby also separated Israel from the church. The Bible was to be understood as divided into different periods, or dispensations. Each dispensation ended in failure. The current dispensation, what we call the church age, will as well (p. 23). The kingdom of heaven would only come in the future through the nation of Israel. The Plymouth Brethren were opposed to revivalism but instead wanted to evangelize the denominations, since Christendom was in a sad spiritual state. There was a heavy emphasis on studying the Bible and discipleship (p. 36). Darby sought for people to leave their denominations.

When these teachings were exported to America, few joined the Brethren ranks, but many did accept much of their teachings. Aspects of this new premillennialism were adopted by large numbers of people, such as an imminent Rapture and the heavenly nature of the church. They also often accepted the idea of different dispensations (p. 67). However, most rejected the Brethren's call to leave the denominations. The Brethren were also resistant to the Holiness Movement while many Christians in the United States embraced those teachings (p. 52).

At the heart of this emphasis on discipleship and teaching was the view that the Bible was to be interpreted literally. It was to interpret itself, through inductive study (p. 43). The OT prophets and the book of Revelation were to be interpreted in this manner as well, not in an allegorical method that saw promises made to Israel spiritually applied to the church. This hermeneutic appealed to many (p. 71).

D. L. Moody, the most famous evangelist in the world after the Civil War, met Darby in 1872. He accepted Darby's premillennial eschatology, but not other aspects of dispensationalism, such as denominational separation (pp. 87-88). Moody was successful in reconciling Northern and Southern white Christians with a common goal to fulfill the Great Commission, which he saw as calling for the spiritual salvation of unbelievers. His successful ministry worked across denominational lines and introduced millions to the terminology of dispensational eschatology.

This new premillennialism, which was promoted by Moody, produced institutions to further its goal of global missions. There were Bible conferences around the nation, schools established, and independent mission organizations founded. They all looked forward to the imminent Rapture of the church (p. 98). The foremost missionary

training school, Chicago Bible Institute, was founded in 1889. It was later named after Moody in 1899 (p. 104).¹

These missionary agencies resulted in “faith missions.” Missionaries looked for financial support solely as an answer to prayer, and not by denominational funds. They adopted this idea from Darby and the early Brethren (p. 108).

Hummel concludes that at the end of the 1800s, dispensational teachings expressed in premillennial eschatology were seen in popular ideas. Institutions promoted these ideas, but there was a lack of scholarly theological credibility (p. 110). Many held to certain aspects of

dispensationalism in various ways, but not as a complete system. The early Brethren would not have approved of some of the practices of these new premillennialists, such as working within and across denominational lines.

An example would be the new Pentecostal movement. They spoke in tongues, promoted supernatural healing, and claimed to have new prophecies. Many adopted premillennial eschatology, such as the Rapture and the imminent return of Christ. But they rejected dispensational times and the church-Israel distinction. At first, they were part of the Moody movement, but there was a split. Even so, Pentecostalism helped spread certain dispensational ideas (pp. 119-21).

New premillennial eschatology reflected certain dispensational themes. These themes and theology would become a dominant religious force in the beginning years of the 20th century.

III. THE SPREAD OF NEW PREMILLENNIALISM AND DISPENSATIONALISM

C. I. Scofield was a leader in the new premillennial movement. Hummel maintains that more than any other leader, he “transformed new premillennialism into a full-blown religious identity for millions of Americans” (p. 130). His reference Bible, full of notes and published in 1909, was premillennial and provided a framework for dispensational thought to both clergy and laymen (p. 134). It reflected the history of the Bible in seven dispensations.

¹ Biola would become another one.

This *Scofield Reference Bible* was used across denominational lines. It brought new premillennial teachings into various types of churches. It would make its way into religious hymns and then impact religious culture throughout the nation. Millions adopted dispensational concepts through the use of this Bible.

Through it, dispensational thought spread to other countries. Missionaries trained in the Bible institutes connected with Moody's ministry used this reference Bible to teach that theology in other countries (p. 139). It became their handbook.

As World War I approached, premillennialists pointed to the depraved state of the world as proof of their contention that the world was getting worse. The historical situation reflected a move towards a one-world government as a precursor to the coming Antichrist. Capitalism was offering the promise of a better world (p. 145).

To fight against theological liberalism, several theologians published *The Fundamentals*. Many new premillennialists contributed to these writings. They reflected the predominant theological view of conservative Christianity in America (p. 151).

Dispensational eschatology seemed to be supported by the coming of World War I. Europe was seen by many Christians as fulfilling prophecy as the basis of the coming one-world government. In 1917, Britain took control of Jerusalem and produced the Balfour Declaration, all pointing to a homeland for the Jews and the end of the times of the Gentiles (p. 151). Scofield kept to his dispensational roots, saying that the only hope for humanity was the return of Christ.

Billy Sunday was an immensely popular revivalist and a premillennialist. At the same time, he was unashamedly pro-American and promoted nationalism. Like Moody before him, he used dispensational language but was not theologically astute. He also broke from the dispensational tenet that this world cannot be saved. Christians were told to fight and hope for the defeat of the Germans and the victory of democracy over fascism (p. 153).

A core of dispensationalists Hummel designates as "scholastic" were not concerned about shaping the nation's culture or defeating the enemies of America. They formed new institutions to advance dispensational theology and premillennialism. They wanted to teach it as a full systematic theology and give it scholarly credentials (p. 174). Lewis Sperry Chafer, the leader of this scholastic group, wanted to train pastors and place them in the pulpits of various denominations, teaching

systematic dispensationalism. Along with others, he founded Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) for this purpose (p. 182). By the 1940s, graduates of the school were accomplishing these goals, advancing dispensationalism as a complete system of how to interpret the Bible.

Names like Ironside, Feinberg, Pentecost, Walvoord, and later Ryrie, joined Chafer in producing numerous scholarly works. Graduates of DTS went on to establish publishing houses, more seminaries, and Bible colleges.²

Neo-evangelicals also used dispensational language, such as the Rapture and the coming Tribulation. The most famous of these was Billy Graham. However, he rejected other aspects of dispensationalism. He taught that the people in America could change the future if they would repent, believe, and turn to Christ in the hope of avoiding judgment on the nation. He also believed in an already/not yet aspect of the kingdom (p. 228). The kingdom was not just something that awaited a future development or only involved the nation of Israel.

Into the 1960s, dispensationalism and new premillennial eschatology were riding a wave of popularity. It had scholarly credibility. Many pastors trained at DTS were pastoring many churches. Even some of those who did not accept all of the points of dispensationalism taught certain aspects of it.

IV. THE FALL OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Hummel points to various things that led to the fall of dispensationalism as a respected system of Biblical interpretation. A major factor was the rise of what Hummel calls “pop dispensationalism.” But dispensationalism was also threatened by opponents from without and within.

A. Pop Dispensationalism

In 1970, DTS graduate Hal Lindsey published *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It was a non-scholarly book that sold ten million copies and spoke of the Rapture and the coming Tribulation. Hummel says this book led to the eventual demise of dispensationalism as a serious theological system (p. 234). It started the process of commercializing

² These include Talbot Seminary and Grace Theological Seminary.

dispensationalism. Pop dispensationalism was immensely popular and scholastic dispensationalists could not compete with it.

Lindsey greatly simplified certain dispensational teachings, but his focus was on things happening in the social and military scenes. He tried to connect current events to a very loose premillennial interpretation of prophecy, often using outrageous interpretations of Biblical passages. Hummel compares it to a tabloid newspaper. It combined prophecy, including what was happening in the Middle East, with entertainment. Lindsey wanted the reader to think he was a serious and scholarly theologian who was able to write of complex Biblical issues in a way that the contemporary American could understand in light of what was happening in the world (p. 237).

Lindsey was not concerned that his writings did not reflect scholarly dispensational theology. He embraced certain charismatic teachings, set dates for the Rapture based on current events, and did not focus on the church-Israel distinction. Hummel suggests he was not a good example for Christians because of his multiple divorces and remarriages, as well as his lavish lifestyle (p. 239).

Many would follow Lindsey's example of making money off of pop dispensationalism. One was Tim LaHaye, who would later become the most successful of them all with his *Left Behind* series. Various dispensational authors wrote similar paperbacks that flooded the commercial market. Hummel says that they wrote for profit, regardless of their sincere beliefs. These writings became even more popular, with their teachings appearing in fictional books, movies, and music. No church, denomination, or seminary put a check on what was being said. Millions of Americans were exposed to a "haphazard engagement" with dispensationalism. Broader aspects of Biblical teachings were set aside. At times, Pentecostal spirituality, which was rejected by older dispensationalists such as Chafer, was embraced within a premillennial view of judgment that also spoke of the coming Antichrist and his mark (p. 244). It was inevitable that serious Biblical scholars would mock the popular expressions of dispensationalism.

Hummel maintains that even John Walvoord, the president of DTS, took advantage of the commercial success of pop dispensationalism. In 1974, he wrote *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*. It discussed Cold War politics, the problems with the oil market and the Arab-Israel conflict, and the move toward European unity. It was not

based upon the exegesis of the Scriptures or a systematic dispensational treatise. Instead, it was more like a conservative Republican policy brief (pp. 255-56).

Other dispensational writers followed suit. They fed the popular desire to interpret geopolitical events in Biblical language. Hummel says these writers were looking at “sales charts” instead of promoting dispensational teachings (p. 256).

Dispensational teachers and Bible colleges expanded their efforts in giving the people in their churches what they wanted to hear. They quit emphasizing the study of Biblical prophecy and other doctrines to focus on social issues and the mental well-being of Christians. Tim LaHaye was widely successful with his books on how to have a healthy sex life and marriage (p. 257).

B. Theological Opposition from Without

Coinciding with the rise of pop dispensationalism was the teaching of “historic premillennialism.” This challenged the dispensational view that the kingdom of God involved the nation of Israel. It maintained that the kingdom was focused on the church in this present age. This renewed many of the teachings of old premillennialism, which also denied the imminency of the Rapture of the church and dispensational times. It was heavily promoted in many Evangelical seminaries and presented a scholarly alternative to eschatology instead of the emotional appeal of pop dispensationalism.

This view of the kingdom called for social activism, as the church furthered the impact of the kingdom in this present age. This gave rise to the New Christian Right, which sought to influence the culture in areas such as abortion and family values. Leaders such as Francis Schaeffer and James Dobson rejected the idea of an imminent Rapture and the view that the kingdom was in the future. Instead, Christians in America needed to be organized politically to further inject Biblical values into the culture. All of this was contrary to dispensational teachings (p. 258).

This brand of premillennialism was much more acceptable to Covenant and Reformed theology. There was robust scholarly engagement among Evangelical scholars about the kingdom, the church, and Biblical interpretation. Most seminaries rid themselves of their dispensational faculty members, as dispensational hermeneutics and theology

lost credibility in academic circles (p. 262). Dispensational ideas were relegated to their expressions in pop dispensationalism. These expressions had little in common with the theology of Darby, Schofield, and Chafer.

Lindsey was a glaring example of how his brand of dispensationalism had denied the tenets of that system. He adopted the strategy of the New Christian Right, calling on his millions of readers to shape both domestic and foreign policies. He unabashedly supported the platform of the Republican Party and Ronald Regan. His view was that a strong Christian America could keep judgment from coming upon the world (p. 268). Tim LaHaye also encouraged his readers to get involved in conservative politics to impact the culture.

These writings by Lindsey and LaHaye taught, in LaHaye's words, the reality of a "humanist tribulation." This would occur *before* the Rapture, so the Rapture was not imminent. It involved a battle between the forces of humanism and modernism against Christianity. Political involvement by Christians would cause a moral victory and delay the coming of the Lord. This would allow the gospel to go out and more people could be saved. The New Christian Right agreed, with Jerry Falwell joining in the battle for America's soul with the founding of the Moral Majority (pp. 272-74). Francis Schaffer was promoting similar views of current events in Reformed circles. Those who claimed to be dispensationalists were often indistinguishable from opposing theological camps.

Other theological distinctions were blurred as well. With a call for political involvement, supported by pop dispensationalism, Pat Robertson came to have a great influence on the American religious scene. His *700 Club* was popular with Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and many other denominations. He also longed for a revival in the country to avoid the humanist tribulation (pp. 276-79). Even though millions of Americans were familiar with certain terms related to dispensational eschatology, scholastic dispensationalism as a system to understand the Bible was not a moving force.

In the 1980s, these trends were visible in televangelism programs such as *The PTL Club*, *The Jimmy Swaggart Telecast*, *Oral Roberts and You*, and the Trinity Broadcast Network. They used certain dispensational terms such as the Rapture, Tribulation, Antichrist, Armageddon, and the Second Coming. But they did not have much interest in

dispensational hermeneutics. These shows were all charismatic in nature and were decidedly opposed to scholastic dispensationalism. They all, like pop dispensationalism, spoke a great deal about the need to slow down cultural and moral decline and the chaos certain political parties were causing (p. 287).

John Hagee in San Antonio is another example. He also promoted New Christian Right political activism. He used a mixture of dispensational themes along with Pentecostalism and prosperity theology (p. 295).

Scholarly theologians ridiculed the direction dispensationalism was going. Hummel states that even those who were considered scholastic dispensationalists contributed to this ridicule. Charles Dyer, a professor at DTS, wrote in 1991 during the crisis in the Persian Gulf that Saddam Hussein was potentially a person the OT prophets wrote about. His book was highly successful, so Walvoord “rushed” to cash in on the money and popularity of such writings by publishing his own work that sold a million copies (p. 289).

The rise of New Calvinists also brought opposition to dispensationalism. These included Baptists who often had a premillennial eschatology but rejected the new premillennialism associated with dispensationalism. They were Reformed in their theology concerning salvation and saw the kingdom as being present in the church.³ John Piper is one of its most well-known advocates and a staunch opponent of systematic dispensationalism (p. 294). Hummel points out that in the 1990s, this covenantal premillennialism was the overwhelming position of the leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention. New Calvinists are the predominant view among the faculty in all their seminaries (p. 298).

Hummel suggests that when theological scholars attacked dispensational views, the dispensationalists were not able to defend their positions. The leadership was old and its centers of theological education were shrinking. There was little to no response to a rising postmillennialism which specifically attacked the dispensational teaching that encouraged believers not to get involved in societal problems and to wait for the Rapture (pp. 304-307).

³ A Reformed view of soteriology includes works in the offer of eternal salvation. It is worded in different ways. Some say that salvation cannot be obtained until a person gives his life over to the Lord by turning from his sins. Others say that final salvation will only be obtained when the Lord looks at our works at the final judgment to see if we merit that salvation. Many say we look to our works to see if we are true believers or not. All of this is related to the Calvinist teaching that genuine believers will persevere in faith and good works until the end of their lives.

Even Christian music abandoned dispensational themes. Songs did not speak of an imminent Second Coming. Instead, they focused on living holy lives in the present world. The kingdom of God was commonly said to be here in the church and in the lives of Christians (p. 291).

C. Opposition from Within

Some pastors trained at DTS went on to lead megachurches. These included Charles Swindoll, Erwin Lutzer, David Jeremiah, Robert Jeffress, Tony Evans, and Andy Stanley. Other dispensationalists did the same, though they were not trained at DTS. These included David Hocking and John MacArthur. They were all selective in which part of dispensational teachings they embraced (pp. 292-93).

Hummel discusses MacArthur's public break with scholastic dispensationalism over the issue of soteriology. Hummel says this led to a large defection of dispensationalists to Covenant Theology. MacArthur insisted that eternal life was only given to the one who made Jesus the Lord of his life (p. 302). He maintained that the New Calvinists and Reformed teachings on salvation were Biblical and not the dispensational Free Grace gospel, which only required "mental assent," which he called "easy believism." Pop dispensationalism had spread this heresy, in MacArthur's view, but Lewis Sperry Chafer was responsible for it. At the root of the issue was the dispensational tenet that separated the dispensation of the Law in the OT and the dispensation of grace in the NT.

The Free Grace gospel was also made popular with the writings of DTS professors such as Ryrie and Zane Hodges. Hodges, in particular, rejected the need for repentance from sins and the acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord on the part of the unbeliever (p. 310). Even though MacArthur maintained some dispensational beliefs, he became much more comfortable in the company of Covenant theologians. His popularity caused many to reject the soteriology of certain dispensational writers.

Another source of opposition came from DTS itself. In the 1990s, some of the younger professors challenged critical aspects of dispensationalism. They called themselves "progressive dispensationalists." These scholars, who included Darrel Bock and Craig Blaising, rejected the view that the church age was a parenthesis in God's dealings with

Israel. There were not seven distinct dispensations, but a progression from one dispensation to another. Prophetic utterances did not have to be literally fulfilled. These prophecies could be fulfilled in more than one way. Opponents of traditional dispensationalism often praised the progressives. They saw this movement as contributing to the decline of dispensational theology and that progressive dispensationalism was similar to Covenant Theology and its eschatology. These young scholars, who had jettisoned much of traditional dispensationalism, were held in high regard by many of those who critiqued the old system (pp. 315-16). Progressive dispensationalism became the leading theological perspective at formerly dispensational schools.

D. The Results

By the first decade of the 21st century, traditional dispensationalism was a small and practically irrelevant scholastic tradition. Hummel says it had no respected national leaders and no young scholars coming up through the ranks. Pop dispensationalism was a commercial success, but there was no unity in the movement (p. 322). Christians from many different theological backgrounds were part of the customers of what pop dispensationalists were selling. There was a strong appeal to political voters, especially conservative ones.

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 provided another source of revenue for pop dispensationalism. The War on Terror allowed writers to make predictions about end-time scenarios. It did not matter when these predictions failed to come true. Whatever allusions there were to Biblical eschatology, the emphasis was on geopolitics and not on looking for the future kingdom of God (p. 326).

Hummel maintains that the entertainment value of pop dispensational themes made it attractive to completely secular ventures. The Rapture motif showed up in comic books, movies, television shows, and video games. Among serious theologians, in Hummel's view, the idea of an imminent Rapture was a source of ridicule.

The collapse of dispensationalism has led to increased discussions about the meaning of the kingdom of God. Instead of seeing believers being taken in an imminent Rapture to meet the Lord in the air, a respected scholar such as N. T. Wright says that believers should try to bring Jesus to the earth to make this planet better. Others say that the kingdom is a "present reality" in the preaching of the gospel and works

of justice and mercy (p. 339). In various degrees, those who contributed to the fall of dispensationalism would agree. In the present age, that includes the vast majority of Evangelicals.

V. ANALYSIS

Space does not permit a complete analysis of Hummel's discussion on dispensationalism. However, certain points that he made are of particular interest to readers of the *JOTGES*. These merit our consideration. In this section, I will discuss three such issues. These are: dispensationalism and accusations of racism, the relationship of Free Grace theology to dispensationalism, and what the Bible says about the fall of dispensationalism.

A. Dispensationalism and Racism

Throughout the book, Hummel points out what, at the very least, could be labeled as racist tendencies in dispensationalism. Specifically, these tendencies often arose from the new premillennial eschatology (pp. 5, 12, 54, 85-89, 119, 122, 125-27, 220-21, 263, 270, 279). The reader is left to determine for himself if particular dispensationalists/premillennialists were racist or if they were simply being true to their sincere theological beliefs. If the latter, then the dispensational system itself could be accused of promoting racism in the American culture. While not stated, this would certainly imply that the theology was an unbiblical one. Its collapse should then be welcomed by all Christians.

Hummel states that dispensationalism provided four generations of "white" Protestants a way to understand not only the Bible, but the world in which they lived (p. 5). In light of the soon return of Christ, after the Civil War new premillennialists did not concern themselves with the plight of black citizens or the effects of slavery. They concerned themselves with preaching the gospel. They were eager to work with racist Southerners in this endeavor (p. 12). They were content with the status quo. Dispensational eschatology taught that the church should not get involved in political issues such as Reconstruction. The church had a heavenly citizenship. Segregation was not a spiritual issue (p. 54).

Moody, a new premillennialist, was an outspoken proponent of this way of thinking. In his ministry, he encouraged Christians not to discuss the issues that caused the Civil War or black civil rights (pp. 87-89). Even though he was from the North, he was welcomed as a

speaker in the South. Moody even spoke to segregated crowds. Whatever his personal racist views may or may not have been, the overriding principle was unity among white believers to fulfill the Great Commission (pp. 122-24). Black believers had practically no role in Moody's revivalism. Hummel says that dispensationalism would become known as an almost totally "white" theology.

Hummel maintains that the dispensational view of the future kingdom sometimes resulted in racist views of eternity. Israel will rule over the "nations." But these nations could be described in racial terms. G. Campbell Morgan, a dispensationalist who would later reject the system, said he did not think black people would be raptured. Moody seemed to see the heavens as ruled by white Europeans as well (pp. 125-26). In other words, in some premillennial writings, black citizens of the kingdom will still be inferior.

For most dispensationalists, however, problems with racism would be resolved in the kingdom. There was no need to engage in the issues now. In fact, in a world that is spiraling down, such effort is a waste of time. The later Civil Rights Movement was seen as an example of American liberalism, which was godless. Dispensationalists saw no need to reach out to black constituents to try and improve their social status. DTS did not accept its first black student until 1966. When confronted with this lack of concern about the black church, Walvoord, the president of the institution, responded that he was not willing to fight against the status quo (p. 263). DTS, after all, was located in the South.

Pop dispensationalists, who had at least some connections with new premillennial eschatology, often reflected racist ideas. Hummel points out that Tim LaHaye, one of the leaders of this movement, belonged to the John Birch Society. It was strongly racist and appealed to white conservatives. He and people like Jerry Falwell were strong opponents of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. They saw that movement as prohibiting the furtherance of the proclamation of the gospel (pp. 270, 279). When the vast majority of the black church supported liberal politics and social change, and white premillennialists mostly supported conservative political programs, the latter would often be seen as racist by the former.

Hummel rightly points out that opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the idea that solving racist problems should await

the world to come, caused the dispensational movement to be rejected by the black community and church. This also contributed to the collapse of the system as it did not reach out to such a large population of potential adherents.

However, it is another thing to say that dispensationalism and new premillennial eschatology are racist themselves. If one concludes that individuals like Morgan and LaHaye were racist, it does not necessarily mean that the theological system they promoted was as well. It is inconsistent to single out dispensationalism as racist when other Evangelicals did the same things. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention certainly supported segregation and most of their early leaders were slave owners. Their seminaries, like DTS, also did not admit black students until the 1960s either.

Evangelicals of practically all stripes were guilty of hypocrisy when it came to race relations. It is unfair to suggest that racists were only associated with a theological system that saw the kingdom as totally future.

Surely almost all dispensationalists would reject the racist views of the “nations” of Morgan and what Moody said about the white Eurocentric leadership of the kingdom of God. For example, this reviewer has never met a single dispensationalist who held these views. Unfortunately, like many Evangelicals, people like Morgan and Moody were products of the culture in which they lived. The fault laid in their individual beliefs and not the literal interpretation of Biblical prophecy. Racist dispensationalists, like all racist Evangelicals, are not faithful to the teachings of God’s Word.

A Christian who does not support liberal political programs may very well not be a racist. He could see those policies as detrimental to the black community and church. In fact, those policies can be seen as detrimental to all of society. A white Republican dispensationalist may conclude that these policies will result in the wrath of God on our culture. Even if he is looking forward to the coming kingdom, he does not want what he sees as destructive policies enacted in his community.

If one accepts the dispensational view that the kingdom is future, it is not racist to believe that the black church is mistaken in its view that liberal political programs will be of benefit to them. The answer for believers of all races is found in living godly lives in anticipation of the imminent return of the Lord. This would involve properly interpreting the Bible. A dispensationalist is not a racist if he thinks his system

provides the way to do so. A dispensationalist is not a racist because he believes the church cannot redeem this fallen world from the sins so prevalent around us, including the sin of racism.

B. Free Grace Theology and Dispensationalism

As mentioned above, Hummel sees opposition to Free Grace (FG) theology as a reason why dispensationalism collapsed. He mentions it on numerous occasions (pp. 11, 39, 148, 151, 184, 193-95, 209, 302, 310).

The opponents of FG theology, according to Hummel, object to the practice of only requiring a sinner's prayer, the call to simply accept Jesus into your heart, or making a decision for Christ, in order to be saved from hell. They reject the teaching that the unbeliever does not have to submit to the will of God. They claim that dispensationalism played a large role in supporting such notions. It taught that the sinner only had to acknowledge Jesus as Savior.

A common accusation is that dispensationalism's teaching about separate dispensations led to this way of presenting the gospel. The OT was seen as a dispensation of Law, and the NT was the dispensation of grace. In the church age, people are under "pure grace." Opponents said that this division of the Scriptures into dispensations mutilates the Bible and perverts the gospel.⁴

Hummel says that the revivalism of people like Moody emphasized this idea of free grace. People were told they only had to walk the "sawdust trail" and simply make a decision for Christ.

In *The Fundamentals*, Scofield taught FG. Hummel points out that critics, even ex-dispensationalists, said it allowed Christians to keep on sinning while claiming to be saved from hell. Other Evangelicals, such as A. W. Tozer, complained that such a gospel did not require obedience or cross-bearing.

MacArthur traced what he considered the heresy of the FG gospel to Chafer. Ryrie continued the supposed error. But the leader of

⁴ This reviewer finds it strange that opponents of dispensationalism and its connection with the FG gospel often accuse dispensationalism of teaching two ways of eternal salvation. They say dispensationalists teach that people in the OT were saved by works of the Law while NT believers are saved by grace. That is simply not true. Grace Evangelical Society, for example, teaches that OT people were saved by grace through faith in the coming Christ. New Testament believers are saved by grace through faith in the Christ who has already come. In both cases, they believe that the Christ gives eternal life by believing in Him. I do not know a single FG leader who claims OT people were saved by keeping the Law of Moses.

this teaching would be Zane Hodges, another long-time professor at DTS. He taught that repentance, which he defined as turning from sins, was not required for eternal salvation. The unbeliever did not have to acknowledge Jesus as Lord in order to be saved.

Most readers of the *JOTGES* will be confused by some of Hummel's statements. Free Grace theology does not call for a decision. A sinner's prayer has never saved anybody. Nobody was ever saved by walking down the aisle or inviting Jesus into his heart. Hummel seems to imply that FG theology has nothing to say about holy living. He never mentions the doctrine of rewards or explains that FG theology makes a distinction between eternal salvation, which is absolutely free, and discipleship, which is costly and requires good works.

In addition, Hummel does not accurately explain what the FG gospel is. As taught by Hodges, who he states was its most able spokesman, eternal life is given by believing in Jesus for eternal life. Faith is being convinced that the promise of eternal life given by the Lord is true. Assurance of that salvation is the essence of faith. Hummel does not mention any of these things.

It follows, then, that FG theology does not necessarily flow from dispensationalism. They are separate issues. One can be a dispensationalist but not FG. Hummel himself states that Darby did not teach the same gospel as Hodges or Chafer and that the early Brethren leaders were Reformed in their soteriology. Moody's revivalism also did not promote a FG gospel. Holiness leaders were part of that movement and they denied the assurance of salvation.

Many of the proponents of new premillennial eschatology, which was associated with dispensationalism, were either Reformed or Arminian in their soteriology. They did not maintain that assurance was the essence of saving faith. Eternal salvation and discipleship were not seen as separate. Discipleship was seen as necessary either to prove one's salvation or to keep it. Eternal rewards as the result of good works were seldom if ever taught among many who held various dispensational beliefs.

This reviewer attended DTS at a time when all professors claimed to be dispensationalists. The vast majority of them did not hold to a FG gospel. Hodges was not seen as a representative of dispensationalism in this regard.

The connection between FG theology and dispensationalism is a literal hermeneutic. Specifically, the FG gospel is derived from interpreting the gospel presentations in the Gospel of John in a literal way. For example, when Jesus says to the woman at the well that if she believed in who He was (the Christ) and the gift He had to give (eternal life), it would be hers and she would never thirst for it again. She would be eternally saved forever and her eternal life could never be lost. The necessity of works, however it is introduced, is excluded.

C. Biblical Teaching and the Fall of Dispensationalism

Hummel's book is not an exegetical work that attempts to show that dispensationalism failed because it was not Biblical. It argues that there were historical reasons why the system collapsed as a viable alternative to Biblical interpretation. It is safe to assume that Hummel would agree with the opponents of dispensationalism that its rejection by the vast majority of Christian leaders is all but proof that it is unbiblical.

This is a common accusation against both dispensationalism and FG theology. Since the majority of Christians and their leaders have determined they are either unbiblical or even heretical, they are to be thrown on the trash heap of history. Dispensationalism experienced a relatively short period of popularity, but its rejection by Christians across denominational lines shows its demise should be celebrated.

According to Hummel, another reason dispensationalism fell is because of the character flaws of many of those who were associated with, and promoted, the system. They literally cashed in on popular aspects of the theology. Others were too lazy to respond to the attacks upon it.

But does the majority determine Biblical truth? Do the sins of proponents of a theological system prove it is false? The answer in both cases must be "no." Even those who oppose dispensationalism differ on the issues it has raised. There is no majority opinion on eschatology, soteriology, or the view of the kingdom. Each group has its own examples of leaders with feet of clay. Their failures do not prove or disprove their theology.

The real issue with dispensationalism is the degree to which it accurately interprets the Word of God. Is it Biblical to interpret the Bible in a literal way? Is it proper to allow the Bible to interpret itself? Does God have a future for the nation of Israel? Are Israel and the church

separate entities? Does the kingdom of God lie in the future? We cannot determine these things by a vote or by whatever shortcomings teachers in the flesh may demonstrate. Only the Bible will give us the answers. Since that is not the purpose of Hummel's book, it will not answer those questions.

George Ladd was a very harsh critic of dispensationalism. Even so, he had some high praise for the system. Hummel says Ladd commented that it is:

...doubtful if there has been any other circle of men [dispensationalists] who have done more by their influence in preaching, teaching, and writing to promote a love for Bible study, a hunger for the deeper Christian life, a passion for evangelism and zeal for missions in the history of American Christianity.⁵

Even if we accept this verdict by Ladd as true, it does not prove the truth of dispensationalism. But his words can also serve as a warning. Just because the majority of this world does not accept the teachings of dispensationalism does not mean they are automatically false.

It is somewhat ironic for this reviewer when we are reminded of Darby's view of the majority of Christendom in his day. He and the early Brethren saw a church that needed reformation and a return to serious Bible study and discipleship. Their view was that the situation was so bad that Christians needed to withdraw from their denominations, study the Bible, and get back to Biblical living based upon looking for the imminent return of the Lord.

How would they respond to the history of dispensationalism as presented in Hummel's book? The book concludes that a very large percentage of people in those denominations have looked at the teachings of those early dispensationalists and found them lacking. However, if these men were able to speak to us today, surely they would suggest that they were right about the state of Christendom. You can almost hear Darby say, "I told you so."

VI. CONCLUSION

In *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, Daniel Hummel has done a great job of describing the history of dispensationalism. It started as a

⁵ George E. Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952), 49.

small group of radical, separatist, European believers. Within 150 years it had grown to be a popular, respected, and scholarly view of Evangelical interpretation. But it quickly became a system that is seen by most Christian leaders today as an oddity or even a source of ridicule. The majority of people reject it. This is what Hummel means by its “fall.”

Readers of the *JOTGES* will find this an interesting book. They will discover familiar names and learn how different groups responded to dispensational teachings. Many will understand at a deeper level how small a group they belong to.

The book also challenges dispensationalists to be consistent in their beliefs and practices. What does it mean when we say that the kingdom of God is not the church but lies in the future? How does that impact how we try to influence the present culture? How involved should we be in politics? Are accusations of racism towards premillennialists valid?

The book also shows the gross misunderstanding of FG theology that exists in our Christian culture today. The opponents of the gospel of grace have something in common. Despite their denials, they add works to the offer of eternal life. As a result, they have no assurance of eternal salvation.

Dispensationalism is not the same thing as Free Grace. But they have something in common. They both insist on a literal hermeneutic. In the case of FG theology, if we take the words of the Lord at face value when He evangelized unbelievers in the Gospel of John, we can only arrive at one conclusion. The message of grace that we proclaim is what He preached. That should be our goal, not conforming to the views of the majority.

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

A REVIEW OF BRENNAN MANNING'S *THE SIGNATURE OF JESUS*¹

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I. THE NEVER-ENDING REVIEW

Little did I know when I began to read *The Signature of Jesus* the time and effort that would be involved in understanding it. I am not a theologian by training. My background is in technical management in electronic component manufacturing. However, I stumbled onto something that I became convinced was very dangerous and little understood.

One reading was not enough for me to understand the book. I found that it was like reading something in a foreign language. I read many new expressions like *contemplative prayer, centering prayer, centering down, paschal spirituality, the discipline of the secret, contemplative spirituality, celebrating the darkness, mineralization, the Mineral Man, practicing the presence, the interior life, intimacy with Abba, the uncloistered contemplative life, inner integration, yielding to the Center, the bridge of faith, notional knowledge, contemporary spiritual masters, masters of the interior life, shadow self, false self, mysterium tremendum, existential experience, and the Abba experience*.²

I also encountered many writers I have never read before, including Kasemann, Burghardt, Merton, Van Breeman, Brueggemann, Moltmann, Nouwen, Küng, Steindl-Rast, Rahner, Bonhoeffer, Kierkegaard, and Camus.

I had to read the book three separate times before I was confident that I understood what Manning was saying. I even read it a fourth time for good measure.

¹ This article originally appeared in the September 1997 *JOTGES*. Minor changes, including format, were made.

² See pp. 209-27, 218, 94, 115-36, 185-96, 216, 137-58, 58-59, 58, 94, 94, 170, 102, 111, 112, 30, 29, 219, 94, 224, 224, 231, 65, and 168 respectively.

Reading this book led me to read several other books and articles by and about leading mystics/contemplatives. I learned about the heart of Manning's message: *centering prayer*.

I felt like I had to meet the man. I attended one conference he conducted. In addition, I purchased the tapes of another conference he conducted and poured over them.

Altogether I spent hundreds of hours trying to understand what Manning is saying. Why did I do this? I began this study because three Free Grace Christian leaders I know endorsed Brennan Manning in his earlier book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. These men are bright, well-educated, experienced in ministry, and heads of major works. Yet I had read a cautionary review of that book,³ and I wanted to read Manning for myself.

I *continued* the study because what I found frightened me and I felt others needed to be warned. The teachings of Manning are very dangerous.

There is a seductive quality to his writings. He reports grappling with and overcoming fear, guilt, psychological hang-ups, and difficulties, including alcoholism. He gives the impression that he has a very intimate relationship with God and insight into a super spirituality. He regularly meditates and reports having many visions and encounters with God. He is an extremely gifted writer who can tug at the emotions of the reader while at the same time introducing ideas that the reader would immediately reject if they were not cloaked within this emotional blanket.

He promises readers that if they apply his teaching they too will gain this same intimacy with God, as well as freedom from fear, guilt, psychological hang-ups, and difficulties. This is very attractive. Manning's prescription to achieve this is not by traditional prayer and by the reading and application of the Bible. Rather, the means to this end is a mixture of Eastern Mysticism, psychology, the New Age Movement, liberation theology, Catholicism, and Protestantism.⁴ This mixture will not deliver intimacy with God. It no doubt will lead to special feelings and experiences. Those practicing Manning's methods will likely *feel*

³ Reviewed by Robert N. Wilkin in the *JOTGES*, Autumn 1994, 74-75.

⁴ One of the keys to this spirituality is a meditation technique called *centering prayer*, which isn't really prayer at all. It is an emptying of the mind and a chanting of a sacred word or phrase over and over again. More on this shortly.

closer to God. However, in the process, they will actually move away from Him as a result of a counterfeit spirituality.

II. THE RAGAMUFFIN MYSTIC MONK

Speaking at a conference, Brennan Manning summed up his view of the essence of his ministry and the core of the good news: “In healing our image of God, Jesus frees us of fear of the Father and dislike of ourselves.” This is a radical departure from the good news of Jesus Christ. Eternal life and the forgiveness of sins are replaced with psychological healing.

Ordained a Franciscan priest, Manning earned degrees in philosophy and theology. He had training with a monastic order which included seven months of isolation in a desert cave. Years later, after a collapse into alcoholism, he shifted direction and focused on writing and speaking. He became *persona non grata* among the Roman Catholic hierarchy as a result of his marriage in 1982. He now writes and speaks mainly to Protestant audiences. It is important to note that Manning is well-received, even by some Free Grace people.

The Signature of Jesus was first published in 1988. The current revised edition was published in 1996 by Multnomah Books.⁵

Manning is more widely known for his bestseller published in 1990, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*.⁶ Its first few chapters are emotionally gripping as he writes about God’s forgiving nature and His love for the unworthy. The book promotes the freeness of God’s love, but falls short because it does not present a clear gospel. It also leaves many open questions about his views. Manning’s book, *The Signature of Jesus*, answers many of those questions and raises several additional ones.

III. WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY?

The Signature of Jesus is actually a primer on what Manning calls *paschal spirituality*, which is supposedly, but not actually, spirituality centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. (Chapter 6 is entitled “Paschal Spirituality.”) Another name for this, a more accurate one, is contemplative spirituality. Indeed, one entire chapter is a call to

⁵ Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996).

⁶ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-up, and Burnt Out* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1990).

“Celebrate the Darkness” (pp. 137-58).⁷ Another teaches about centering prayer, an Eastern Religion mind-emptying meditation technique (pp. 209-227). The book has several personal stories from Manning where he claims that Jesus or God the Father appeared to him, touched him, and spoke to him.

Manning indicates that *The Signature of Jesus* is about radical discipleship and authentic faith. Radical discipleship sounds good. So does authentic faith. Unfortunately, the book isn’t about following Jesus Christ or having faith in Him. It is about following “the masters of the interior life” (pp. 94, 219).

In Manning’s view many Christians have been raised in a devotional spirituality that focuses “more on behavior than on consciousness...on doing God’s will and performing the devotional acts that please him than on experiencing God as God truly is” (p. 216). Contemplative spirituality, on the other hand, “emphasize[s] the need for a change in consciousness, a new way of *seeing* God, others, self, and the world” (p. 216) which leads to a deeper knowledge of God.

Manning sets up a battle between two views of the Christian life. One he paints as traditional, cold, intellectual, ritualistic, unemotional, unloving, uncaring, insensitive, unattractive, and obsessive. The other he presents as new, warm, free, emotional, loving, caring, sensitive, attractive, and liberating. While he acknowledges that there is a place for Bible study and corporate worship, he argues that the key is “practicing the presence” through a special form of prayer we will discuss more fully later, centering prayer. Manning writes:

Herein lies the secret, I believe, of the inner life of Jesus. Christ’s communion with Abba in the inner sanctuary of His soul transformed His vision of reality, enabling Him to perceive God’s love and care behind the complexities of life. *Practicing the presence* helps us to discern the providence of God at work especially in those dark hours when the signature of Jesus is being traced in our flesh. (You may wish to try it right now. Lower the book, *center down*, and offer yourself to the indwelling God.)⁸

⁷ Manning tells of literally sitting in a dark room with one solitary spotlight shining on a crucifix (p. 47): “Prostrate on the floor, I whisper, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ over and over.”

⁸ *The Signature of Jesus*, 94 (italics added).

Daily devotions consisting of Bible study, meditation, memorization, and traditional prayers are of limited importance in the contemplative spirituality of Manning. A type of prayer derived from Eastern Mysticism is what is really important. Practice the presence. Center down. What is really needed is freeing the mind and having an existential experience with God.

Contemplative spirituality is the teaching that spiritual growth and true spirituality occur by contemplation not of Scripture or even of scriptural themes, but contemplation of God through emptying your mind.

IV. THE ORIGINS OF CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

This movement began in the Roman Catholic Church, where there has been an important shift over the last thirty years. *Devotional spirituality* is a pejorative term coined by some within Roman Catholicism who reacted against the prewar, pre-Vatican II Church, with a devotion to saints, doctrine, frequent reception of the sacraments, and approved devotional practices.

Some Roman Catholics began to advocate *the new theology*⁹ which Francis Schaeffer warned of in his classic *The God Who Is There*.¹⁰ Schaeffer pointed to Hans Küng and Karl Rahner (both influential in shaping Manning's views) and Tielhard de Chardin as the leading progressive thinkers who were following in the path of Heidegger, the existentialist philosopher. In the new theology, language is always a matter of personal interpretation and therefore the language of the Bible can be used as a *vehicle* for continuous existential experiences. A given verse can have thousands of different interpretations as each person has an encounter with God.

Schaeffer warned that if the "progressives" consolidated their position within the Roman Catholic Church, they would have both its organization and linguistic continuity at their disposal. They would then be in the position of supplying society with an endless series of

⁹ Francis Schaeffer seems to have used the phrase broadly to avoid clumsiness in his discussion of how modern shifts in philosophies have affected theology. The expression *new theology*, as Schaeffer uses it, encompasses neo-orthodoxy, strongly rationalistic liberal theology, theologies following Kierkegaard's *leap of faith*, and theologies following in the footsteps of the religious existentialism of Heidegger. Since Manning and the contemplatives drink from all of these fountains, I have used this expression a number of times concerning Manning and the contemplatives.

¹⁰ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968).

religiously motivated “arbitrary absolutes” applying any sociological or psychological theory at their discretion.

Schaeffer predicted that the new theology would lead to mysticism. Karl Rahner showed the truth in Schaeffer’s prediction when he wrote “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all...By mysticism we mean a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence.”¹¹ But Schaeffer had a different definition of mysticism than Rahner’s: “Mysticism is nothing more than a faith contrary to rationality, deprived of content and incapable of communication. You can bear witness to it but you cannot discuss it.”¹²

Since Schaeffer’s remarks thirty years ago, there has been a growing interest in contemplative spirituality. In an article titled “The Changing State of Spirituality” in the November 27, 1993 issue of *America*, a Roman Catholic Journal, some observations were made about the trend in books being published. In 1968, the top ten Roman Catholic books were predominantly from authors attempting to apply the new theology to spirituality. In 1993, the top ten were predominantly from authors attempting to apply Eastern religious teachings as well as psychology to spirituality. The new theology is free, as Schaeffer warned it would be, to draw upon any teaching in order to achieve its goals.

V. THE CONTEMPLATIVES

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning quotes Catholic saints, medieval mystics, and monks, including Charles de Foucauld, Francis DeSales, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Siena. The most frequently cited sources are part of the community of Roman Catholic clergy who are instrumental in promoting modern contemplative spirituality: Thomas Merton, Anthony DeMello, William Shannon, Henri Nouwen, Peter Van Breemen, William Reiser, David Steindl-Rast, and Basil Pennington. Although the word *contemplation* brings to mind a monastic life dedicated to penance and cloistered within the walls of the monastery, not so with these *New Monks*.¹³

¹¹ John B. Healey, “The Journey Within,” *America* (Feb 1994).

¹² Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 61.

¹³ I coined this term since these priests promote mysticism for the common man through the use of their interpretation of monastic ideas and meditation. For them, every man should be a mystic and every man should be a true monk. A “true monk” is a social activist. There are even self-help books on how to be a mystic. See, for example, Frank X. Tuoti, *Why Not Be a Mystic?* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1995).

The New Monks critique the current state of Christianity by arguing that since God is holy and is a “wholly other,” He cannot be defined by systems of doctrine. They maintain that Western rationalism has crushed the knowledge of God and that we must return to a more intuitively received knowledge. We must move beyond the intellect, doctrine, and words, to a deeper union with God. Their writings contain rather complex discussions on the nature of being and share common themes of universality, mystical union with God through contemplation (wordless “prayer”), social justice, and non-violence.

The New Monks maintain that all religions should immerse themselves in the myths of their tradition because there is power in the “collective unconscious”¹⁴ of the tradition to shape the experience of its followers. So, for the New Monk, the use of Biblical language has great power within the Christian tradition. For example, the call to salvation¹⁵ is actually a call to a transformation of consciousness to be psychologically awakened to the unity and oneness of all creation. For the New Monks all religions at their deepest mystical level use myth and symbol to say the same thing.

The New Monks believe we are born into a duality between self (the ego) and oneness (being). The ego is driven by fear of death and alienation and is the source of all suffering and woundedness. The Fall, a mythical story, has a deeper more “universal truth,” which is intended to shed light on present human experience. We have fallen

¹⁴ This phrase is from Carl Jung, whose teaching is highly influential to the New Monks. Manning also favorably cites him in *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 153 and *Abba's Child*, 41. Jung, a psychologist who was a disciple of Freud, believed one could become whole by integrating the unconscious with the conscious. However, this process requires embracing the darkness of the unconscious. Jung was known to even use occultic techniques to facilitate this goal. Jung interpreted Christian doctrine from a mythic perspective. He maintained that religious myth and symbol were an expression of the “collective unconscious” of the human race. Jung defined God as “whatever cuts across my will outside of myself, or whatever wells up from the collective unconscious from within myself.”

¹⁵ A further example of how Biblical language and themes are distorted by the New Monks is found in the writings of Alan Jones, favorably cited by Manning in *The Signature of Jesus*, 11, 148, 198, 207 and in *Abba's Child*, 55. In his book *Journey into Christ* (Trinity Press, 1992) Jones writes about the meaning of the cross on p. 114: “The Christian Life is one of sacrificial love. At the heart of our story is a tree, or rather two trees; one of Adam and the other of the new Adam, Christ. The cross is the tree under which Adam is buried. Both trees are double-sided. They are bearers of life and death. In other mythologies too, there is a double-sided tree; one side green and alive, the other side dead and dry. There comes a time when ‘it is the dry branches and not the green, of the universal tree, that must be grasped and painfully climbed’ [quote from Joseph Campbell, author of *The Power of Myth*]. It is the same tree but there are moments on the journey when our climbing has to be on the dry and dead side. So also with the dreadful and yet life-giving mother-goddess Kali [of Hinduism]: the blood from her left side brought death and that from her right side, life.”

from oneness and harmony of paradise into alienation and a sense of separation. We must simply realize that the gulf that appears to separate “sinful” humanity from a righteous God has never existed. We are and always have been one with God. For the New Monks, this is God’s unconditional love and grace.

Thomas Merton, who is frequently cited by Manning, is the forerunner of the New Monks. He became a Roman Catholic monk at age 26, just three days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Having accepted so much of the new theology, Merton remained involved in the Roman Catholic Church only by a thin affirmation of a God in Nature and a reverence for tradition. He popularized Jungian Psychotherapy in his writings about spiritual healing, agreeing with Jung’s mythic perspective of Biblical doctrines.

Merton traveled to Asia on a quest to redefine what being a monk entailed and apparently found it in Buddhist and Hindu teachings. He discovered great similarities between monastic contemplation and Eastern Meditation and determined that they were both in touch with the same mystical source. He felt that the emphasis on experience and inner transformation rather than doctrine would be the ecumenical meeting place between East and West.

Merton advocated moving the practice of contemplation from its marginal state of use by only the Catholic monks behind the cloistered walls to a broader use by the common man. Dedicated to civil rights, antiwar, and liberationist activism, he came to call his fellow activists “true monks.” Embraced by progressive Catholics, some say he was most influential in the shift from devotional spirituality to contemplative spirituality.

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning echoes the themes of contemplative spirituality. It appears to be his intention to bring to Protestants what Thomas Merton brought to many Roman Catholics.

VI. CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY PROMOTES UNIVERSALISM

Both the new theology and contemplative spirituality emphasize ecumenism. Hans Küng (whose book *On Being Christian* Manning says is “the most powerful book other than Scripture that I have ever read,” p. 153) is the author of the document, *Declaration of a Global Ethic*, which personifies the push toward religious pluralism among

progressives. The document, intended to be an agreement among the world's religions, does not contain the word *God*, Küng explains, "because including it would exclude all Buddhist and many faith groups with different views of God and the divine."¹⁶

Most Evangelicals are familiar with ecumenism within Christendom only. However, those who hold to the new theology, and more explicitly those who hold to contemplative spirituality, believe in an ecumenism that includes non-Christian religions and all "faith groups." This is a logical step for those who divorce themselves from the gospel of Scripture and who adopt the view that all are saved (universalism).

Since universalism is not appealing to many Evangelicals, and Manning is attempting to reach them, he does not make blatant statements advocating it. He shows, however, that he is indeed a Universalist in two ways.¹⁷

First, the people whom Manning approvingly cites believe in universalism. David Steindl-Rast is a Roman Catholic priest who promotes contemplative theology. In a 1992 article he said, "Envision the great religious traditions arranged on the circumference of a circle. At their mystical core they all say the same thing, but with different emphasis."¹⁸ Manning cites him approvingly twice in *The Signature of Jesus* (pp. 210, 213-14).

The New Monks frequently use the phrase "unconditional love" to express universality. Their push to a beyond-words, beyond-thoughts, meditation experience in order to fully experience a loving deity, misses entirely that apart from faith in Christ for eternal life, there can be no adequate discussion of experiencing God's love.

Matthew Fox, cited approvingly in Manning's books *Lion and Lamb* (p. 135) and *A Stranger to Self Hatred* (pp. 113, 124) is an excommunicated Catholic priest who is a contemplative. He gives us another example of the universalism of the contemplatives whom Manning cites:

Remember that 15 billion years of the universe loved
you and brought you forward. And it loved you

¹⁶ John R. Coyne, "Ultimate Reality in Chicago," in *National Review* (October 4, 1993).

¹⁷ Manning doesn't like being called a Universalist, and when charged with being one in some of his speaking engagements, he denies it. He does so by quibbling over the definition of universalism, not by saying that only those who believe in Jesus Christ have eternal life. This type of response is unconvincing and suggests that he dislikes the label because if it were widely known that he was a Universalist, his outreach to Evangelicals would be greatly damaged if not destroyed.

¹⁸ David Steindl-Rast, "Heroic Virtue," *Gnosis* (Summer 1992).

unconditionally...We were loved before the beginning...God is a great underground river, and there are many wells into that river. There's a Taoist well, a Buddhist well, a Jewish well, a Muslim well, a Christian well, a Goddess well, the Native wells—many wells that humans have dug to get into that river, but friends, there's only one river; the living waters of wisdom.¹⁹

Merton says one can work within the Christian traditions but view universalism as the broader truth: “[The contemplative] has a unified vision and experience of the one truth shining out in all its various manifestations. He does not set these partial views up in opposition to each other, but unites them in a dialectic or an insight of complementarity.”²⁰

Second, Manning makes statements that imply universalism. In *The Signature of Jesus*, for example, he says that contemplative spirituality (which he calls *paschal* spirituality) “looks upon human nature as fallen but *redeemed*, flawed but in essence good” (p. 125, emphasis mine). For Manning the life, death, and resurrection of Christ mean that *all* are redeemed. There is nothing to be done to gain the life of God. Everyone already has it:

He has a single, relentless stance toward us: he loves us. He is the only God man has ever heard of who loves sinners. False gods—the gods of human understanding—despise sinners, but the Father of Jesus loves all, no matter what they do. But of course this is almost too incredible for us to accept. Nevertheless, the central affirmation of the Reformation stands: through no merit of ours, but by his mercy, we have been restored to a right relationship with God through the life, death, and resurrection of his beloved Son. This is

¹⁹ Fox, highly influenced by Merton, is the author of *Original Blessing* (the title is intended to be set in contrast to the phrase, “original sin”) and *The Cosmic Christ*. Fox believes that the “second coming” of the Cosmic Christ, an awakening to mysticism, will usher in a global renaissance that can heal Mother Earth and save her by changing human hearts and ways. Fox is founder of Creation Spirituality.

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 207-208.

the Good News, the gospel of grace (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p.18).²¹

Manning says that God loves “all.” He is not speaking here merely of the compassion God has for the world that moved Him to send His Son to die for us (John 3:16). He is saying that God has *already* restored all people to a right relationship with Him. Notice that he first says “he loves us” and then “he loves all.” Clearly *us*, the first person plural pronoun, in this context includes everyone. Then, in the same context, Manning goes on to say that, “*we* have been restored to a right relationship with God.” *We* is the same group as the *all* mentioned earlier. All have been restored to a right relationship with God. Manning wants us to overcome our psychological fog so that we can realize it. The Good News is that *everyone is already saved*. The Biblical view that all are lost and that only when a person trusts Jesus Christ as Savior does he pass from death to life (John 5:24) is foreign to Manning and contemplatives.

The last chapter of *The Signature of Jesus* is all about a revelation that Manning supposedly received from God about final judgment. More will be said about this later. However, the illustration mentions by name some of the most vile men of all time, including Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, and Saddam Hussein, and implies that all of them, indeed all who have ever lived, will get into heaven.²²

It should be noted, however, that there are statements in *The Signature of Jesus* and in the writings of other contemplatives which can be easily misconstrued to imply that there is salvation only for those who believe in Jesus. For example, Manning writes, “In any other great world religion it is unthinkable to address almighty God as Abba.” He then supports this point by approvingly quoting Peter Van Breemen:

²¹ See also his approving citation on the previous page of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s suggestion that God will accept into heaven sinners of every stripe (drunkards, weaklings, vile beings), including those who have taken the mark of the beast. The latter is a direct contradiction of Rev 14:9-11. The former is only true of those who have been washed in the blood of Christ by faith. Yet Dostoevsky and Manning put no qualifier on which sinners get into heaven. *All* go to heaven.

²² In a 1995 sermon given at Greenbelt Seminars in Sheffield, England, entitled “In Bed with God” (what kind of title is this?!), Manning says, “Do you see why the revelation of Jesus on the nature of God is so revolutionary? [Do you see] why no Christian can ever say one form of prayer is not as good as another *or one religion is not as good as another?*” If all religions are equally good, then universalism must be true.

Many devout Moslems, Buddhists, and Hinduists are generous and sincere in their search for God. Many have had profound mystical experiences. Yet in spite of their immeasurable spiritual depth, they seldom or never come to know God as their Father. Indeed, intimacy with Abba is one of the greatest treasures Jesus has brought us (p. 170).

It is important to realize that when contemplatives speak of knowing God as your Father/Abba, they are not referring to regeneration. They are referring to achieving a level of intimacy with God, “intimacy with Abba.” They view all people as heaven-bound. The issue for them is becoming a mystic whose experience of God transforms their lives and the world. Their ultimate aim is to usher in a new world.²³

There are statements in *The Signature of Jesus* that could be misconstrued as teaching Lordship Salvation as well. He denounces “cheap grace” (pp. 118, 128) and says:

In the last analysis, faith is not the sum of our beliefs or a way of speaking or a way of thinking; it is a way of living and can be articulated adequately only in a living practice. To acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord is meaningful insofar as we try to live as he lived and to order our lives according to his values. We do not need to theorize about Jesus; we need to make him present in our time, our culture, and our circumstances. Only a true practice of our Christian faith can verify what we believe (p. 33).

However, Manning is not talking about salvation from hell. He is speaking of deliverance from fear and shame, and of coming into an intimate knowledge of God in one’s experience, not of how we gain eternal life. Manning does not believe in Lordship *Salvation*; he believes in Lordship *liberation*. It is a liberation from our psychological hang-ups and fears.

²³ Manning twice indicates we are “involve[d] in building the new heavens and the new earth” (p. 18) and that our “mission” is “building the new heavens and the new earth under the signature of Jesus” (p. 194). While this is a startling claim for those who know the Biblical promise that it is God who will introduce the new heavens and the new earth (e.g., Rev 21:1ff), it is consistent with the emphasis of contemplatives.

VII. CENTERING PRAYER

As mentioned above, the key to spirituality, according to Manning, is a special type of prayer that he calls “contemplative prayer” or “centering prayer.”

For the uninitiated, this may not seem ominous. It may sound like what God calls us to do in His Word. It is not. It is a practice derived from Eastern mysticism.

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning writes, “The task of contemplative prayer is to help me achieve the conscious awareness of the unconditionally loving God dwelling within me” (p. 211). He also says, “What masters of the interior life recommend is the discipline of ‘centering down’ throughout the day” (p. 94).

Manning attempts to head off the charge that centering prayer comes from Eastern mysticism and the New Age movement by saying:

A simple method of contemplative prayer (often called “centering prayer” in our time and anchored in the Western Christian tradition of John Cassian and the desert fathers, and not, as some think, in Eastern mysticism or New Age philosophy) has four steps... (p. 218).

He instructs the reader in the practice of centering prayer, which is a type of contemplative wordless “prayer,” a technique that involves breathing exercises and the chanting of a sacred word or phrase. Manning states, “The first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer” (p. 212)! What Biblical support is there for this idea?

The second step, according to Manning, is to “without moving your lips, repeat the sacred word [or phrase] inwardly, slowly, and often” (p. 218). Once again, where is the Biblical support for this practice? None is cited, because none exists.

The third step concerns what to do when inevitable distractions come. The answer is to “simply return to listening to your sacred word...Gently return your mind to your sacred word” (p. 218).

Finally, “after a twenty-minute period of prayer (which Manning recommends twice daily) conclude with the Lord’s Prayer, a favorite psalm, or some spontaneous words of praise and thanks” (p. 219). While he doesn’t say how long this concluding recitation or spontaneous words might last, it seems he only expects this to be a minute or

two, since the Lord's Prayer and most of the Psalms are short and easy to read in a minute or so.

This concluding recitation seems to be an afterthought, something put in to make the "prayer" seem Christian. Yet even this fourth part is Biblically suspect. Jesus said, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do" (Matt 6:7). Any routine prayer repeated each prayer session will soon fall into the category of "vain repetition," even if it is Scripture. The Lord's Prayer is a sample of the way we should pray, and not some prayer we should memorize and repeat back to God daily.

The instruction utilizes odd jargon such as the "false self" and "crucifixion of the ego" and a curious mix of spiritual and psychological terms. To understand his language, one would need to have a more candid overview of centering prayer, which I found in an unusual—for me, not for New Agers—non-Christian source called *Gnosis Magazine*. The following is a condensation of the article titled, "From Woundedness to Union" (*Gnosis*, Winter 1995, pp. 41-45). The author is a Ph.D. who was tutored by the inventors of centering prayer:

Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington [who Manning credits for teaching him this prayer form] were exploring how to achieve a more concentrated experience on the general model of a Zen sesshin, having been quite experienced in sesshins. During these experiments they came upon a form of meditation from which tears, repressed memories, deep intuitions all came to the surface in a jumble, along with a sense of catharsis and bonding among the participants.

From his years as abbot, Keating recognized that this technique accelerated the sensitizing of the unconscious which is the goal of the contemplative life. He recalls, "I saw people going through in ten days what it might have taken twenty years to go through at a monastery." He believes that this unloading of the unconscious is a purification process at work to which he attaches traditional Christian terminology as the struggle against sin. This is called "Divine Therapy."

The main goal is to dismantle the "false self," the needy, driven, unrecognized motivations behind

untransformed human behavior. They suggest the false self as a modern equivalent for the traditional concept of original sin. The “true self” is buried beneath the accretions and defenses. A huge amount of healing has to take place before our deep and authentic quest for union with God is realized. This, in essence, constitutes the spiritual journey.

The most fruitful connection here [for the author of the article] is the linking of the “dark night” of the traditional apophatic path and the psychological process, the “darkness” of the psyche. If psychoanalysis represents “cataphatic therapy”—using words, concepts, and awareness to illuminate the darkness of our inner ground—centering prayer presents a kind of “apophatic psycho therapy” (“apophatic” meaning that which points one towards the ineffable, beyond all words, concepts, and forms).

Periods of psychological ferment and destabilization are signs that the journey is progressing, not failing. The results can often be horrifying to ourselves. As trust grows in God and practice becomes more stable, we penetrate deeper and deeper down to the bedrock of pain, the origin of our personal false self. In response to each significant descent into the ground of our woundedness, there is a parallel ascent in the form of inner freedom, the experience of the fruits of the spirit and beatitude.

By interweaving the contemporary language of psychological healing with the traditional language of Christianity a new synthesis is born.²⁴

Chapter seven is entitled “Celebrate the Darkness” (a title that is decidedly not only unbiblical, but even *antibiblical*; darkness is always presented negatively in Scripture, see, for example, 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:8, 11; 1 Thess 5:4-5; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 John 1:5-10). Manning writes, “The ego has to break; and this breaking is like entering into a great

²⁴ Basil Pennington started his own foundation to further centering prayer called the Mastery Foundation. His cofounder is Werner Erhart of EST fame.

darkness. Without such a struggle and affliction, there can be no movement in love” (p. 145). He goes on:

With the ego purged and the heart purified through the trials of the dark night, the interior life of an authentic disciple is a hidden, invisible affair. Today it appears that God is calling many ordinary Christians into this rhythm of loss and gain. The hunger I encounter across the land for silence, solitude, and centering prayer is the Spirit of Christ calling us from the shallows to the deep (p. 149).

In centering prayer, the word *sin* becomes a religious word attached to a method of psychological therapy, and the Biblical presentation of true moral guilt is omitted.²⁵ It is a system completely open to the manipulation of the inventors who feel the liberty to use Biblical language any way they see fit. Manning attempts to give it the validity of tradition by saying that it has been rooted in Catholic monastic practices since the 5th century: “It is a comfort to know that this is a path that others have tracked before us” (p. 149).

The practice of centering prayer is expanding in many parishes and is now moving beyond Catholic boundaries as many are coming to it from the Recovery Movement. The Catholic Church does not have an official position on this form of prayer, but some Catholic scholars refute the mind-emptying techniques. They also call for psychological

²⁵ Manning gives us better insight into the contemplatives’ view of sin in his book *Abba’s Child* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 163. He writes, “As Julian of Norwich [a Catholic mystic] said, ‘Sin will be no shame, but honor.’ The dualism between good and evil is overcome by the crucified Rabbi who has reconciled all things in himself. We need not be eaten alive by guilt. We can stop lying to ourselves. The reconciled heart says that everything that has happened to me had to happen to make me who I am—without exception.”

This is very typical of Manning, to edge up to the contemplative view, but not to complete the thought. Gerald May, whom Manning cites, gives us the complete thought, “We have proposed that all polarities, including the problems of good and evil, exist only as a direct consequence of dualistic thinking. During unitive experiences no dichotomies are made between good and evil, light and dark, creation and destruction...the world and all within it, are One” [*Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1982), 249]. By *dualism* Manning and May seem to be focusing on what they feel is a problem of characterizing the world as a warfare between good and evil. For them “good and evil...are One.” This certainly seems to suggest, in keeping with Eastern Religious thought, that God is both good and evil. The unitive experience appears to be their solution: give up thinking that good and evil, light and darkness, creation and destruction, are opposites. View them instead as a unity.

Such a view cannot be harmonized with the Word of God which says, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

studies because of the reported occurrences of depression among practitioners of New Age-type meditation.

The result of this mystical practice is that the practitioner becomes less interested in objective spiritual knowledge found in the Bible and more interested in the subjective experience that is found through centering prayer. This may account for the antagonistic attitude toward traditional forms of faith.

Manning speaks of “several local churches I have visited, [in which] religiosity has pushed Jesus to the margins of real life and plunged people into preoccupation with their own personal salvation” (p. 193). Of course, centering prayer requires no interest whatsoever in one’s own personal salvation since it presupposes that all are already saved. That is what we discover when we “center down.” Manning’s attitude toward the Bible seems to be markedly different from that of Calvin and Luther, for example, or of anyone who has a high regard for it as the very Word of God:

I am deeply distressed by what I only can call in our Christian culture the idolatry of the Scriptures. For many Christians, the Bible is not a pointer to God but God himself. In a word—bibliolatry. God cannot be confined within the covers of a leather-bound book. I develop a nasty rash around people who speak as if mere scrutiny of its pages will reveal precisely how God thinks and precisely what God wants (pp. 188-89).

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Manning rarely cites Scripture. Why should he, when the truly important knowledge of God comes from *his experience* of centering down and not from the Bible? Remember, “God cannot be confined within the covers of a leather-bound book.” While Manning would acknowledge that some elementary truths of God can be found by reading the Bible, intimate knowledge of God only comes through centering prayer.²⁶

²⁶ In his first chapters of an earlier book, *Gentle Revolutionaries* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1975), Manning indicates that we all have seven “centers,” three bad (security, sensation, and power) and four good (love, acceptance, self-awareness, and unitive). The unitive center is the “highest level of consciousness” (p. 104). None of this, of course, is found in the Bible. It is all consistent with centering prayer and contemplative spirituality, neither of which depends on being anchored to the Bible.

VIII. A PARABLE OF CONTEMPLATION

It seems appropriate to mention Manning's latest book, *The Boy Who Cried Abba: A Parable of Trust and Acceptance*.²⁷ It is a small book that appears to be written to both the young and to adults. Although he does not announce his intentions, it is most emphatically a parable about contemplative spirituality. The book jacket has endorsements by Amy Grant²⁸ and Max Lucado, which is sure to help it sell to evangelicals.²⁹

The parable takes place in a town near the Rio Grande. It is the story of a boy who is rejected by other children. He is scared and unloved. He finds kindness from a Medicine Man, El Shaddai [which is a Hebrew name for God, meaning *God Almighty*, see Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11], who gives him medicine to take daily. The medicine for self-acceptance—oil which he rubs on his heart—becomes too difficult for him to take. His grandmother, who is named Calm Sunset, urges him to go to the cave of Bright Darkness where he will be alone and will face great difficulty. While in the cave, he continues to take the medicine as hurtful memories begin to come to the surface. In the end, El Shaddai appears to him and asks the boy to accept acceptance. When he does, he is healed of his scars.

Psychological salvation comes by centering down and getting away with “God” in a cave or closet. Unfortunately, it is not God that people meet in the darkness, “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

²⁷ Manning, *The Boy Who Cried Abba: A Parable of Trust and Acceptance* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997).

²⁸ Amy Grant appears to have been influenced by contemplative spirituality and Manning. In an interview in the August-September 1997 issue of a magazine called *Aspire*, she refers three times to developing a “rich interior life” and once to “one of the richest interior experiences I had” (p. 25). These terms are not found in the Bible or normal Christian literature; however, they are common in Manning and contemplative writings. Perhaps she is unaware of exactly what Manning is teaching. On p. 65 of that issue of *Aspire* under the heading “Amazing Grace,” a glowing review is given of *The Boy Who Cried Abba*, indicative of the notoriety Manning is receiving.

²⁹ I was even more surprised to see that Dr. Larry Crabb, a Free Grace advocate, endorsed Manning's 1994 book, *Abba's Child*. It would be hard to be much more laudatory than this: “Brennan is my friend, walking ahead of me on the path toward home. As I watch him from behind, I am drawn to more closely follow on the path, to more deeply enjoy Abba's love. Thanks, Brennan.” It is not clear whether he is referring to Manning being older or more spiritually mature. However, what *is* clear is that he considers Manning to be not only a believer, but one who is well-grounded and orthodox in the faith.

IX. THE BRIDGE OF FAITH?

Manning believes that there is a chasm between belief and experience. Belief is one type of knowledge; experience is another. This is the old two-story approach to knowledge. This chasm is crossed through the contemplative experience: "Contemplative prayer bridges the gap between belief and experience because it is the bridge of faith" (p. 212).

The early mystics were revered because of their visions. Throughout the book, Manning recounts some of his own peak experiences that came as a result of persevering in contemplation. He remembers how Jesus appeared to him and said, "Look carefully at what you most despise in yourself and then look through it. At your center you will discover a love for Me beyond words, images, and concepts, a love you are unable to understand or contain. Your love for me is fragile but real. Trust it" (p. 181).

Manning devotes four pages (pp. 239-42) to recounting a dream about judgment day. In the dream, he sees people going before the Lord Jesus to be judged. The people come in by twos. Each pair has one person most would say is good, and one whom most would say is bad. "I see Sandi Patti step forward followed by Madonna. I see Saddam Hussein and Mother Teresa. Next came Adolph Hitler and Mohandas Gandhi. Idi Amin and Billy Graham...The prophet Amos and Hugh Hefner...and Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt" (p. 241). Finally, Manning comes before the Lord trembling and fearful, but God does not judge.³⁰ The result? "He takes my hand and we go home" (p. 242). Implied, of course, is that Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Hugh Hefner, Stalin, and Hitler all went to heaven as well. Manning's universalism is evident in this dream.

This dream is not an educated guess by Manning. It is a revelation from God that is on par with Scripture! After describing the dream, he says, "The content of this dream is more real than the book you are holding in your hand...The dream is neither the product of a vivid imagination nor a comatose religious fantasy..." (pp. 242-43).

³⁰ Manning frequently recycles his material throughout his writing. This revelation was also recounted in *Gentle Revolutionaries*, 138. In this telling of his revelation, he stands before God awaiting his judgment. God says, "I am not your judge." This quote is left out of his 1996 version. Other details are also different. For example, Madonna and George and Barbara Bush appear in the 1996 version, but not in the 1975 version. Nelson Rockefeller, Howard Hughes, Dorothy Day, and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burton appeared in the 1975 version but were omitted in the 1996 edition. Either he has had the revelation twice or the story is changing with the times.

Manning's dream is loosely based on the Bible's account of the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) but misses very important details. For example, everyone at the Great White Throne Judgment will be condemned to the *lake of fire*. There won't be *any* believers there. The remarkable thing is that Manning bases his understanding of Judgment Day not on the Bible, but on a vision he had. And he expects the reader to do so as well, delivering his dream with a sense of prophetic authority.

Although Manning does make occasional use of the Scriptures, it is impossible to miss that Scripture has been attached to devotional spirituality but not to contemplative spirituality. In this way, the authority of Scripture is diminished.

X. CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND POSTMODERNISM

Although Manning has, for the most part, adopted the language of Evangelicalism, his presuppositions are clearly from contemplative spirituality which denies that there can even be a set of true propositions from the Bible that could be proved literally, objectively, and historically.³¹ It has been noted here that several modernist philosophies have come into alignment in Contemplative Spirituality. For example, consider this clear statement of Existentialism from William H. Shannon, a contemplative which Manning cites approvingly in *The Signature of Jesus* (pp. 211, 216):

To call God mystery is to remind ourselves that all the knowledge of God comes from some human experience of God. The heart of the mystery is this: the words we possess are able to express only the human experience, not the divine reality experienced.³²

³¹ As a further example of Manning's embrace of the existential method of evaluating historical truth, he favorably cites Walter Wink (*The Signature of Jesus*, 72) and Marcus Borg (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, 25). Both of these men are liberal scholars, among the 74 Fellows that comprise *The Jesus Seminar*, founded in 1985 to identify the "historical" or "true" Jesus. They also claim to be evaluating whether any of the traditional books of the canon or parts of those books should be dropped. To date, they have determined that the entire Gospel of John should be excluded because it differs too much from the Synoptics and portrays Jesus as the world's only Savior. They also contend that only 18% of the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels should be retained as authentic (*SCP Journal*, Vol 21 [1997]: 1-2). (Be aware that the *SCP Journal* does not seem to be particularly friendly to the Free Grace view.)

³² William Shannon, *Seeds of Peace* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1996), 33.

This language is far away from a Biblical understanding of truth and how we can know about truth. In addition to expressing familiar modernist philosophies, Contemplative Spirituality is also parallel in many respects with what is called Postmodernism. According to postmodern theory, truth is not objective or absolute, it is socially constructed, plural, and inaccessible to universal reason. Yet its most ominous concept is that language itself must be “deconstructed.” This is echoed by Contemplative Spirituality in the assertion that ultimate truth is “beyond words,” “beyond doctrine,” “ineffable,” and can only be known experientially through “wordless prayer.” They say this is a renewal of the path of the Catholic mystic.

The article by Zane Hodges titled, “Post-Evangelicalism Confronts the Postmodern Age” (*JOTGES*, Spring 1996, 3-14) makes this relevant observation:

Postmodernism has taken the final step and has dismissed language itself as a legitimate conveyor of truth. To the postmodernist, all communication is theory-laden and can never point to ultimate reality of any kind (p. 9).

Discussing the deconstruction of truth he notes:

It is plain that such an approach to the Scriptures robs them of any inherent authority and places the interpreter above the text rather than under it. What the interpreter will hear is not the voice of the Lord, but his own voice. And in postmodernism that is all the interpreter really wants to hear! From one point of view postmodernism is the ultimate attempt to place man in authority over the Scriptures rather than place the Scriptures in authority over man (p. 6).

XI. RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP?

As mentioned earlier, Manning claims that his book is about radical discipleship. And what is a radical disciple? It is one who is the “fully integrated person” (a contemplative term that has something to do with being integrated psychologically). This is important because the New Monks are seeking to usher in a non-violent, environmentally-conscious (healing the earth’s woundedness) society. Ultimately,

Manning expects to usher in the new heavens and the new earth (pp. 18, 194).

The theme of nonviolence has the genius of framing broad indictments of society. Not only does non-violence cover pacifism (“The pragmatic wisdom of ‘self-defense’ and ‘national security’ masks our childish fantasies of revenge...” p. 83), but even job stress comes under its umbrella.

Throughout his other books, Manning gives examples of individuals that he specifically refers to as “radical disciples,” including Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners*, a leftist Christian magazine. (Wallis must have startled even the secular left with his assertion that the Vietnamese boat people set sail because of their addiction to Western goods.) Another example is Walter Burghardt. Manning approvingly cites David H. C. Read who says, “In my opinion, no one today can equal Walter Burghardt in expounding the Gospel...”³³ And who is Burghardt? He is the coordinator of “Preach the Just Word,” a program sponsored by the Woodstock Theological Center to assist priests in being more effective in preaching *social justice*. Evidently for Manning, like liberation theologians,³⁴ “expounding the gospel” is preaching social justice.

Another example of radical disciples according to Manning is the Berrigan brothers, well-known during the Vietnam War period, but more recently active in Plowshares, an organization committed to anti-military activism.

XII. CONCLUSION

Manning speaks much of God’s grace and love, but these precious Biblical concepts are actually replaced by vague notions of wholeness through an Eastern religious meditation technique, Centering Prayer. Many of the contemplatives assert that this constitutes the spiritual

³³ *The Signature of Jesus*, 250.

³⁴ Manning favorably cites Jürgen Moltmann, who has been credited for helping to provide the theological roots used by Latin American liberation theology. In addition, Manning himself bluntly advocated liberation theology in an earlier book, “The Church as the visible body of the Lord is committed to global freedom, to active participation in the construction of a just social order, and to stimulating and radicalizing the dedication of Christians. *The holy alliance* [!] *between charismatic spirituality* [which he later came to call paschal or contemplative spirituality] *and liberation theology serves to vitalize the Church’s action in the world* and to make its commitment to the Lordship of Jesus deeper and more radical” (*Gentle Revolutionaries*, 112, italics added). In this book, Manning cites Gustavo Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation*. He also cites Enrique Dussel, author of *Philosophy of Liberation* and *History and the Theology of Liberation*.

journey and is the same process as integrating the conscious with the unconscious as described by Jungian psychotherapy. Throughout the course of this book some of the most crucial Biblical truths, such as sin and forgiveness, are reinterpreted in the light of therapy. The irony is that a clear Biblical gospel, if believed to be true, will produce assurance that has truly profound psychological benefits.³⁵ There is no place for centering prayer in discipleship. Meditation is to be on God's Word, not on nothingness.

Contemplative spirituality is dangerous. Christian leaders should warn their people about it. Those who are interested in a comprehensive Biblical understanding of true Biblical spirituality and the gospel of Jesus Christ should be warned that Manning is traveling on a wholly other path.

³⁵ Frank Minirth, "The Psychological Effects of Lordship Salvation" *JOTGES* (Autumn 1993): 39-51.

TO FEAR OR NOT TO FEAR?

THE CATASTROPHIC PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF FEAR-BASED THEOLOGY, AND THE LIBERATING IMPACT OF ETERNAL REWARDS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 2 Tim 1:7, Paul writes to his lieutenant Timothy that, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind.”¹ The proclamation of unbiblical theology will produce fear. This fear can have a devastating psychological impact on those who accept it.

II. A WORKS-BASED GOSPEL CAUSES MORE THAN THEOLOGICAL DAMAGE

The doctrine of eternal rewards is rarely taught or believed in our churches and seminaries today. It is often rejected and in its place surfaces a strange and damaging blend of works and grace.² Instead of distinguishing eternal life (Eph 2:8-9) from the abundant life that comes through actively following Jesus (John 10:10), people conflate the two concepts.

This confluence—the hallmark of Lordship Salvation—leads to faulty conclusions. The typical Calvinist view would be that the one who fails to persevere was never a true believer in the first place. The Arminian would say that person is no longer a believer. Both introduce a threat of failure as a fundamental component of eternal salvation.

Works-based salvation theology breeds fear, or at the very least, uncertainty of one’s eternal destiny. Aside from a proclamation of false doctrine, the collateral damage to one’s mental health from this theology can be severe, stimulating symptoms of fear, anxiety, and

¹ Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Paul warns us that we cannot mix grace and works (Rom 11:6).

obsessive tendencies related to the topic of eternal salvation.

There are various ways a person can respond to this stimulus. They can range from hedonistic behaviors and even substance abuse and addiction sought as coping mechanisms, to an almost cult-like mindset of attachment to this line of thinking.

These teachings are not only devastating to the individual, but degrade the collective as well. These beliefs promote a culture of people constantly measuring their performance and contrasting themselves with others. Ultimately, it creates communities of self-absorbed people who are looking to themselves for assurance, and in the end, will never find it. It destroys the sense of community and corporate emphasis, fostering a “survival of the fittest” mindset.

In this article, I will explore these toxic psychological consequences of heretical theology. This kind of theology breeds insecurity and fear in its adherents, rather than a life grounded in rightfully dividing God’s Word and thus motivated by truth.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF FEAR-BASED MOTIVATION

When a person experiences fear, multiple systems in the brain are involved. The *amygdala* is a part of one of these systems, and it has a significant function in emotional memory. The *amygdala* was found to be significant in fear conditioning. Ivan Petrovich Pavlov was a Russian neurologist and psychologist who discovered the theory of *fear conditioning*. He found that if there is a conditioned stimulus (e.g., a bell), paired with an unconditioned stimulus (e.g., a shock), then the participants’ fear response would soon be associated with the benign, conditioned stimulus. The participant would develop this fear response to the bell because of the anticipated shock. Fear conditioning shows that when a person associates a stimulus with a threatening stimulus, they then tend to avoid the benign stimulus to avoid the trauma.³

This correlates to works-salvation because it actually reinforces *Biblical avoidance*. In this case, God’s Word is the benign stimulus, and fear-induced biases engrained by the toxic message of this theology are the threatening stimuli. So, one response may be for someone to avoid

³ Tom Beckers, et al., “Understanding Clinical Fear and Anxiety through the Lens of Human Fear Conditioning,” *Nature Reviews Psychology* 2, no. 4 (2023): 234, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-023-00156-1>. Accessed Jun 24, 2024.

seeking truth from Scripture because the lens by which they would view passages would be tainted by the Lordship Salvation message.

When people are fearful of their eternal destiny because they believe in some form of works-based salvation, they tend to defer to some form of spiritual leadership to tell them the path to eternal life. This is because of their incorrect, works-based, lens by which they view Scripture. With this lens, seeking the truth of God's Word on their own would likely only perpetuate their fear and uncertainty.

In short, they are looking to be assured. But if they look to teachers perpetuating this same works-based theology, they are looking to those who can only provide more doubt and fear. These people are also effectively "trapped" by this false teaching. Many are unable to leave their church because they are told if they stop coming, they are considered apostates. To "fall away" in this manner is a sure test to prove that they will go to the lake of fire.

Imagine a scenario where you are being held hostage, and your life threatened daily. Then also imagine that if you try to escape, you will be killed immediately. But if you don't try to escape, they might kill you anyway. This is the type of psychological abuse people have to deal with under these false teachings; only it is not physical death that is threatened, it's eternal death. It's a *Catch-22*. This vicious cycle leads to enslavement by fear and makes it extremely difficult to process the truth of God's Word and combat the powerful negative messaging the person continues to hear. The people who proclaim this false message may or may not realize the impact they are having on people, but Satan knows exactly what he is doing through his psychological warfare.

IV. INSECURITY PROMPTS A VICIOUS CYCLE

The insecurity felt in response to a lack of assurance of one's eternal life can influence people to hyper-focus on their works to prove to themselves that they are worthy of salvation. This form of introspection can lead to *scrupulosity*, a type of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) where the patient suffers from pathological guilt surrounding religious or moral issues.⁴ To relieve this pathological guilt, people who suffer with this disorder resort to rituals and listen intently to seemingly credible teaching to reassure themselves of something that can never

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

be reassured in their minds. The false teaching of insecurity of one's eternal destiny perpetuates this disorder and brings no relief in sight.

Although there are many limitations in retroactively diagnosing someone, there are psychologists who have hypothesized that Martin Luther and other historical theologians had this disorder. One such limitation in diagnosing Martin Luther with this disorder is that scrupulosity was culturally accepted and even encouraged in his day.⁵

I have treated several people in my practice who have been plagued by this disorder. But this fear of failure and ruminations of inadequacy are not limited to those with diagnosed psychiatric disorders. While perhaps not to the same clinical severity, for many, the fear of the prospect of eternity in the lake of fire compels them to return to further works-salvation teaching. This is out of the futile pursuit of hope that the teaching will instill some sense of assurance.

But of course, this sense of assurance is foreign to works-salvation teaching. The result is a downward spiraling path of constant personal evaluation to subjectively assess whether they are worthy of eternal life. The emphasis on works and rituals to find assurance, and find relief from negative obsessions, is mentally exhausting and makes a person more susceptible to continued indoctrination—strikingly similar to the concept of brainwashing—under the framework of that theology.⁶

However, not every person is equally susceptible to these fear tactics. For some, instead of a path of fear, another path is more likely. This is a cycle of pride and self-deception, believing that they truly are good enough to earn eternal life and attain perfection. Instead of being “the prey,” these individuals become “the predators.” Their mindset leads to narcissistic tendencies and hypocrisy, and is a blindness that further perpetuates the enslavement of others.

Our brains were created with an adaptive response to stress that is designed to prepare a person for an imminent or near threat by enabling the person to have the capacity to escape, to freeze, or to fight. The brain accomplishes this by chemically signaling sensations of dread, triggering changes in physiological arousal.

But in extreme cases, when these signal and arousal networks are

⁵ Paul Cefalu, “The Doubting Disease: Religious Scrupulosity and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Historical Context,” *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 31, no. 2 (2010): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-010-9107-3>. Accessed May 15, 2024.

⁶ Robert N. McCauley and George Graham, “Scrupulosity, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Ritual,” in *Hearing Voices and Other Matters of the Mind* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2020), 103.

dysfunctional, severe problems like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder can manifest.⁷ But even in less severe cases, a normal response to anxiety is not substantially different from the brain's adaptive response to fear. In fact, those suffering from severe anxiety can even develop a fear reaction to completely benign stimuli. In other words, they develop something akin to a fear response to something completely non-threatening.

Anxiety disorders are quite common. For example, in the United States, approximately 19% of the population—40 million adults—suffer from an anxiety disorder.⁸ How many of those Americans are struggling because they are living life without real purpose and motivated by fear?

V. GOD CREATED OUR HEALTHY ABILITY TO LEARN AND ADAPT

Fortunately, there is a much healthier method of learning than fear conditioning. There is a better way of living life than living with a constant sense of dread. The human brain produces a powerful neurotransmitter called *noradrenaline* that helps the brain stay active and effective under both positive and negative stressors. Also known as *norepinephrine*, and as powerful as this neurotransmitter can be, it can also wreak havoc in someone diagnosed with PTSD. It can also perpetuate an addiction to stimulating the release of adrenaline.⁹

Researchers recently discovered a pathway in the brain that enhances learning when responding to aversive stimuli.¹⁰ *Noradrenaline* is created in the brain stem in an area called the *locus ceruleus*, where researchers studying mice discovered that instead of routing *noradrenaline* to the *amygdala*—which would produce a fear response—the brain routed the neurotransmitter to the *medial prefrontal cortex* (mPFC). The mPFC helps regulate the *HPA axis*, an area of the brain that can easily become

⁷ Anxiety is defined in the DSM-V as excessive worry and apprehensive expectation. Sometimes people can confuse excited anticipation with anxiety, but anticipation is a healthy reaction. Anxiety is not.

⁸ "Anxiety Disorders," NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness, April 27, 2023), <https://nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders>. Accessed Jun 10, 2024.

⁹ This pattern is what most would recognize as an "adrenaline junky."

¹⁰ Akira Uematsu, et al., "Modular Organization of the Brainstem Noradrenaline System Coordinates Opposing Learning States," *Nature Neuroscience* 20, no. 11 (2017): 1602–11, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.4642>. Accessed Apr 19, 2024.

overburdened during episodes of trauma and high stress.¹¹

To state it concisely, the *medial prefrontal cortex* is the area of the brain that is involved in executive function, organization, and rational thinking. This pathway to the mPFC actually promotes fear extinction, adaptive and flexible behavior, and enhanced learning.¹²

VI. WHY DO PEOPLE KEEP GOING BACK TO THOSE EVOKING FEAR AND ANXIETY?

If God beautifully designed and created our brains to effectively learn, why do many choose a far inferior method of learning—and teaching—by fear-based methods? For example, we see the power of the media to draw people into the negative stories and provoke fear in those who watch. But why do people continue to watch the news with such negative messaging?

The psychology of this ironic attraction to fear lies in what is called the *negativity bias*.¹³ Have you often wondered why you can remember an insult from your distant past, but can't remember a compliment you received yesterday? The answer is that our brains tend to hold on to negative information and ruminate on it. We might watch a news story with footage of a train derailment, and as destructive as it is, we might find it difficult to look away. Researchers have found that, in fact, the *amygdala* responds more to negative and harmful input than to beneficial and positive input.¹⁴ So, when people are fearful, their ability to make decisions can be jeopardized,¹⁵ as well as their ability to learn.¹⁶ Furthermore, stress may cause someone to become more rigid,

¹¹ Jason J. Radley, Carlos M. Arias, and Paul E. Sawchenko, "Regional Differentiation of the Medial Prefrontal Cortex in Regulating Adaptive Responses to Acute Emotional Stress," *The Journal of Neuroscience: The Official Journal of the Society for Neuroscience* 26, no. 50 (2006): 12967, <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.4297-06.2006>. Accessed Jun 29, 2024.

¹² Akira Uematsu, et al., "Modular Organization," 1602. Accessed Apr 28, 2024.

¹³ Amrisha Vaish, Tobias Grossmann, and Amanda Woodward, "Not All Emotions Are Created Equal: The Negativity Bias in Social-Emotional Development," *Psychological Bulletin* 134, no. 3 (2008): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.3.383>. Accessed Feb 10, 2024.

¹⁴ Praneeth Namburi, et al., "A Circuit Mechanism for Differentiating Positive and Negative Associations," *Nature* 520, no. 7549 (2015): 675, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14366>. Accessed Jan 28, 2024.

¹⁵ Sean Wake, Jolie Wormwood, and Ajay B. Satpute, "The Influence of Fear on Risk Taking: A Meta-Analysis," *Cognition & Emotion* 34, no. 6 (2020): 1143, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2020.1731428>. Accessed Feb 5, 2024.

¹⁶ Lars Schwabe and Oliver T. Wolf, "Learning under Stress Impairs Memory Formation," *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory* 93, no. 2 (2010): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2009.09.009>. Accessed Mar 12, 2024.

habitual, and less adaptive in their learning.¹⁷ This is a ripe environment for those seeking influence over others, and seeking control by evoking fear, presenting themselves as the sole remedy to that fear.

The media, political leaders, and even religious leaders capitalize on this *negativity bias* and fear conditioning to manipulate and control people.¹⁸ People can become enslaved by the propaganda of the pastor, political leader, or the media. This enslavement is the opposite of God's truth. Jesus said, "The truth shall set you free" (John 8:32).

VII. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POWER OF GRATITUDE

As believers in Jesus, we have much for which to be grateful. At the moment of faith in Jesus for everlasting life, there is so much more that takes place above and beyond settling the matter of our eternal destiny. Lewis Sperry Chafer noted that the Bible teaches us that at that moment of faith, God graciously grants thirty-three things to the new believer.¹⁹ Those who respond to this bestowal of grace positively are motivated by gratitude, and receive emotional and physical rewards as well.

Furthermore, gratitude increases the activity in one's *hypothalamus*.²⁰ The *hypothalamus* is essential in regulating eating, sleeping, stress, and other essential bodily functions. Researchers have even found that gratitude improves sleep,²¹ anxiety, and depression.²² Gratitude is also powerful enough to be a catalyst for positive growth in someone

¹⁷ Susanne Vogel and Lars Schwabe, "Learning and Memory under Stress: Implications for the Classroom," *NPJ Science of Learning* 1, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1038/npsj-scilearn.2016.11>. Accessed May 3, 2024.

¹⁸ The use of fear-tactics is a common weapon employed in psychological warfare.

¹⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "33 Riches of Grace upon Believing," PMI Center for Biblical Studies, August 3, 2015, <https://pmicenter.wordpress.com/2015/08/03/33-riches-of-grace-upon-believing-dr-lewis-sperry-chafer/>. Accessed Feb 20, 2024.

²⁰ Roland Zahn, et al., "The Neural Basis of Human Social Values: Evidence from Functional MRI," *Cerebral Cortex* 19, no. 2 (2009): 279.

²¹ Alex M. Wood, et al., "Gratitude Influences Sleep through the Mechanism of Pre-Sleep Cognitions," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 66, no. 1 (2009): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2008.09.002>. Accessed Jan 8, 2024.

²² Geyze Diniz, et al., "The Effects of Gratitude Interventions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Einstein* 21 (2023), https://doi.org/10.31744/einstein_journal/2023rw0371. Accessed Mar 18, 2024.

who has experienced trauma.²³ It is really no coincidence that Paul instructed the Philippian church to pray with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6).

However, when someone incorrectly interprets God's Word and believes that he or she must earn eternal life in some way, it takes away from the remarkable sacrifice and gift that Jesus offers everyone freely. The fear-based, striving mentality that ensues is a poor environment for gratitude, short-circuiting the natural and optimal pathways in the brain.

VIII. ISOLATION AMPLIFIES FEAR

As noted previously, one of the by-products of a theology purporting works-based salvation is the degradation of the corporate emphasis that the church is intended to fulfill. When people are held captive by fear, their natural inclination is then bent toward individualism. But this individualistic bias only exacerbates the problem through a sense of loneliness.

Loneliness destroys not only our mental health, but also our physical health. A recent study showed how loneliness and social isolation increased the rate of coronary heart disease by 29% and increased the risk of having a stroke by 32%.²⁴ Only through sound Biblical teaching can we overcome our own natural tendencies toward self-centeredness. Knowing that we are not alone in our struggles is a powerful psychological tool.

Not only are we not alone, but God has also graciously given us His Holy Spirit to empower us and spur us on to live righteously (Rom 4:25). He also has given us an eternal family to support and love us. So many sadly come from broken families—whether biological or ecclesiastical—where they have been mistreated, neglected, or abused. At the moment of faith, believers are born into God's family; corporately, we are in this life together as the body of Christ (Eph 4:16). As part of this corporate body, we are to motivate and encourage one another in the truth (Heb 10:24), and equipped with the guarantee of eternal security, we must continue to exhort one another in the truth. We need

²³ Julie Vieselmeyer, Jeff Holguin, and Amy Mezulis, "The Role of Resilience and Gratitude in Posttraumatic Stress and Growth Following a Campus Shooting," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* 9, no. 1 (2017): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000149>. Accessed Jun 3, 2024.

²⁴ Nicole K. Valtorta, et al., "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Observational Studies," *Heart* (British Cardiac Society) 102, no. 13 (2016): 1009, <https://doi.org/10.1136/heartjnl-2015-308790>. Accessed Feb 18, 2024.

to be closely involved in each other's lives so we know how to pray for one another, and how to encourage each other (Heb 3:13). It is easy for this world and the lies of this world to choke out growth (Matt 13:3-9) and to lead us astray. Works-salvation theology effectively undermines all of this, by eradicating motivation by gratitude and offering only motivation by fear as a replacement.

IX. A BIBLICAL SOURCE FOR MOTIVATION

Through correct interpretation of the Bible, one finds rewards throughout. Rewards are separate from people believing in Jesus for His guarantee of eternal life (John 11:26). Even more, the concept of rewards of blessing is not only found in the NT. In the OT, the Israelites were rewarded with abundant crops and peace in the land if they obeyed God. In the NT, the theological doctrine of rewards is more fully developed, and Jesus Himself commands believers to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19–21).

Conversely, the fear-based tactics prevalent in works-salvation theology reject the concept of eternal rewards. They pervert God's blessing of rewards intended to motivate faithful believers into a tool of extortion to require one's works as the basis for eternal salvation. This fear-based mentality encourages people to live from the power of the flesh, which is enslavement and leads to death. For those who don't believe in Jesus for everlasting life, the flesh is all they have. But for believers, a Spirit-led mentality produces a lifestyle of freedom through gratitude, leading to reaping eternal rewards (Gal 6:8).

As believers, we are not immune to the enslavement of the flesh perpetuated by false teachings or falling back to our old patterns or ways of thinking. But we have access to freedom and a clear conscience through rightly dividing the Word of God and through walking by the Spirit (c.f. Gal 5:1).

Contrary to works-salvation theology, Free Grace theology simply and correctly delineates between matters of eternal salvation, and matters of discipleship and rewards. Not only does God reward us for following Him, but He empowers us and equips us with all we need. This is the opposite from what is found in works-based systems of theology. Instead of being set up for failure, we are set up for success. The neurochemicals, pathways, and the physical design of our brains as God created them give us the advantage to respond from His proper

sources of motivation. Not only that, but God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit for a clear conscience (1 Pet 3:21). This is the freedom people enslaved by false teaching are craving.

Knowing that everything we do for God and suffer in this world for Him is seen and will be vindicated is truly motivating and encourages gratitude. But there are times in our lives when gratitude isn't enough motivation, and this could very well be the majority of the time for most people. As our Creator, God knows us so well. He knows intimately how He created our minds to be properly motivated, and then graciously provides us with those incentives of rewards for motivation.

Especially in those really dark times in our lives when we feel like we can't even put one foot in front of the other, Jehovah El Roi—The God Who Sees—sees us and knows how difficult our path is. And one day, when the pains of this life are over, we will reap an everlasting harvest (Gal 6:8). We can only imagine how much Paul had to suffer, yet he called that suffering only a “light affliction” (2 Cor 4:17-18).

While theologically more developed in the NT, eternal rewards as a motivator for faithfulness do appear in the OT (Heb 11:39-40).²⁵ Job certainly was aware of the resurrection, and certainly the concept of rewards as well; to be redeemed is to be vindicated. That hope—that expectation—was part of his motivation to continue to worship God despite all of his loss and suffering (Job 19:25–27).

I thank God for His mercy and love. He didn't have to pay for the sins of the world. He didn't have to offer us eternal life freely. God wasn't required to give us even more incentive to serve Him, but He did. Not only that, but He has given us a remarkable assurance of our eternal destiny. This security gives us the ability to have more of an open mind to the truth, and it creates the possibility for the optimal environment for us to learn, grow, and be transformed (Rom 12:2).

When we see God through the correct lens, we are transformed and grow. This lens begins with an open mind to the truth, an understanding of our eternal security the moment we believe in Jesus for eternal life, and continues as we pursue Jesus and lay up treasures in heaven. Those of us who know all of these motivating factors that God has given us to follow Him are without excuse. God equips us with all we need and gives us more incentives than we can even imagine. As believers, we are responsible to love others by sharing the truth, and by doing so, we

²⁵ All the OT saints in the chapter knew they had eternal life. They lived their lives in order to gain rewards in the world to come.

might bring that psychological and spiritual abuse to an end for some.

Eternal rewards are not a topic that we can compromise upon. If they are rejected by false teaching, the doctrine of salvation by grace alone is sure to be compromised as well. Eternal rewards are—metaphorically—a “hill to die on.” When the doctrine of rewards is dismissed, a false gospel of salvation is sure to follow. People will take teachings on rewards in the Bible and the need to work for those rewards as requirements for eternal life. The tactics of this works-based salvation theology will ensnare its followers into a desperate vicious cycle of psychological anguish and fear.

As Free Grace believers, we cannot be shy about teaching the doctrine of rewards. Sharing the truth is one of the main ways that we love others, as we share it gracefully with them. As we do, we can help them find freedom. Attending a church that promotes false teaching enables the perpetuation of false doctrine, and it may be only a matter of time before believers who attend will get sucked back into a damaging and enslaving mindset. God has equipped us to be overcomers, not only by the guarantee of everlasting life by faith alone, but by the motivating incentive of eternal rewards, and by creating our physical minds and bodies to respond to Him.

X. CONCLUSION

This article began with Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in which he speaks of the possibility of fear. A works-based salvation will produce that fear. Our brains are built that way.

Later, Paul speaks of the importance of teaching the truth. This truth will allow those who hear to “escape the snare of the devil” (2 Tim 2:26). A works-based salvation is such a snare. Good works are necessary to receive rewards in the world to come. To reject the doctrine of rewards and apply those teachings to eternal salvation will cause those who hear to fall into that trap.

May we be diligent in speaking the truth. Eternal life is given by faith alone apart from works. It cannot be lost. Rewards will be given for obedient works. Such doctrines will also have a wonderful impact on our psychological health.

THE ROLE OF RAPTURE TEACHING IN DISCIPLESHIP

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I. INTRODUCTION

I first became aware of Biblical prophecy and teaching on the Rapture as a freshman at Virginia Tech in the fall of 1972. I was not yet a believer. A friend invited me to a showing of *The Return* narrated by Hal Lindsey. It was one of the steps that God used toward my eventual belief in the promise of Jesus for eternal life.

After becoming a believer in February of 1973, the teaching of prophecy anchored on the hope of the Rapture contributed to my spiritual growth. That year, in addition to the Bible, I read *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey.¹ I was motivated to prepare myself spiritually for an imminent Rapture and to encourage others to believe in Christ for eternal life.

Many believers have testified to the importance of the Rapture in their personal living:

- John Nelson Darby: “Christ will come again, and we wait for Him. This is the abiding thought in every instructed Christian, whatever degree of light he may have as to details. He expects Christ, so that, morally, the fashion of this world is closed for him: the object of his hope is elsewhere.”²
- Lewis Sperry Chafer: “The truth of the imminent coming of Christ for His church is a very practical truth...As presented in the New Testament, the rapture is a comforting hope (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess.

¹ The book became a record-setting bestseller with sales of 28 million. Lindsey erred in tying the Rapture and the Tribulation to a timetable related to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

² John Nelson Darby, “The Rapture of the Saints,” in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 11, ed. William Kelly (Believers Bookshelf Reprint, 1972), 154.

4:18), a purifying hope (1 John 3:1-3), and a blessed or happy expectation (Titus 2:13).³

- Charles C. Ryrie: “The rapture is the hope of the church... Therefore every day until we die or are raptured, we should continually be purifying our lives (1 John 3:3), be abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58), and be loving His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).”⁴
- Renald Showers: “The fact that the glorified, holy Son of God could step through the door of heaven at any moment is intended by God to be the most pressing incessant motivation for holy living and aggressive ministry (including missions, evangelism, and Bible teaching) and the greatest cure for lethargy and apathy. It should make a major difference in every Christian’s values, actions, priorities, and goals.”⁵
- Robert N. Wilkin: “Victory in the Christian life is possible. Not only that, God expects us to be victorious. But, and this is vitally important, victory is not automatic. It takes effort. In light of all that the world, the flesh, and the devil throw at us, it is quite a challenge to keep looking to Jesus. Keep your eyes on Him. Live by faith in Him and His soon return. In this way, God will transform your life and make you an overcomer who will one day hear, ‘Well done good servant’...”⁶

II. EXPLANATION OF TWO KEY CONCEPTS

Many NT passages explicitly or implicitly reference the Rapture. Before we survey them we need to explain two key concepts: imminency and the two phases of the Second Coming of Christ.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 80-81.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know About the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 138-39.

⁵ Renald Showers, *MARANATHA Our Lord, Come!* (Belmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 256.

⁶ Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 180-81.

A. Imminency

Imminency refers to an event that is about to take place. Louis Barbieri explains, “Imminency is not date-setting, it is not a chronological concept, and it does not mean soon. But a prophetic event which is imminent is one which is overhanging, certain to occur but uncertain as to time, and not dependent upon any intervening events.”⁷

The Rapture is an imminent event for believers of the church age. Darby comments, “As to the time of the rapture, no one, of course, knows it...When is the Christian to expect the Lord? I answer, ‘Always.’”⁸

B. Two-Phased Second Coming

The Rapture can be understood as the first phase of two phases of the Second Coming of Christ.⁹ In the first phase, He comes in the air for believers of the church age (1 Thess 4:15-17). In the second phase, He comes to the earth with them (Zech 14:3-9; Acts 1:11; Jude 14; Rev 1:7; 19:7-16). In between is the time of wrath, the Tribulation.

The Rapture is the removal of living believers from the earth to meet Christ in the air. The primary passage that explicitly presents the truth of the Rapture is 1 Thess 4:13-18. The Greek word translated “caught up” in 4:17 is *harpazo*. The Latin translation uses the word *rapturo* from which comes the English word *rapture*. The word in this context means to snatch or take away.

First Corinthians 15:51-54 describes the transformation that will occur. The dead in Christ will be raised imperishable and living believers will put on imperishability and immortality. The entire process will take place in an indivisible moment of time.

The Tribulation is the last week of the seventy weeks of Daniel (Dan 9:24-27). It is a period of seven years of wrath that precedes the return of Christ to the earth.

⁷ Louis Albert Barbieri, “The Biblical Doctrine of Imminency” (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968), 1.

⁸ Darby, “The Rapture,” 156-57.

⁹ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 449-50. See also Merrill F. Unger, “Second Coming of Christ,” *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1957), 990; and Glenn Kreider, “The Rapture and the Day of the Lord,” in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2015), 83.

III. SURVEY OF RAPTURE TEACHING IN THE NT

When we combine the concept of imminency and the two-phase return of Christ, first for the church in the air at the Rapture and then with the church to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, we find a host of passages in the NT that speak to the practical value of Rapture teaching in discipleship. S. Lewis Johnson discusses the practical value of the return of Christ in both of its phases:

I am not going to distinguish between the rapture and the Second Advent for purposes of our study because they logically go together. Both of these events represent the hope of the Christian. The hope of the Christian is not only to meet the Lord in the air. The hope of the Christian is to then after the tribulation period to accompany him to the earth. The hope of the Christian involves the kingdom of God upon the earth, for we shall rule and reign with him. The hope of the Christian involves all of the future, and we are very, very closely identified with the hope that the nation Israel has. So we're just going to talk about the second coming, and you'll understand that these attitudes and the motivation and incentive are true of both of these events.¹⁰

A. Teaching of Jesus

1. *The Olivet Discourse*

John Hart and Wes Spradley make a good case that Matt 24:36-44 is a reference to the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse.¹¹ There are three parallel Gospel accounts of the discourse: Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The account in Matthew divides into three sections

¹⁰ S. Lewis Johnson, "Practical Value of the Doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ," transcript of a sermon found at www.sljinstitute.net. Accessed Apr 4, 2018.

¹¹ John F. Hart, "Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44? Part I, II, and III" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 2007, Spring 2008, and Autumn 2008); Wes Spradley, "Jesus Is a Pre-Tribber," unpublished paper presented at the January 2017 San Antonio Grace Evangelical Society Conference. For a contrary view see Robert Dean, "Mapping the Second Half of the Olivet Discourse," unpublished paper presented at the 2017 Pre-Trib Rapture Conference.

which involve questions (24:1-3), answers (24:4-44), and applications 24:45–25:46.

In the first section, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple (24:2). The prediction brings up two questions: “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

In the second section, Jesus answers the two questions in reverse order. The answer to the “what” question involves a summary of the Day of the Lord with its preliminary events (vv 4-14) and a focus on the Great Tribulation—the final 3½ years of the Day of the Lord (vv 15-35).

The answer to the “when” question involves a declaration that no one knows when the Day of the Lord begins, but before it begins some will be taken to be alongside (*paralambanō*) the Lord while others will be left for the judgments that follow (vv 36-41). Believers don’t know when their Lord is coming and therefore should be on the alert and prepared for His coming (vv 42-44). The Rapture is the imminent event that precedes the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

The third section makes application to church age and Tribulation period believers through the Lord’s teaching about accountability, two parables, and His comments about coming judgment.¹² In the account of the Just and the Unjust Servant (24:45-51), we learn that believers of the church age need to remain watchful and faithful for the imminent coming of Christ at the Rapture.¹³ The Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13) primarily applies to Tribulation period believers who need to be both watchful and prepared for the Lord’s return to the earth. The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30) could apply to both church-age believers and Tribulation believers concerning their accountability and evaluation for authority in the kingdom. The Judgment of the Sheep and Goats (25:31-46) deals with the evaluation of surviving Gentile believers and unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation period. It is likely that only prepared believers survive to the end of the Tribulation.

¹² See Zane Hodges with Bob Wilkin, “The Parable of the Talents, Matt 25:14-30,” *Grace in Focus* (Denton, TX: GES, June 1, 2017); available online at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/the-parable-of-the-talents/>.

¹³ Darby observed, “That which leads the wicked servant into all mischief is not the denial of the Lord’s coming, but the loss of the sense and present expectation of it.” See, Darby, “The Rapture,” 156.

2. *The Upper Room Discourse*

Jesus presents a message of hope and comfort to His troubled disciples in John 14:1-3. To dispel their gloom and strengthen their hope He exhorts them to believe in God and in Him. He is departing to prepare a place for them and He will come to take them to be with Him. The verb “come” is likely a futuristic present that points to the imminency and certainty of the event. Believers find comfort that the Lord will come for them and take them to be with Him.

B. Teaching of Paul

1. *First Corinthians*

Paul thanks God for the grace given to the Corinthian believers so that they were not lacking in any gift. He notes that they were eagerly awaiting the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7). He closes the letter with the expression *Maranatha*, “O Lord, come” (16:22).

Paul provides an extended defense of the bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Distinct groups are resurrected at different times (15:23-25). Paul explains what will happen to believers of the church age who have not died at the time of the resurrection (15:50-57).¹⁴ First the dead in Christ will receive resurrection bodies and then those who are living will be transformed. The expectation of the Lord’s coming and of the resurrection motivate believers to steadfastness and faithfulness (1 Cor 15:58). This hope motivates our service.

¹⁴ A few interpreters assign this resurrection and transformation to the end of the millennial period and the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth. See for example Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 99-107; Dennis O. Wretling, “The Last Trumpet: A Demarcation Event between the Present Temporal World and the Eternal World to Come,” PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary (May 1997). In contrast, Arnold Fruchtenbaum identifies “the last trumpet” of 1 Cor 15:52 with “the trumpet of God” of 1 Thess 4:16. He explains, “*The last trump* refers to the Feast of Trumpet and the Jewish practice of blowing trumpets at this feast each year. During the ceremony, there are a series of short trumpet sounds concluding with one long trumpet blast which is called the *tekiah gedolah*, the great trumpet blast. This is what Paul meant by *the last trump*. As such, it says nothing concerning the timing of the Rapture; only that this Rapture, whenever it comes will fulfill the Feast of Trumpets. This trumpet is the same as the *trump of God* found in 1 Thess 4:16.” See, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 147.

2. Philippians

Philippians 3:20-21 is an overlooked Rapture passage. We eagerly wait for a Savior from heaven who will transform our bodies.¹⁵ We will receive a glorified body, like that of Christ, at the Rapture. Our present humble bodies will be transformed into the glorious state of Christ. This hope encourages us to stand firm in the Lord (4:1).

Paul uses the imminence of the Lord's return in Phil 4:4-5 to exhort believers to joy and reasonableness in relationships. The phrase, "The Lord is near" looks to the Rapture.

3. Colossians

Colossians 3:3-4 deals with the matter of our present identification with Christ and our future revelation with Him. We have died with Christ and our lives are hidden with Him. When Christ is revealed (*phaneroō*) to us at the Rapture, we will also be revealed with Him in glory. We are to look forward to His return for us. We are to live today with the expectation of Christ's return.

4. First Thessalonians

Paul uses the expectation of the Lord's return for believers at the Rapture as a means of comfort to those grieving the loss of loved ones (1 Thess 4:13-18). This can be a comfort to believers today who have believing loved ones who have died. Charles Ryrie gives an exposition of 1 Thess 4:13-18 by describing five aspects of the Rapture:¹⁶

- 1) Jesus' Return—Jesus will come for believers. There will be a shout. The trumpet of God will summon the dead in Christ to their resurrection and living believers to their transformation.
- 2) Resurrection—Believers in Christ who have died will first be resurrected.

¹⁵ John Walvoord connects this verse to John 14:2-3. He writes, "According to John 14:2, Christ is in heaven preparing the place for His future bride, the church. Accordingly, in keeping with the promise of John 14:3, He is coming again for His church, and hence the church can be looking to the heavens for the return of their Savior." John F. Walvoord, *Philippians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971), 97.

¹⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 30-35.

- 3) Rapture—Living believers will then be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.
- 4) Reunion—Translated believers will be reunited with resurrected believers and with the Lord.
- 5) Reassurance—Paul tells us to “comfort one another with these words.” The hope of the Rapture encourages us with the knowledge that departed believers will be raised and living believers will be changed when the Lord comes.

Paul goes on to base his encouragement to believers to encourage each other and build up each other on the fact that whether or not they are spiritually watchful they will be delivered from wrath, the Tribulation, by the Lord at the Rapture to live together with Him (1 Thess 5:9-11).¹⁷ This is in keeping with his statement in 1:9-10 that the Thessalonians had “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven...who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

The coming of the Lord Jesus also provides an incentive to brotherly love (3:12-13). The Thessalonians will be Paul’s glory and joy at the coming of the Lord (2:19-20). Paul prays that they might be blameless at the coming of the Lord (5:23).

5. *Second Thessalonians*

Second Thessalonians 2:3 may be a reference to the Rapture.¹⁸ The Greek word *apostasia* can have the meaning of “departure” rather than “defection.” Paul eases the fear of the believers in Thessalonica concerning the Day of the Lord by pointing out that the departure to be with Christ will occur first. This is in keeping with the immediate context where Paul is addressing the matter of “the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to Him” (2:1).

The presence of the Holy Spirit with the church on earth actually keeps the man of lawlessness from being revealed (2 Thess 2:6-7). Paul

¹⁷ Zane Hodges has done a survey of 1 Thessalonians, with an exegesis of 5:1-11, demonstrating that “the truth that the church will escape the Tribulation by means of the rapture has firm roots in the New Testament exegesis.” See Zane C. Hodges, “The Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982).

¹⁸ See H. Wayne House, “Is the Rapture Found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3? in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, eds. Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011).

thus comforts the believers. Believers should eagerly await the appearing of Christ, not the appearing of the man of lawlessness.

6. Pastoral Epistles

Paul charges Timothy “to keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing (*epiphaneia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which God will bring about at the proper time (1 Tim 6:14-15). The goal is obedience until the appearing of Christ for believers at the Rapture.

The appearance of Christ is the basis for Paul’s solemn charge to Timothy to preach the Word, using it to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and diligence (2 Tim 4:1-2). The Lord will award a crown of righteousness to all who have labored faithfully and loved His appearing (2 Tim 4:8).

Paul makes a direct relationship to godly living and looking for the coming of the Lord in Titus 2:11-14. The grace of God instructs believers “to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

C. Teaching of Hebrews

Christ mediates the New Covenant so that those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance at His appearing if they eagerly await Him (9:15-28). The segment opens with “the promise of the eternal inheritance” in 9:15 and closes with Christ appearing a second time for salvation to those who eagerly wait for Him in 9:28. In the context of Hebrews, this is a salvation in which faithful believers enter God’s rest and share in Christ’s dominion.

Hebrews 10:22-25 gives three “let us” commands: let us draw near in faith; let us hold fast our hope; let us spur one another to love. We are to carry out these commands all the more as we “see the day drawing near.” What day is that? This is a reference to the Second Coming, of which the first phase is the Rapture.

S. Lewis Johnson comments:

One of the great incentives of the meeting of believers is that the day of the Second Advent is approaching, and so in light of the soon coming of Jesus Christ, we are to give ourselves to meeting together to strengthen

one another for the tasks that lie before us in the meantime, so that the Second Coming is first of all an incentive to Christian worship.¹⁹

D. Teaching of James

James uses the imminent coming (*parousia*) of the Lord as the basis for his exhortation for patience (5:7-8). A particular aspect of patience is expressed by not complaining against each other since “the Judge is standing right at the door” (5:9). Expectation of the coming of the Lord contributes to harmony among believers.

E. Teaching of Peter

1. First Peter

Peter writes to encourage believers who are undergoing persecution. They have a living hope (1:3). That hope fixes itself on the appearance, or revelation (*apokalupsis*), of Jesus Christ (1:7, 13). The term describes the coming of Christ for them. Such a hope motivates readiness for action and sobriety.

Peter turns his attention from believers in general to the elders in 5:1-4. They are to do their work voluntarily, eagerly, and exemplarily. Peter couples the exhortation with the motivation of the appearance of Christ who will reward their work.

2. Second Peter

Peter writes of the last days when mockers will question “the promise of His coming” (3:3-4). The Day of the Lord will come unexpectedly and will ultimately lead to new heavens and a new earth (3:5-13). Peter uses these events to motivate believers to be diligent to be found by the Lord in peace, spotless, and blameless (3:14).

F. Teaching of John

1. First John

John exhorts believers to abide in Christ so they will be confident and not ashamed when He comes (1 John 2:28). The hope of believers

¹⁹ Johnson, “Practical Value of the Doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.”

is conformity to Christ at His appearance and that hope provides a motive for present purity (1 John 3:2-3). The believer who looks forward to becoming like Christ at His coming strives to be like Him now.

2. Revelation

In the messages to the churches at Thyatira and Philadelphia, the Lord exhorts them to “hold fast” until He comes (2:25; 3:11). Believers are to hold fast their testimony of Christ in the midst of affliction so as to be rewarded by Him at His coming.

Revelation 3:10 provides a promise that believers will be kept from the wrath that comes on the world (see 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). John Niemelä provides a grammatical analysis of Rev 3:10 that disconnects that promise from the command to persevere. He gives this translation of the text: “I have loved you, because you have kept my command to persevere. I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.”²⁰

Some interpreters have suggested that the symbol of the male child in Rev 12:5 can be identified as the body of Christ.²¹ The catching up of the child to God and His throne would represent the catching up of the body of Christ as described in 1 Thess 4:17. This is supported, among other things, by the use of *harpazo*, the representation of the church as a corporate entity in union with Christ, and the corporate application of Ps 2:9 in Rev 2:26-27; 12:5; and 19:14-15. The sure hope of the church is that she will be rescued from the coming wrath. This frees believers from fear over current events and any unhealthy focus on identifying news events and personages with prophecy.

Revelation ends with a threefold affirmation by the Lord of His imminent coming (Rev 21:7, 12, 20). He is coming with His reward to give to believers in accordance with works done. Believers who long for His coming can join John in saying, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

²⁰ John C. Niemelä, “Revelation 3:10 and the Rapture: A New Departure,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Spring 2017): 37.

²¹ See Michael J. Svigel, “What Child Is This? A Forgotten Argument for the Pretribulation Rapture,” In *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2015).

IV. HOW TEACHING ABOUT THE RAPTURE IMPACTS DISCIPLESHIP

From the preceding NT references to the imminent Rapture of believers, the Tribulation, the return of Christ to the earth with believers, etc., we can draw many essential principles for Christian living and discipleship. The teaching of the Rapture matters when it comes to the theme of discipleship.

A. It Promotes Alertness and Readiness

The hope of the Rapture provides motivation for alertness and readiness (e.g., Matt 24:42-44). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will be alert and ready. Be alert and be ready 'till He comes!

B. It Promotes Purity

The hope of the Rapture provides a motivation for purity (e.g., 1 John 3:2-3). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will seek to be like Him. Be pure 'till He comes!

C. It Promotes Harmony

The hope of the Rapture provides a motivation for harmony (e.g., Phil 4:4-5; Jas 5:7-9). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will live in harmony with other believers. Be sweetly reasonable 'till He comes!

D. It Promotes Ministry

The hope of the Rapture provides a motivation for ministry (e.g., 1 Cor 15:58; 2 Tim 4:1-2). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will steadfastly abound in the work of the Lord. Serve the Lord 'till He comes!

E. It Promotes Endurance

The hope of the Rapture provides a motivation for endurance (e.g., Phil 3:20-4:1; Rev 2:25; 3:11). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will endure hardship and suffering for the sake of Christ. Hold fast 'till He comes!

F. It Provides Comfort

The hope of the Rapture provides comfort in grief (e.g., John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:13-18). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord will grieve with hope. Grieve in hope 'till He comes!

G. It Provides Peace

The hope of the Rapture provides security from fear of the wrath to come (e.g., 1 Thess 1:9-10; Rev 3:10). The believer who eagerly awaits the coming of the Lord has peace since he knows God has not destined us for wrath but for deliverance through Christ. Be at peace 'till He comes!

V. CONCLUSION

There is a trend today to discount the teaching of prophecy and the relevance of the hope of the Rapture. For example, Rick Warren writes, "When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!'"²² Mark Driscoll called the Rapture part of "a gloomy pessimistic eschatology that thinks we can't make a difference in the world as the church by the power of the gospel."²³

We have seen that the hope of the imminent coming of Christ for believers at the Rapture provides great incentives for a worthy walk and work. The teaching of the Rapture is essential to discipleship.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002), 285.

²³ Gerry Breshears and Mark Driscoll, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 61.

ARE THE *APISTŌN* OF LUKE 12:46 UNREGENERATE?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many scholars suggest that the word *apistōn* (*unbelievers or unfaithful*) in Jesus' parable in Luke 12:46 refers either to the unregenerate¹ or to regenerate people who forfeit eternal life.² However, others interpret *apistōn* as referring to regenerate people who fail their Master yet remain justified.³ Based on contextual considerations, sequential exegesis of the parable (12:42-48), and intertextual analysis, this article will demonstrate that the *apistōn* are regenerate people who fail their Master and suffer loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, yet remain eternally justified.

II. RECIPIENTS AND CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

To accurately interpret the identity of the *apistōn* in Luke 12:46, the context in which Jesus spoke and those to whom He spoke must be identified.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1182; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 505–506; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 362; John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 2, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 239.

² Arthur Ritchie, *Spiritual Studies in Luke's Gospel*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee, WI: The Young Churchman Co., 1906), 372; William H. Van Doren, *Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982), 508.

³ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978); John Peter Lange and J. J. van Oosterzee, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Luke*, trans. Philip Schaff and Charles C. Starbuck (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 205; Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant King*, (USA: NP, 2012), 782; Alberto S. Valdés, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 294; Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1982), 92.

Luke 9:51 begins a new section in the third Gospel, frequently called the “Travel Narrative” (9:51–19:48).⁴ This lengthy section contains two units: (1) Christ’s widespread rejection as He journeys (9:51–11:54), and (2) His instruction to His disciples in view of this rejection (12:1–19:27).⁵ Despite the massive crowds⁶ that come to hear Jesus teach (cf. 11:14, 27, 29; 12:1, 13, 54, *et al.*), Luke is careful to point out when Jesus is specifically addressing *tous mathētas autou*—His disciples (e.g., 11:1; 12:1, 22). As the rejection unit of Luke ends in 11:54, the instruction unit begins in 12:1.

It is vital to see that Jesus speaks “first of all” (12:1) to His disciples. Except for (1) a brief interaction with a covetous man in the crowd (12:13–14)⁷ and (2) some instruction to the crowd itself (12:15–21),⁸ Jesus again speaks specifically to His disciples in 12:22. It cannot be stated too strongly that nowhere in 12:22–53 does Luke make a *single reference* to Jesus expressly addressing the unbelieving crowd. It is clear that Jesus is speaking to His disciples—those who have already believed in Him for eternal life and are therefore justified.⁹ It is only *after* Jesus finishes telling His disciples how to properly prepare for the rejection they will face (12:4, 11–12, 49–53)¹⁰ and His assessment of them at His return (12:37–38, 43, 46–48), that He again addresses the crowds (12:54). If these markers of identification that Luke has inserted are overlooked, it will be impossible to interpret the identity of the *apistōn* in Luke 12:46 correctly.

⁴ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 394.

⁵ Martin, “Luke,” 232.

⁶ “...a very large number, not precisely defined...” see William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), s.v. “*murias*,” 661.

⁷ It is highly interesting that when the man in the crowd demands that Jesus intervene in a family financial fracas, Jesus rejects his request by saying, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” (12:14). This is significant because later, Jesus uses the parable in 12:42–48 to remind *His disciples* that He will indeed judge their works at His Parousia. He is not interested in judging or arbitrating mundane earthly issues, but the service rendered to Him by His earthly servants is of intense interest to Him and must undergo His judgment (cf. 2 Cor 5:9–10).

⁸ The emphasis here is on accumulating wealth and disregarding God.

⁹ Though Judas Iscariot was “numbered among the twelve” (Luke 22:3) Jesus knew he was not regenerate and that the remaining eleven were: “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you [pl., *humeis*] are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean” (John 13:10–11; cf. John 6:70–71; 17:12).

¹⁰ In Mark 10:38–39, Jesus told James and John that they would “drink the cup” that He would drink and “be baptized with the baptism” that He would be baptized with, i.e., die for their faith (cf. Luke 12:49–53).

Chapter 11 of Luke ends with Christ's rebuke of the Pharisees and lawyers (11:39-52) and their subsequent hostility towards Him as they seek to trap Him into saying something they might use against Him. It is against this backdrop of opposition that Jesus speaks to His disciples in chapter 12. First, He warns them of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (12:1-3). Then, He explains that even what they say *as disciples* ("whatever *you* have spoken" [12:3], emphasis added) would be heard by all one day. This is a possible foreshadowing of what He will say later in this chapter (12:42-48), pointing to His future judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10).¹¹ In 12:4-12, Jesus then encourages His followers not to fear the dangers of human reprisal but to courageously confess Him openly and without apprehension.

At this point in the narrative (12:13), Christ's words to His disciples are interrupted by a disgruntled man in the crowd. This necessitates a brief rebuke of the man (12:14) and a parable to the multitude on exalting wealth above God (12:15-21). That Jesus is speaking *primarily* to the crowds in this parable is seen in 12:22 since Luke clarifies to his readers that Christ is once again speaking specifically to His disciples.¹² In 12:22-34, Jesus reminds His followers that seeking the kingdom must be their priority. They are not to fret like non-believers about the provision of basic physical needs. They are to focus on generosity rather than material accumulation (12:33-34). In doing so, they will store up eternal wealth and rewards that cannot be lost (cf. Matt 6:19-21).

Beginning in 12:35, Jesus shares a series of three parables¹³ about His coming¹⁴ and the future judgment His followers will undergo. It is crucial to understand that Christ is speaking these parables to *tous mathētas autou* ("His disciples"). In 12:22, Luke identifies the disciples as the target of Christ's words, and not until 12:54 does the text state that Christ speaks directly to the unbelieving crowd. This must be

¹¹ In regard to the Bema, Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 783, says: "At this moment, the stern warning of our Lord [in Luke 12:2-3] will have pointed meaning..." Compare 1 Cor 4:5, where Paul, in reference to the Parousia and Bema, states: "...[the Lord] will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts..."

¹² A good illustration of a modern speaker doing this is a pastor's weekly message to the believers of his local congregation. Typically, he addresses his words and illustrations to those who are children of God. But this does not exclude the possibility that he may pause during a certain part of his message and speak specifically to unbelievers who may be among the congregation. Once he has finished speaking to this group, the pastor can return to addressing the believers.

¹³ The Parable of Expectant Servants (12:35-38); The Parable of the Thief in the Night (12:39-40); The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (12:41-48).

¹⁴ *Erchomai* is used eight times in 12:35-48: 36, 37, 38 (2×), 39, 40, 43, 45.

clearly understood because Christ gives these parables to instruct the *disciples*: (1) concerning their readiness for this judgment, and (2) on the suddenness of its nature.

Their degree of dedication and obedience to their Master's instructions (as given in both 12:1-34 and the parables themselves) would impact the kind of reward they would receive upon His return.¹⁵ Thus, Christ delineates for His regenerate servants¹⁶ the possible outcomes at the Bema for those who obey His teachings¹⁷ and those who do not.¹⁸ This judgment of believers,¹⁹ both faithful and unfaithful, is not to be confused with the eschatological judgment of all unbelievers (The Great White Throne Judgment, Rev 20:11-15), where the destiny of all those judged is identical: "the lake of fire" (Rev 20:15).

III. EXEGESIS OF THE PARABLE OF THE *PISTOS* AND *APISTOS* SERVANTS (12:41-48)

Two parables concerning preparation for the Master's unexpected Parousia (12:35-40) set the stage for a third parable that motivates regenerate servants to remain faithful to avoid failing their Lord

¹⁵ In regard to the kind of obedience Christ has in mind, Hays handles the contextual impact on the interpretation excellently: "What then does it mean to 'have one's loins girt and lamps lit,' to be 'found alert' and 'be ready' at the arrival of 'the Lord,' the 'Son of Man'? Context is clear: such readiness consists not of storing up treasures for tomorrow, but of practicing generosity for the poor (and, if we want to reach back to vv 1-12), we can probably include the faithful confession of Jesus as part of 'being alert and ready' for the coming of the Son of Man." Christopher M. Hays, "Slaughtering Stewards and Incarcerating Debtors: Coercing Charity in Luke 12:35-13:9," *Neotestamentica* 46 (2012): 43. For NT references to the Bema, cf. Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 1:8; 3:10-15; 4:5; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; 5:9-11; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8; 1 John 4:17; cf. Bob Wilkin, "'The Day' Is the Judgment Seat of Christ," *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 20, (2007): 2-14.

¹⁶ It is also crucial for these parables to be interpreted in light of the teachings of Christ and His apostles concerning the matter of justification by faith in Christ alone. The NT states that eternal life is a free gift that, once given, cannot be lost and that justified people remain eternally justified even in the case of prolonged behavioral failure (i.e., failure to live as a justified individual should live [cf. John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-29; 11:25-27; Rom 6:23; 8:31-39; Jude 24-25]). Not interpreting these parables in this light results in what is so often seen in commentary literature (see notes 1 and 2 above)—the unfaithful servant of 12:45-46 being relegated to a Christless eternity—something our Lord spoke of elsewhere as a distinct impossibility (see the word *never* in the following verses: John 4:14; 6:35 (2x); Heb 13:5).

¹⁷ "Blessed" (3x—12:37-38, 43); "...he will...come and serve them..." (12:37); "...he will make him ruler over all he has..." (12:44); cf. 1 Cor 3:12-14; 4:5; Phil 2:16; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 John 2:28a; 4:17; Rev 16:15a.

¹⁸ "...appoint him his portion with the unbelievers..." (12:46); "many stripes" (12:47); "few stripes" (12:48); cf. 1 Cor 3:15; 1 John 2:28b; Rev 16:15b.

¹⁹ Also called in the NT "the Day of Christ" (see note 15).

(12:42-48). A question from Peter to Jesus in 12:41 introduces this third parable.

A. The Motivation for Peter's Question

After hearing Jesus speak about the need to be ready for His return (12:35-38) and about its unpredictability (12:39-40), Peter, like the man in the crowd in 12:13, interrupts Jesus in the midst of His discourse. He asks: "Lord, do you speak this parable only to us, or to all people?" (12:41). Readers of Luke's Gospel know the answer to this question (= *the disciples*, as stated in v 22). But this may be one of the *first times* that Christ instructs Peter and the disciples regarding His return.²⁰ Since this may be an unknown topic to Peter (or at least unfamiliar to him at this point), it makes sense that he would want to know whom Jesus was targeting in these parables.

B. The Answer to Peter's Question

Interpreters see Jesus targeting just the Twelve,²¹ the Jewish religious leaders,²² leaders among God's people,²³ and all people everywhere (both saved and unsaved).²⁴ But Jeremias insightfully argues that the numerous *servants* in 12:35-38 (told to wait expectantly for the master's return) would make the parable's intended audience (and the answer to Peter's question) all servants of Christ.²⁵ And even though Jesus does not answer Peter's question *directly*, He does answer him *indirectly* through the Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (12:42-48).²⁶

²⁰ Luke 9:26 may be the first reference. Summers says, concerning the disciples and the Parousia: "...they had little foundation for the idea at this time..." Regarding the Jewish leaders and the multitudes: "They had no foundation for that idea." Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke* (Waco, TX: Word, 1972), 161.

²¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 989; L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1977), 166.

²² Martin, "Luke," 239.

²³ D. A. Carson, R. T. France, *et al.*, eds., *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1994); William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

²⁴ Green, *Luke*, 507: "Is Jesus speaking to the disciples or to everyone (v 41)? Yes!"; Nolland, *Luke* 9:21-18:34, 705; Bock, *Luke*, 1178.

²⁵ J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1972), 43; Leon Morris, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 239; Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 208.

²⁶ Jesus answers a question with a question in John 11:8-9 as well.

His first words after Peter's question are: "Who then is that faithful and wise steward...?" (or, manager; *oikonomos*; v 42). In using the word *steward*, Jesus identifies the target audience of His parables. He is speaking about household managers who, in ancient cultures, were slaves placed in charge of an estate during the owner's absence.²⁷ In v 44, Jesus references this same position using the word *servant* (*doulos*; slave). That Jesus is directing this parable to those who are regenerate is clear. It is *His servants* who are entrusted with the position of steward and who do His bidding.

In vv 35-40, Jesus has spoken of: (1) His "coming" seven times (12:36-37 (2×), 38 (2×), 39-40); and (2) the proper activities of a "servant" (*doulos*; vv 37-38) who is waiting for his "master" (*kurios*; vv 36-37, 39). Both the distant context (vv 1-12 and vv 22-34) and the near (vv 35-40) argue for seeing the recipients of this parable as the regenerate servants of Christ. Ryle understands this when he says: "The lesson before us is not about justification, but about sanctification, not about faith—but about holiness; the point is not *what a man should do to be saved—but what ought a saved man to do* (emphasis in original)."²⁸

C. Two Possible Outcomes for a Servant of Christ

In this parable, many interpreters see either 1) two separate servants (one regenerate and one unregenerate²⁹) or 2) one regenerate servant who loses salvation and is then deemed unregenerate.³⁰ However, these views cannot be sustained grammatically or contextually. In actuality, what we have here in Christ's third parable is a case of two possible outcomes for *one* servant of God. This is seen in Jesus' use of the Greek word *ekeinos* in 12:45: "But if *that* servant says in his heart..." (emphasis added). This word clarifies that Jesus is not referring to two distinct servants but to *the very same servant* who can be either faithful (*pistos*) in carrying out his master's wishes (vv 42-44) or unfaithful (*apistos*; vv 45-46).

Thus, Jesus sets forth two possible outcomes for a servant whose master has gone away but will suddenly return. In addition, He reveals that His judgment of unfaithful servants will be proportionate to what they knew and were entrusted with (12:47-48).

²⁷ BDAG, 698 ("manager of a household or estate").

²⁸ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, vol. 2 (London, ENG: Thynne, 1897), 90.

²⁹ See n. 1.

³⁰ See n. 2.

(1) *The First Possible Outcome: Being Found Faithful and Wise at the Master's Return*

First, Jesus speaks regarding the “faithful and wise” manager who has been appointed by his master to sensibly distribute food rations (*sitometrion*) to the other household servants (*therapeias*) under his care (v 42). If this servant is walking in obedience when his master returns, he is called “Blessed” (*makarios*)³¹ and is made “ruler” (*katastēsei*; put in charge) over all his master’s possessions (12:43–44).³²

The eschatological authority pictured here given to faithful servants in the kingdom of Christ³³ is seen intertextually in Jesus’ Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11–27). A nobleman entrusts his servants with money to invest while he is away to receive a kingdom.³⁴ Upon his return, his servants are brought before him. Two of them have acquired a return on their master’s money and are given authority over ten and five cities, respectively. But a third servant has failed to invest what was entrusted to him and thus receives no authority from his master.³⁵ It is clear in these parables that Christ gives future authority and reward in His kingdom in response to a servant’s faithfulness in doing what He commands until the day of His return.³⁶

³¹ Pao and Schnabel’s connection of this parable to Joseph and the blessings he enjoyed as a faithful servant of Pharaoh is profound: “The parable of the Faithful and Prudent Manager in 12:42–46 possibly alludes to Gen 39:4–5: ‘So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house [*katestēsen auton epi tou oikou autou*] and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house [*meta to katastathēnai auton epi tou oikou autou*] and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.’ Biblically informed readers of Luke’s Gospel would find in Joseph an example of a faithful servant who is eventually rewarded, the antithesis of the servant in the parable who reasons that since his master is delayed in coming, he can begin ‘to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk’” (Pao and Schnabel, *Luke*, 331–32).

³² BDAG, 492. Note: In v 42, the servant was “made ruler” (*katastēsei*) of the master’s servants. Now (in v 44) he is made “ruler” (*katastēsei*) over all his possessions.

³³ cf. Matt 25:21, 23; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26–27; 3:21.

³⁴ The “money” they are entrusted with symbolizes the life’s work of a servant of Christ (each is given *one mina*, i.e., one life).

³⁵ Notice how the conclusion of both parables contains teaching that is essentially identical regarding reward and loss of reward (12:48 and 19:26).

³⁶ That victorious living and faithfulness until the end of life are required for those who desire to possess the highest reward of reigning with Christ in His kingdom is seen in Christ’s words to His people in Rev 2:26–27: “And he who *overcomes*, and *keeps My works until the end*, to him I will give power over the nations...” (emphasis added).

(2) *The Second Possible Outcome: Being Found Abusive and Self-indulgent at the Master's Return*

That another outcome is possible for the servant mentioned above is seen in the contrastive introduction of v 45: "But if (*ean de*) that servant says in his heart..." By His use of the word "that" (*ekeinos*), Jesus is unmistakably referencing the "faithful and wise" servant of v 42 and validating the possibility that regenerate servants, initially loyal and obedient, can drift into abusive and indulgent behavior.³⁷

The behavioral drift that Jesus deems possible begins with defective thinking in the faithful servant's mind regarding the imminency of his master's return: "My master is delaying (*chronizei*) his coming..." (v 45a). Such thinking is in total contradiction to the attitude of readiness commanded by Christ in the previous two parables (vv 35-38; 39-40).³⁸ Once this aberrant mindset takes hold, the mistreatment of other servants (v 45b) and self-indulgent living (v 45c) follow, and the faithful and wise servant becomes unfaithful and foolish. He has failed to do what his master has asked of him. At this point in the parable, the master returns to find his *previously trustworthy* servant in this shameful state (v 46a).³⁹

If a servant remains faithful and wise, his master rewards him (vv 43-44). But if he becomes abusive and indulgent,⁴⁰ his master will return suddenly (like a "thief," v 39), catch him unprepared, and punish him (v 46). The punishment this servant receives must now be considered, and the meaning of *apistōn* in v 46b must be decisively determined.

³⁷ It is clear that the audience of the book of Hebrews is regenerate believers (e.g., 3:1; 5:9; 6:12) who are in danger of drifting (2:1) from apostolic truth and public confession of Jesus as Messiah (3:12-14). The warnings given to believers throughout Hebrews as well as in the rest of the NT indicate that justified people who will be with God forever can indeed fail spiritually and even die in that condition. If this were not possible, these warnings would be meaningless and unnecessary.

³⁸ Luke 12:35, 40; cf. Matt 24:43-44; 25:10; Luke 21:34-36; 1 Thess 5:6; 2 Pet 3:9-14; Rev 19:7.

³⁹ The apostle John spoke clearly about believers being "ashamed" (1 John 2:28) at the return of Christ. In Rev 16:15, Jesus Himself says that believers should stay awake and guard their garments, or at His return, they will be found "naked," and people will see their "shame" (*aschēmosunēn*), a euphemism for a person's private parts. Robert Vacendak, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1308.

⁴⁰ In the parallel in Matthew, Christ calls him an "evil" servant (Matt 24:48).

D. The Meaning of “*Tōn Apistōn*”

If the formerly faithful servant disintegrates into a violent and narcissistic one, the text tells us that when the master returns, he will (1) “cut him in two”⁴¹ and (2) “appoint him his portion with the *apistōn*.”

Slaves in the ancient Near East were occasionally executed by being cut in two or dismembered.⁴² For this article, it is not important whether the servant of this parable was executed or severely beaten (since in either case severe punishment has occurred).⁴³ What is vital is to recognize that Jesus is illustrating the piercing judgment the unfaithful servant will experience before Him at the Bema.⁴⁴ The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to be “diligent” in their obedience to Christ (Heb 4:11) because the word of God will critique all believers in that future day (Heb 4:12). It is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.” To confirm that Christ’s Bema is in mind in Heb 4:11-12, the writer adds: “...all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him *to whom we must give account*” (Heb 4:13; emphasis added; cf. Rom 14:12).

Standing before the Master, the words and deeds of the unfaithful servant will be exposed (cf. Luke 12:1-3).⁴⁵ It will be as if he has been “cut in two” as his life is critiqued by the powerful Word of God. It is at this point in the parable that the servant’s punishment is rendered by the master. The master appoints him “his portion with the unbelievers” (*tōn apistōn*).

The word *apistōn* must not be understood as it is translated in the NIV⁴⁶ (“unbelievers”) but as translated in the NET⁴⁷ (“unfaithful”). The basis for this view is twofold. First, as previously noted, Jesus’

⁴¹ Hays’s comments here are excellent: “The context of 12:47-48a also supports this more literal and graphic rendering; the abusive steward is ostensibly more culpable than the negligent slave mentioned in the next verse, who himself receives many beatings.” Hays, *Slaughtering Servants*, 47.

⁴² See reference to “violent death” in Plummer, *Luke*, 332-33. Spicq gives numerous ancient literal uses. See Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 1:351, fn. 6.

⁴³ Yet BDAG, 253, concedes that “no exact linguistic parallels have been found to support...this rendering...”.

⁴⁴ Sim reasons that since the dissection of the servant occurs following the return of the master (= the Parousia of Christ) this activity must have “an eschatological referent,” David C. Sim. “The Dissection of the Wicked Servant in Matthew 24:51,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 58 (2002): 176.

⁴⁵ See Dillow’s comments in n. 11.

⁴⁶ Also, KJV, NKJV, NASB, HCSB, and REB.

⁴⁷ Also, ASV, ESV, WEB, CEV, NCV, NLT, NRSV, and TEV.

audience is His *regenerate* disciples.⁴⁸ Second, the emphasis of Christ's previous parables in vv 35-38 and 39-40 (= His Parousia) is also His emphasis in vv 42-48.⁴⁹ Though Evans suggests that *apistos* "is not the opposite of faithful (v 42) but is the word for 'unbeliever,' and appears to be a Christian creation,"⁵⁰ this view cannot be sustained contextually or linguistically. In the NT, Christ and the apostles use *apistos* to reference (1) the unregenerate⁵¹ (unbelievers) as well as (2) regenerate people who have or may become disloyal (unfaithful) to God.⁵² In each case, the context must guide the translator. By no means is *apistōn* a technical term for unbelievers.⁵³ In the context of Luke 12, Luke carefully establishes Jesus' target audience. Thus, it is much more logical to translate *apistōn* as "unfaithful,"⁵⁴ "untrustworthy,"⁵⁵ or "disloyal"⁵⁶ in contrast to the "faithful steward" of v 42, since no interpreter objects to that translation of *ho pistos oikonomos*.⁵⁷

⁴⁸ See pp. 74-76.

⁴⁹ See n. 14 above.

⁵⁰ C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2008), 537.

⁵¹ Clear references to the unregenerate: Matt 13:58; 17:17; Mark 6:6; 9:19; 16:14, 16; Luke 9:41; Acts 28:24; Rom 3:3; 11:20, 23; 1 Cor 6:6; 7:12, 13, 14 (2x), 15; 10:27; 14:22 (2x), 23, 24; 2 Cor 4:4; 6:14, 15; 1 Tim 1:13; 5:8; 1 Pet 2:7; Rev 21:8.

⁵² Clear references to the regenerate: John 20:27 (Note: Jesus has already declared Thomas "clean" [i.e., regenerate] in John 13 [see n. 9 above]; thus it would be impossible to take *apistōn* here to mean "unregenerate" unless one believed that loss of salvation is a possibility); 2 Tim 2:13 (using the editorial "we" the apostle includes himself in that group of believers that could fail God: "...if we are faithless [*apistoumen*]" and yet God would remain faithful to His promise of eternal life to them: "...He remains faithful [*pistos*], for He cannot deny Himself."); Heb 3:12 (where "brethren" [= believers in Christ] are warned not to have an "evil heart of unbelief"). Tanner points out: "They failed to believe God's promises that He would give them the land, and thus forsook their mission. To speak of a believer having an *evil heart* is not inappropriate. The word for *evil* (*ponēros*) is used for the brother under discipline in 1 Cor 5:13, the disciples in Luke 11:13, and believers with 'evil motives' in Jas 2:4. Also, see 3:19 where Israel's wilderness generation disloyalty is given as an example of being unfaithful (*apistōn*) to the Mosaic Covenant." J. Paul Tanner, "Hebrews," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1044.

⁵³ Even if one retains the English word *unbelievers* here, it should be understood as Valdés perceives it: "Unbelievers refers here to those who did not believe the truth relative to Jesus' coming and their responsibility in light of His accompanying evaluation of them at the Second Advent." Valdés, "Luke," 294.

⁵⁴ e.g., William D. Mounce, *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*apistos*," n.p.; Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*apistos*," n.p.

⁵⁵ E.g., A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1933), Luke 12:46; J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*apistos*," n.p.

⁵⁶ E.g., BDAG (see num. 3 under "*apisteō*" in reference to *disloyal* soldiers), 103.

⁵⁷ Hays, *Slaughtering Servants*, 48.

Due to his egregious treatment of his master's servants and his profligate lifestyle, the unfaithful servant is given "his portion" (or, place⁵⁸; *meros*) with the unfaithful (Matt 24:51: "with the hypocrites").⁵⁹ Though many would object by saying that a Christian who is found in such a hypocritical state could not possibly be a true believer,⁶⁰ it must be noted that Jesus has just warned His disciples in 12:1-3 to beware of this very thing and that after Christ's death, Paul must rebuke the apostle Peter for this same sin (cf. Gal 2:11-13).

If it is not possible for formerly faithful servants of Christ to experience spiritual collapse and even to die in this condition (or be found in this condition at Christ's return), then verses such as 1 John 2:28 have no meaning: "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence *and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*" (emphasis added).⁶¹ In using the word *we*, John includes himself in this appeal. Even the apostles recognized that shame at Christ's return could be their lot if they failed to continue as faithful servants until the end.⁶² The unfaithful servant of Christ cannot forfeit eternal life, but he or she can forfeit the highest reward in eternity—ruling with Christ in His eternal kingdom (cf. Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26–27; 3:21).

E. The Consequences of Failure for Servants of God

It is highly probable that after hearing Jesus share the outcome of the unfaithful steward's disobedience in v 46, His listeners would have other questions concerning the consequences of failure for disloyal servants of God. With this in mind, as well as the fact that some of God's

⁵⁸ BDAG, 634.

⁵⁹ Dillow explains that "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is not a technical term for hell (Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 785). He concludes, "Christians are capable of unfaithfulness and hypocrisy and can lead carnal lives that can be summed up as hypocritical. They will be in the kingdom but not at the wedding feast! The unfaithful servant will not be 'at the table,' though he is a servant and will be saved."

⁶⁰ Bock, *Luke*, 1183: "He is given an eternal place with the unbelievers"; Stein, *Luke*, 362: "The servant receives an eternal punishment"; Butler, *Luke*, 2008: "This one is cut in two and given an eternal place with the unbelievers"

⁶¹ As well as: Luke 9:26; 1 Cor 3:15; Phil 2:16; Rev 16:15; *et al.*

⁶² Speaking to his protégé Timothy, Paul taught that as a servant of Christ, if he would seek to be diligent and rightly divide the word of truth: (1) he would find God's approval, and (2) avoid being "ashamed" at the Bema (2 Tim 2:15). Immediately after Jesus spoke to His disciples about denying self and taking up the cross, He said: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, *of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed* when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38, emphasis added).

servants are given more responsibility than others, the Lord Jesus concludes this pericope with (1) insights on proportionate judgment, and (2) a reminder to those entrusted with much from God.

Rewards given at Christ's Bema for a life of faithful service to God (vv 37-38) are now contrasted with the consequences of failure in this matter (vv 47-48) with, however, a caveat. Jesus clearly states in v 47 that the servant who "knew his master's will" and failed to prepare and to do it would receive a stricter judgment (cf. Jas 3:1)⁶³ with more significant consequences than the servant who did not understand his master's will and did not obey (v 48a). The former would be "beaten with many stripes." This is not a literal beating but a metaphor regarding the severity of Christ's judgment and the degree of eternal rewards lost at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). The latter would be "beaten with few" stripes, that is, would undergo a judgment of his life before Christ that is less severe with fewer losses.⁶⁴ Ignorance of God's revealed will is not an excuse; thus, both servants suffer loss, though not to the same degree.

Christ's teaching here parallels His numerous warnings in the Synoptic Gospels to His followers concerning their need to be spiritually alert and ready for His return (Matt 24:42-44; 25:10; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:37-40; 21:34-36). If all believers in Christ are destined to end their Christian lives on earth in victory due to having been justified (as many believe), Jesus' words of warning about His coming return and the piercing judgment of His servants are redundant. And so are the

⁶³ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 78: "...the man who used his tongue to teach would be held to a higher standard, a *stricter judgment*, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, than someone who had not so used his tongue. It is noteworthy that James includes himself among those who teach: *we shall receive a stricter judgment*. It was a solemn responsibility to assume the role of a teacher in the Christian Church. James thinks most of his readers will be better off to avoid this role."

⁶⁴ This difference in the approach used by Christ in the judgment of Christians at the Bema is also seen in Jas 2:12-13, where the unmerciful Christian receives a more severe judgment than the believer who showed mercy to others. Hodges, *James*, 57-58, writes: "...judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy (2:13). In light of this, believers are to speak of others and treat others as those who will be 'judged by the law of liberty' (2:12). Once again, Hodges' comments are potent: "Such is the solemnity of the Judgment Seat of Christ, however, that no man can view it without sensing how awesome and exacting it must be. Paul also sensed this feature of it (2 Cor 5:11). Any reasonable person must know that a judgment of his Christian life 'by the book' (i.e., with full strictness) is likely to leave him with much censure from his Savior and with much loss of potential reward. What is needed in that day is *mercy*—a willingness on the part of our Lord and Judge to assess our words and deeds with the fullest possible measure of compassion...the mercy we show to others can actually 'win the day' at that future experience of judgment, for *mercy triumphs over judgment*" (emphasis in original).

many warnings and exhortations of His apostles (Rom 13:11; 14:10-13; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 4:5; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-11; 1 Thess 5:2-6; 1 Pet 4:7; 2 Pet 3:14; Rev 16:15, *et al.*). But since failure *can* occur in the lives of the regenerate, and because sanctification is *not* viewed in the NT as inevitable for all who believe, Jesus is careful to equip His followers with the truths that will motivate them to avoid evil and to stay faithful to Him until the end of life.

IV. CONCLUSION

So, whom does the *apistos* servant picture in Christ's parable in Luke 12:42-48? Does Jesus understand him as someone who is unregenerate and whose final judgment is the lake of fire? Or does Jesus regard this failing servant as a picture of a truly regenerate man who is unfaithful to his Master and suffers the loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Based on this parable's context, exegetical and linguistic considerations, and intertextual analysis, it is clear that Jesus is picturing a regenerate believer in Him—entrusted with significant skills and abilities—who drifts from fidelity to God and suffers substantial loss of reward in eternity, but *not* the loss of eternal life.

As serious as it will be for a child of God to stand before the "righteous Judge" (2 Tim 4:8) in shame for such significant failure, *every believer* has Christ's promise that he will "never perish" in hell or be snatched out of His hand (John 10:28). And that is why none other than the apostle Paul could confidently say: "If we are faithless (*apistoumen*), He remains faithful (*pistos*); He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim 2:13). Even though the unfaithful believer will suffer a significant loss of eternal rewards, God will never deny Himself or the promises He has made to those who believe in His Son.

TIMOTHY AS A THEOLOGICAL MINORITY (2 TIMOTHY 3:14–4:4)¹

GREG MULLER

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2 Tim 3:14–4:4, Paul instructed and encouraged his student and lieutenant Timothy to teach truth even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Much like Focused Free Grace people today, Timothy was also in the minority in his commitment to clarity as he led a group of believers in the first-century church.² This paper will examine what can be understood about secularism and what a teacher's response should be to the instructions that Paul gives Timothy.

We live in a day when it is popular to question the Bible's reliability. It is stylish to doubt the Scriptures. We should not be surprised to hear people criticize the Word. In a recent article, Christian columnist Peter Heck related his interaction with an attorney working for the so-called "Freedom from Religion Foundation."³

The attorney was a self-professed atheist and had tweeted that people should read the Bible because it is an awful, immoral book that breeds atheism. This atheist was saying that what Christians believe to be the inspired Word of God not only is not the Word of God, but will even lead you to believe that there is no God. Today it is popular to ridicule the Bible about everything from the six-day Creation, the story of Jonah, and of course the Resurrection and faith in Christ. To say that the Bible has errors or contradictions is common.

Peter Heck says that in responding to the atheist, he considered Prov 26:4-5—which itself has been pointed to as a contradiction,

¹ This article, in a shorter form, originally appeared in *Developing a Dispensational Missiology*.

² See the article by Kenneth Yates in this volume, "A Review and Analysis of *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism* by Daniel G. Hummel" (pp. 3-21). Hummel points out that dispensationalists are a minority in theological circles today. The same could be said about people who proclaim the gospel of eternal life by faith alone in Christ. I would maintain that dispensationalism, the belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and FG theology all place a person in the minority today. An accurate understanding of the Scriptures would lead one to dispensationalism and a FG gospel.

³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200406130645/https://disrn.com/opinion/opinion-the-babylon-bee-is-really-ticking-off-the-right-people>. Accessed Feb 10, 2024.

probably due to the difficulty in reading the KJV.⁴ That aside, modern translations provide more clarity. The NASB95 reads: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.” Rather than descend into an online debate with the atheist’s mockery, Heck retweeted him and said: “Evangelistic atheists encouraging people to read the Bible. Tell me God doesn’t have a great sense of humor.”⁵

It would be expected that an atheist would attack the veracity of the Bible. However, what is surprising and saddening is the attack on the Bible’s reliability from within Christianity. Even in more conservative theological circles, there are views such as limited inerrancy, which proposes that the Bible is true insofar as it fulfills its intended purpose. This means that a text is true if its redemptive purpose is accomplished. It can be true in this sense even if parts of the text are false.⁶ That is a compromised view of truth that does not make sense.

As Christians, we must be aware of the rising skepticism and take steps to insulate ourselves from the infection of doubt. The apostles in the early church depended totally and wholly on God’s Word. They did not question or doubt it.

Nowhere else in the Scriptures do we find a better explanation of the utter dependence on the Word than in 2 Tim 3:14–4:4. Through the concepts and principles he explains in 2 Timothy 3–4, Paul demonstrates a total reliance on the Bible. Timothy could have that same attitude even though he found himself in the minority in the world in which he lived.

II. BACKGROUND

To understand the situation that Timothy was facing in his ministry, we must look back at the first portion of chapter 3 to see the context of this passage. Paul presents a picture of what Timothy would experience in his ministry. A similar picture could be developed for the church and for those who hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Proverbs-26-4-5.html>. This short article gives added details on understanding the proverb—specifically, some ideas of when it is appropriate not to answer a fool, as well as when we should consider rebuking him. Accessed Nov 8, 2023.

⁵ Peter Heck@peterheck.com.

⁶ Leslie Allen, for example, says that Jonah should not be read as historical fact, but as a parable. See, Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 18. See also, Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 444.

today. Paul pointed out two major problems and also gave Timothy two statements of counsel.

The first problem Paul mentions is that Timothy will see moral deterioration (2 Tim 3:1-4). Paul lists 19 examples of that deterioration (vv 1-4). The unbelieving world will demonstrate such characteristics, but believers can as well if they do not take heed to what the Word of God says.⁷ Some of those characteristics deal with what men will “love.” They will be lovers of themselves, money, and various pleasures rather than God.

The second problem Timothy will face is that he will see theological defection (vv 5-9). There will be those who hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power (v 5). The power mentioned here cannot be anything else than the Holy Spirit applying the Scriptures to produce true godliness in the lives of believers. This explains why Paul speaks of the importance of inerrant Scriptures in this section.

Paul tells Timothy that these major problems will be present in most people. “Men” (*anthrōpoi*) refers to mankind in general (v 2). These examples of moral deterioration and spiritual defection will be common. Most of the people whom Timothy would have to deal with will manifest these problems, both in secular and religious circles.

The first piece of advice Paul gives Timothy is that he should avoid those people who exhibit such moral deterioration (v 5). Their error will be obvious (v 9).

The second piece of advice is that even though he will be in the minority, Timothy should *continue* in the things he has learned (v 14). He could do so because he was already grounded in the Word.

Menō is translated as *continue* in nearly all English versions (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, NRSV, HCSB, LEB, NET). It also has the sense of abiding, dwelling, or remaining. Timothy had learned the Scriptures from childhood. Paul was telling Timothy to be faithful. The way to do that was to continue and remain in the Word of God throughout his ministry.

For one holding the minority view amid the problems described in Chapter 3, this type of encouragement is essential. This was true for Timothy. It is also true for the believer today. Paul explains the importance of continuing. In the rest of the chapter, the apostle Paul develops the things that we should hold on to if we are to withstand

⁷ Robert N. Wilkin, “2 Timothy,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 494.

and be insulated against the immoral characteristics of our day and the spiritual defection all around us.

III. FIVE REASONS TO CONTINUE IN THE SCRIPTURES

Paul gives Timothy five reasons to study and live by the things in the Scriptures.

A. Because the People Who Taught Him the Word Loved It and Lived It (2 Tim 3:14)

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them* (2 Tim 3:14).

Paul knew the people from whom Timothy had learned the Scriptures. He pointed to them as a reason to continue studying the Word of God.

Timothy had learned from his mother and grandmother,⁸ and we know that he also learned from the apostle Paul.⁹ Timothy had Paul as a spiritual example of a life that he could follow. Timothy was told that he should continue in the Word of God because the people who taught it to him had done so and Timothy saw the results in their lives. They already had a profound influence on his life.¹⁰

Paul pointed out struggles that he had gone through in his ministry. Timothy had several people in his life who had characteristics that could only be explained by the Lord's work in them. The people Timothy learned from had a faith impacted by the Word of God.

B. Because the Word Is Powerful (2 Tim 3:15)

...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15).

⁸ His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (cf. 2 Tim 1:5).

⁹ "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings..." (2 Tim 3:10–11b).

¹⁰ A. Duane Litfin, "2 Timothy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 750.

Paul says the Scriptures provide the knowledge of how to be saved through faith. We can speak of the salvation that knowledge of the Scriptures can bring in two ways. Eternal salvation was made possible through Christ's death on the cross, and it is given as a free gift through faith in Christ Jesus. There is power in the Scriptures to bring a person to faith in Jesus Christ.

This power is seen in Acts 8:25-40. Phillip speaks with the Ethiopian eunuch using just a section of the prophet Isaiah. This provided the basis for the Ethiopian's faith in Christ. For the Ethiopian, who most likely only had a portion of the OT or even just a portion of the book of Isaiah, the Scripture was the beginning of the teaching that Philip used to preach Christ.

In the immediate context, however, Paul has another salvation particularly in mind. The word "salvation" (*sōtēria*) is best translated *deliverance*. Amid the persecution Timothy would face due to the spiritual defection and moral deterioration around him, the Scriptures would provide the knowledge he needed to be victorious. The only other use of *sōtēria* is in 2:10, where it means deliverance from one's enemies.¹¹

C. Because the Word Is God-Breathed (2 Tim 3:16a)

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God... (2 Tim 3:16a).

Paul says it is wise to continue in the Word of God because of how it was produced. The Greek word *theopneustos* means "God-breathed." The words in Scripture are God's words. However, He gave us these words through human authors.

Since all Scripture is God-breathed, it is the product of God. Therefore, we can depend on it. We believed in the Word of God concerning everlasting life for all who believe in Jesus for it when we were born again (1 Pet 1:23).¹² Since we can depend on God's Word to eternally save us through Jesus Christ, it is only natural, logical, and reasonable to depend upon the Word He gave—the Word He breathed out—to deliver us from troubles we encounter after believing in Christ. Because

¹¹ Wilkin, "2 Timothy," 495.

¹² Gary Derickson, "1 Peter," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 576.

God produced His Word, Paul instructs and encourages Timothy to continue in it.

D. Because the Word is Profitable (2 Tim 3:16b)

...and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16b).

The fourth reason Paul gives for abiding in the Word of God is found in the last part of v 16. Paul says it is profitable in four areas: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Timothy is reminded that Scripture is inspired and that the profitability of the text lies in that inspiration.

The Scriptures are profitable in teaching us all the truth we need to know. We should not misunderstand Paul. He is not saying to read the Bible to become a doctor and perform surgery. But if we want to know about God and our relationship with Him, how to live a life pleasing to Him in this world, how to cope in life, and how to live in relation to others and His creation, the Scriptures are profitable for knowing these things. Being in the theological minority in the midst of a secular culture, Timothy would need to abide in the Word and depend on it for the truth of doctrine as well as for instructions in righteous living.

The Scriptures are profitable for reproof. If something needs to be pointed out as sin, the Scriptures can identify it. Sin brings chaos and the wrath of God into our lives.¹³ The Scriptures are able to reprove us when we need it and deliver us from that wrath. That is immensely profitable.

The Scriptures are also profitable for correction. They do not just point out our sin and then leave us in guilt and despair. The Scriptures correct us. The etymology of the word *epanorthōsis* here is related to the root of the English word *orthopedics*. This word means “to set straight or to relocate.” An *epanorthōsis* is a restoration.¹⁴ The Scriptures are profitable for restoring us to spiritual health and training us in righteousness. Scripture gives us the pattern to follow for righteous living.

Paul instructs Timothy to continue in the Word to obtain all of that profit from the Scriptures. The church’s call today is not just to

¹³ Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 35-36.

¹⁴ BDAG, 359.

critique and analyze; we are to produce value in our vocations, personal relationships, and communities, by continuing to depend on the Word.

E. Because the Word Equips Us for Service (2 Tim 3:17)

...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:17).

The expression *man of God* only occurs twice in the NT, both in Paul's letters to Timothy (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:17). However, it occurs seventy-six times in the OT. It refers to prophets like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and Shemaiah. Paul uses the expression to indicate that Timothy was an important servant of Christ, being the delegate of the apostle to the Gentiles.

The result of remaining in the Word of God is that the man of God may be complete. This means that Paul wants Timothy to be a servant of God thoroughly equipped to do every good work. Everything that God wants you to do for Him is directed in the Scriptures. God equips through the Scriptures. This is not an overnight event; equipping takes time.

Many adults today played sports when they were growing up. In most team sports, players receive equipment to wear or use. Professionals playing in a game like the Superbowl will use the very best equipment. They will put on this equipment and use it to win because winning the game is the "work" their coaches and team owners expect of them. The Scriptures are our equipment for going out to serve the Lord.

If we are to go out, share the gospel, and lead people to Christ, the Scriptures are our equipment. If we are to face the secular moral deterioration and spiritual theological defection of our time, we need to be armed with the Scriptures. If we are to go and serve, minister, and comfort the grieving, we need to use the Scriptures as our equipment. We cannot "win" without them.

IV. HOW TO CONTINUE IN THE SCRIPTURES

What does continuing in the Scriptures look like? I would suggest four principles.

A. Abide in God's Word

The concept of abiding in God's Word has been discussed above. To expand on the idea, it means to be at home or live in a place.¹⁵ We might say we are comfortable in that place. A believer should be rooted in the Scripture, and feel at home with them. This should be an ongoing, or permanent state. It is being stuck in it, but in a good way.

Paul tells Timothy to abide in the Word of God because imposters who deceive and are themselves deceived will grow progressively worse. Keep practicing, keep learning, and keep performing according to the Word's directions.

One is to maintain an unbroken relationship with the Word. Perhaps we can expand the definition of "abiding." Some have illustrated it this way: "A stake can be put into the ground, but a tree abides in the ground." The idea is that *to abide* means "to draw sustenance from, to draw life from." That is what we are to do with God's Word.

B. Establish the Bible in Our Minds

We need to first establish our estimation of the Scriptures and hold firm to it. We are to proclaim the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, understanding and believing that the Bible is God's Word. Every word of it.

Paul tells Timothy that the Bible is true. He says that every word of it is God-breathed. To profit from the text, it is essential that a person hold to that understanding. It is the beginning of abiding in God's Word. Paul knew that Timothy had learned the Scriptures as a child. For those who were adults when they believed, they need to establish from the start the characteristics of the Scriptures

C. Study God's Word

We should study God's Word for ourselves. We can benefit from what others have taught us (2 Tim 1:5), but we must be diligent in studying the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15). All of us have misconceptions and biases when it comes to the Scriptures. Only through our diligent study can those things be corrected and transformed. Our minds need

¹⁵ Ibid., s.v. "*menō*," 630.

to be renewed and constantly challenged by the truths found in God's Word (Rom 12:1-2).¹⁶

Memorizing the Scriptures is part of studying them. Such memorization makes the Scriptures part of a Christian's thought life. When a believer makes a choice, he should know what God's Word says so he can make a righteous decision.

D. Use the Scriptures

We must use God's Word. To be effective in witnessing, you need to use God's Word. If you want to counsel someone, use God's Word. If you want to comfort someone, use God's Word.

V. THE MINORITY'S MISSION

The faithful servant of the Lord, who abides in God's Word, will be in the minority. But he has a mission. In the case of Timothy, Paul discusses what the motive of that servant should be, his message, and the myths to be rejected.

A. Motive of the Minority (2 Timothy 4:1)

I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.

Christ is going to judge the living and the dead. By referring to "the living and the dead," Paul is probably speaking of those who are physically living and those who are physically dead. He is talking about the full scope of Christ's judgment that includes every person (John 5:22).

Unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. Believers will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-15). Unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire because they did not believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life. Their works will determine their level of torment in the lake of fire. Believers' works will be judged to determine their rewards in Christ's kingdom.

Paul goes on to say that these judgments will take place when Christ appears. This refers to the Second Coming, when Christ establishes His

¹⁶ Hodges, *Romans*, 358 (cf. footnote 1). Clearly, the will of God is found in His Word.

kingdom.¹⁷ These will be solemn events. The faithful servant of the Lord has the awesome responsibility to share with those they know about these judgments. They can tell unbelievers of their need for eternal life. Believers can be told to live for the world to come.

B. Message of the Minority (2 Timothy 4:2)

Preach the Word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

The content of our message is to be the Word. One cannot share the Word if he does not take time to learn it. The idea of a man behind a pulpit would not have even entered Timothy's mind. The word used here speaks of a *herald*.¹⁸ A herald was a person sent by the king with a message from the king. He was to go into the public areas of a town and proclaim the king's message to all the people. He was not to proclaim it mildly; he was to proclaim the king's message with the king's authority. Paul is telling Timothy to authoritatively deliver the message God has given. He should not deliver it as though it was his best guess, but as God's message. It is God's proclamation. That is how we are to proclaim the Word.

Christians should be consistent in their proclamation, always being ready whether or not the time is opportune. Paul anticipates practically every question that may arise, being ready in season and out of season—that is, anytime the opportunity presents itself whether or not it is convenient. Preach the Word anytime the opportunity is available and be ready even if you do not get the chance.

Paul gives three commands about what is to happen when the Word is preached. The servant is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. The Word is the source for all three.

Reprove (elenchō) means to convince or to persuade.¹⁹ Paul is telling Timothy that preaching the Word means you are persuading people by convincing them that something is true.

¹⁷ These judgments will occur after Christ returns, but will take place approximately 1,000 years apart.

¹⁸ BDAG, s.v. "*kērussō*," 543.

¹⁹ BDAG, s.v. "*elenchō*," 315.

Rebuke (*epitimaō*) means to correct.²⁰ It is verbal discipline involving a warning of judgment. Rebuke is what parents do to their children when they are doing something wrong. Rebuke implies that if you don't cut it out, you're going to get it! Preaching the Word is a form of discipline. It is a correction.

Paul also told Timothy to exhort (*parakaleō*) the believers in Ephesus. The first two—convincing and correcting—dealt with the negative aspects of correction. Exhortation deals with the positive. Exhortation is a challenge to do what is right.²¹ Timothy was to challenge believers to continue in the right direction.

C. Avoiding the Majority's Myths (2 Timothy 4:3–4)

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

In these verses, we see why it is difficult to abide in the Word of God. The time would come when people would not listen to sound doctrine, but having itching ears would heap up teachers who would say what they want to hear. The result would be turning away from truth to fables.

Instead of accepting the truth as truth, they now reject it and accept that which is false. This is a picture of what happened in the first century and what continues to happen to this day.

When the apostle Paul told Timothy to preach the Word, he was simply commanding him, the speaker. There is an implied directive to those who hear him as well. They should listen attentively. In this command is an implied challenge to listen and to apply the Word. Submit to the Scriptures and your life will change as God renews your mind (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).

VI. CONCLUSION

For Timothy—a theological minority in his day—and for those of us today who hold to the minority views of Focused Free Grace and the

²⁰ Ibid., s.v. "*epitimaō*," 384.

²¹ Ibid., s.v. "*parakaleō*," 784.

inerrancy of Scripture, Paul's encouragement in this text to remain in the Scriptures is essential. The foundation of teaching in the church is in danger if we think we can have an inspired Word of God without an inerrant Word of God. Paul exhorts Timothy to preach and continue in the Scripture...

- because of the spiritual example of the people from whom he first learned God's Word
- because of the power in the Scriptures
- because of the production of the Scriptures
- because of the profit from the Scriptures
- because of the product of the Scriptures

God has provided guidance for avoiding theological defection and secular moral deterioration. He has given us the Scriptures so the believer can become a complete, equipped, and adequate servant of God.

THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE CONTINUES

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I. INTRODUCTION

Forty-eight years ago, Zondervan released Harold Lindsell's groundbreaking book *The Battle for the Bible*. Lindsell was a founding member of Fuller Theological Seminary, which had abandoned a high view of Scripture by 1976.

He gave this strong warning:

Once infallibility is abandoned, however good the intentions of those who do it and however good they feel their reasons for doing so, it always and ever opens the door to further departures from the faith. Once errancy enters an institution, it does not simply become one of several options. It quickly becomes the regnant view and infallibility loses its foothold and at last is silenced effectively...Embracing a doctrine of an errant Scripture will lead to disaster down the road. It will result in the loss of missionary outreach; it will quench missionary passion; it will lull congregations to sleep and undermine their belief in the full-orbed truth of the Bible; it will produce spiritual sloth and decay; and it will finally lead to apostasy.”¹

I played flag football at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) in 1980. We sent an all-star team (I was not on it) out to southern California to play Fuller Seminary. We jokingly called it “The Inerrancy Bowl.”

The funny thing is that DTS's position on inerrancy today is almost identical to that of Fuller Seminary in 1980.

¹ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 25.

II. WHAT INERRANCY MEANT IN 1976

The word *inerrancy* means “without error.” The *in-* prefix reverses the meaning of the base word.

Inexplicable means “not able to be explained.” *Indirect* means “not direct.” *Indecisive* means “not decisive.” *Inerrant* means “not errant.”

In 1976, at DTS and other conservative schools, *inerrancy* meant the following:

- Jonah was actually swallowed by a giant fish and went to Nineveh.
- Job was a real person who experienced the problems he recounts.
- Adam was created from the dust of the earth and began life as a young man. Eve was created from Adam’s rib and began life as a young woman.
- A serpent spoke with Eve and deceived her into sinning by eating the forbidden fruit.
- The words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, accurately tell us what Jesus said.
- There truly was a worldwide flood during Noah’s day.
- The patriarchs really lived between 750 and 1000 years.

III. WHAT INERRANCY MEANS IN 2024

In 2024, at DTS and other conservative schools, *inerrancy* means the following:

- Jonah might have been swallowed by a giant fish, and he might have gone to Nineveh. Or, Jonah might just be an OT parable with no basis in history. A person can unreservedly hold to inerrancy and insist that Jonah is a parable.
- Job might have been a real person who experienced the problems he recounts. Or, the book of Job might be a morality play with no historical basis. Both are views held by so-called inerrantists.

- Adam might have been created from the dust of the earth and begun life as a young man. Eve might have been created from Adam's rib and begun life as a young woman. But more likely, Adam and Eve had been born normally and grew up as part of a group of hominids. God selected them, breathed on them, and made them the first humans.
- A serpent might have spoken with Eve and deceived her into sinning by eating the forbidden fruit. However, Genesis 1–3 is poetic history, and we do not know which details are history and which are poetry. We know **that** God created. We do not necessarily know **how** He created.
- The words of Jesus in the Gospels tell us “the gist” of what Jesus said, like the oral traditions of Bedouins.
- There truly was a flood during Noah's day. Most likely, it was a local flood.
- The patriarchs might have lived between 750 and 1000 years. Or, they might have had normal life spans by today's standards, and Scripture exalted the years, much like the Sumerian Kings, all of whom supposedly ruled for at least 10,000 years.

Over the past fifty years, there has been a significant shift among conservative Evangelicals regarding inerrancy.

IV. KEYWORDS AND PHRASES

There are some important words and terms that we need to understand in this discussion:

- *Ipsissima vox*. This is Latin and means *the very voice*. In 1976, it meant that whenever the Gospel writers translated Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek, it was accurate. Whenever the writers summarized what Jesus said, it was accurate. In 2024, it means that the writers of the Gospels gave *the gist* of what Jesus said, though they sometimes changed the meaning of what He said and sometimes put words in His mouth.

- *Ipsissima verba*. This is Latin for *the very words*. In 1976, it meant that Jesus often spoke in Greek and that much (or nearly all) of what we have in the Gospels is exactly what Jesus said, word for word. In 2024, NT scholars believe that most of what we have in the Gospels is *ipsissima vox*, not *ipsissima verba*.
- *Gist*. The word *gist* is a bit ambiguous. It means “the main point or part: essence.”¹ However, when used in reference to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, it means that the authors got the basic idea right, but not the particulars.
- *Parable*. The Gospel writers introduce many of Jesus’ teachings by calling the words that followed *a parable*. There are some passages, like Luke 16:19-31, that are not called parables, but that some suggest are. Some who claim to believe in inerrancy say that Jonah was an OT parable with no historical basis, even though the Lord Jesus based His future resurrection on the historicity of Jonah’s being delivered from the great fish on the third day.
- *Historiography*. This refers to the science of reporting history. Many secular historians made up speeches and events, making it impossible to know what happened. Thucydides, often called the father of scientific history, was more careful in his reporting. While he created speeches from memory, he remembered enough of the speech to record the gist of what was said. Many who claim to believe in inerrancy consider Thucydides to have been more careful in his reporting of speeches than the Gospel writers were.
- *Autographa*. These are the original writings of the Biblical authors. We do not have the *autographa*, but by comparing existing manuscripts we are able to determine the original readings. Leading NT scholars, including those with a broad view of inerrancy,

¹ Miriam Webster online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gist>. Last accessed 8/14/24.

point out that no significant doctrine is impacted by any of the textual variants.

- *An error now, but not when written.* This is the majority view of conservative NT scholars today. Today, we consider it an error to misrepresent a speaker, change the meaning of what a speaker said, or put words in a speaker's mouth. However, according to this view, at the time the OT and NT were written, such practices were common in secular reporting. The readers of the Bible, familiar with such practices, would therefore not have considered them to be errors.

V. WHAT IS *THE GIST*?

I will discuss four sources that give insight into modern theologians' thinking regarding the *gist* of a passage. They believe that the Gospel writers sometimes got close to what Jesus said, but they often changed the meaning of what He said, put words in His mouth, and even misrepresented who was speaking.

A. Dr. Dan Wallace's ETS Paper, "An Apologia for a Broad View of *Ipsissima Vox*"

I was present when Dr. Wallace presented this paper at the 1999 annual meeting of ETS. He provided many examples of what he considers a broad view of *ipsissima vox*. I will cite just three of the points he presented.

His first point was that the Gospel writers followed the historical reporting of Thucydides, a man who not only did not give exact quotes, but was often guilty of not "getting them close."² Wallace suggested that, "If Luke [took] certain liberties in the speeches he recorded, John may have done so much more."³

His second point was that the changes made by the Gospel writers were much more than simply translation choices or the use of summary statements. He gave examples of different types of changes they made.

² Daniel B. Wallace, "A Broad View of *Ipsissima Vox*," Unpublished paper presented Nov 18, 1999, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

*“Occasionally...the meaning seems to be altered.”*⁴ That is truly a significant shift from 1976. Wallace was saying that the Gospel writers sometimes changed Jesus’ meaning!

*“Within the synoptic gospels, interpretive additions to the words of Jesus seem to occur.”*⁵ An example is Wallace’s view that Luke added the words *to repentance* to the expression, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17).⁶ Luke put words in Jesus’ mouth that He never said. Wallace says, “Luke has slightly altered the meaning of Jesus’ words here.”⁷

According to Wallace, Jesus said that He did not permit either divorce or remarriage of the divorced. However, he says, “Matthew does not have the line about a woman divorcing her husband, but [he] does add ‘except for immorality’—a phrase missing from both Mark’s and Luke’s accounts.”⁸ He summarizes by saying, “There seems to be evidence in the synoptic gospels that, on occasion, words are deliberately added to the original sayings of Jesus.”⁹

I found this surprising. According to Wallace, Matthew contradicted what the Lord Jesus said.

His third point was that sometimes the Gospel writers misrepresented who was speaking: “Sometimes the alteration between gospels is not merely a word or two, but seems to involve a change in speaker.”¹⁰

Wallace’s last two points concern “giv[ing] a different *impression* as to the sense of the original”¹¹ and “some of the dominical material seems dislocated or even patched together.”¹² Concerning the last point, Wallace gives the example of the Sermon on the Mount. He says that while it might have been one actual sermon, “evidence of such composite redactional work on the part of the evangelists cannot be easily dismissed.”¹³ While he mentions that Matthew presented the Sermon on the Mount as one sermon given on one occasion, he does not view that as proof that it was.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ Ibid., 16, *italics his*.

¹² Ibid., 17.

¹³ Ibid., 18.

I appreciate Dr. Wallace's scholarship. He is a leading NT textual critic and grammarian. However, when it comes to inerrancy, he is like the emperor with new invisible "clothes" in the Hans Christian Andersen story. What he calls *inerrancy* is not inerrancy. What he describes are not examples of *the very voice* [*ipsissima vox*] of Jesus.

B. Dr. Craig Olson's ETS paper, "How Old Was Father Abraham? Why the Patriarchal Lifespans Cannot Be Face Value Numbers"

I was present when Olson presented this paper. He had recently received his Ph.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary, and this paper was based on his doctoral dissertation.

He said, "Skeletal and tooth wear data from ancient times indicates an average lifespan of around forty years old, not over 900 years as in Genesis 5, or even the almost 200 years of the later patriarchs."¹⁴ He saw no problem since, "The patriarchal lifespans are in error only if the original author intended them to be accurate historical records, and the original audience accepted them as such."¹⁵ He then compared Genesis with pagan writings: "Writings from the third and second millennia BC (such as the Sumerian King List) contain exaggerated lifespans that everybody understood were intended to honor their ancestors."¹⁶

Olson suggested that the entire book of Genesis exaggerated lifespans, right down to the end. During the question-and-answer time, an audience member asked why Jacob said he was 130 years old when asked by Pharaoh (Gen 47:9). Olson said he did not deal with that in his dissertation, and he did not have an answer that day either. Moses reported that Jacob was 147 years old at his death (Gen 47:28). If he was forty or even eighty, then the Bible is not inerrant.

Science cannot prove that no one lived for hundreds of years before or after the Flood.

The more significant issue is that what Olson suggested is a rejection of inerrancy.

¹⁴ Craig Olson, "How Old?" Unpublished paper presented Nov 15, 2017, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

C. Dr. Darrell Bock's "Live, Jive, or Memorex"¹⁷

This article was required reading for all DTS Th.M. students for years. It might still be.

Bock suggests that Jesus' words in the Gospels are neither jive nor Memorex. *Jive* would be something completely made up. *Memorex* (a recording device) would be the exact words of Jesus. *Live* would be the gist.

While that may be comforting to some, it is discomfoting to those taught that the Gospel records of Jesus' words are completely accurate in every detail.

D. Bock and Simpson's *Minding the Gap*

In the Fall 2019 issue of *DTS Magazine*, Drs. Bock and Simpson wrote about the inspiration of Scripture. They addressed how the Gospels can accurately report what Jesus said when there was a gap in time and memory.

The authors suggest three answers. First, the time gap was only thirty years. Second, multiple people's reports were considered. Third, the disciples told the stories of Jesus repeatedly during the three decades before they wrote. Bock and Simpson call this "careful orality."

Bock and Simpson cite the Bedouins in the Middle East as a modern example of the disciples' oral tradition. Missionary Kenneth Bailey noted that when he heard Bedouins tell the same story multiple times, "a story's detail could vary, but the retelling could not change its core."¹⁸

The authors then indicated that they agreed with Bailey when he related this to the Gospel writers: "The details of the Gospel accounts might not match exactly, but the story's point remains intact."¹⁹

¹⁷ Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 73-100.

¹⁸ Darrell Bock and Benjamin I. Simpson, *Minding the Gap: Orality, Memory, & the Gospels*, Fall 2019 *DTS Magazine*, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

When I read that article, I was shocked that any conservative Bible scholar would use the example of unregenerate Bedouin storytellers to illustrate what it must have been like for the Gospel writers.²⁰

VI. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Dr. John Walvoord passed away on Dec 20, 2002. Dallas Theological Seminary had a memorial chapel for him, which I attended. Mark Bailey, the current president, and Chuck Swindoll and Don Campbell, the previous presidents, spoke. As I heard them talk, I remember thinking that while Dr. Walvoord was the reason for DTS's great growth and progress, he was also the reason for its move away from its earlier positions.

DTS was accredited in 1969 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. A few years later, the accrediting agency told DTS that it had to broaden the degrees of its faculty. Nearly all its faculty had master's and doctoral degrees from DTS. That had to change in order to remain accredited.

Between 1974 and 1978, DTS sent many men to Europe to get prestigious doctoral degrees. The school paid them salaries during that time with the understanding that they would commit to returning and teaching at the school.

The day after the chapel service honoring Dr. Walvoord, I had lunch with Zane Hodges and René López. I said that I was convinced that the doctrinal changes at the seminary were due to the faculty's going to Europe to get degrees. Hodges agreed with me. However, Lopez said he thought that at least some of those who got European doctorates had not changed. Hodges disagreed. Having taught with all of them, he said that, to a man, they all returned as changed men, and not for the better.

I studied under many of those professors at DTS (1978-1985). Their view on inerrancy was nothing like the seminary's historic position.

²⁰ Interestingly, Bock and Simpson mention John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." They imply that the Holy Spirit *improved the memories* of the Gospel writers. However, they fall short of suggesting that the Holy Spirit gave them *perfect recall*, which would be *Memorex*, not live. In my estimation, John 14:26 is a promise of perfect recall. There are people on Earth today who have what is called *hyperthymesia*, which is the ability to remember all or nearly all events in their lives with perfect accuracy. Could not God have given that to the disciples? Is that not what the Lord promised in John 14:26?

DTS is but one of many historically conservative seminaries. What happened at DTS happened at nearly all those schools, with the exception of some Fundamentalist schools.

We could talk about the views of Dr. Craig Blomberg at Denver Seminary, Dr. Michael Licona at Houston Christian University, Dr. Robert Gundry, Professor Emeritus at Westmont College, Dr. John Sanders at Hendrix College, the late Dr. Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College, and author and pastor Dr. Greg Boyd, who formerly was a full-time professor at Bethel University and subsequently taught as an adjunct professor.

I was a member of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) from 1982 until around 2020. I eventually let my membership lapse because the society, formed in 1949 to defend the inerrancy of Scripture, no longer did so. I was present at the 2003 annual meeting of ETS when we voted on whether to expel Drs. Clark Pinnock and John Sanders. Both men had made many statements that were inconsistent with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

I recall that Dr. Geisler came to the microphone and said that if these men were not expelled, he would resign his membership. It should be noted that he was one of the founding members. Slightly over half of us voted to expel Dr. Pinnock, and nearly sixty-five percent voted to expel Dr. Sanders. However, since it took a two-thirds vote to expel anyone, they retained their membership, and Dr. Geisler resigned.

VII. THE BIBLICAL PROOF OF INERRANCY

There are multiple proofs that the Bible is without error *based on the highest standards of historiography*.

First, the Bible is God's Word,²¹ and God cannot lie.²² If the Bible has errors, then either it is not God's Word or God can lie.

Second, God's Word claims to be inerrant. The Lord Jesus said to the Father, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17). An unnamed psalmist wrote, "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Ps 119:16). Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is pure [or *flawless*, NIV, LEB; *proves true*, RSV, ESV; *tried and true*, CEB]; He is a shield to those who put

²¹ Psalm 119:105; Prov 30:5; Isa 55:11; John 10:35; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Pet 1:24-25; 2 Pet 1:21.

²² Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18.

their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”

Third, if God’s Word has errors in it, then it is hard to see how we can be sure that we have everlasting life, that the kingdom is coming, that there will be eternal rewards, etc. John 3:16 is only true if John infallibly reported exactly what Jesus said. If he put words in Jesus’ mouth and changed the meaning of what He said, then John 3:16 would not be accurate.

VIII. HOW CAN WE DEFEND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE?

It starts with being aware of the issues.

Study the issue and become familiar with the problems. I would suggest reading some books that defend a high view of inerrancy. I recommend *The Jesus Crisis* by Thomas and Farnell,²³ *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* by Geisler and Howe,²⁴ *Defending Inerrancy* by Geisler and William C. Roach,²⁵ *Inerrancy*, edited by Geisler,²⁶ and my book, *Current Issues in Inerrancy*.²⁷

Do not financially support churches or schools with a low view of inerrancy.

Do support churches and schools with a high view of inerrancy. You, hopefully, are already in a church with a high view of inerrancy. If you ever move, do not settle for a church with a low view of inerrancy.

Teach your children, family, and friends about the inerrancy of Scripture.

The battle for the Bible has not only continued since 1976 but has also become more intense. It is now much more difficult for students in the leading conservative seminaries to retain a high view of inerrancy. They are bombarded with arguments in favor of the Bible’s giving us the gist, but not precisely what was said and done.

²³ Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 1998).

²⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992, 2008).

²⁵ Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 2011).

²⁶ Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980).

²⁷ Robert N. Wilkin, *Current Issues in Inerrancy* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2016, 2024).

Of course, we should be gracious in our defense of inerrancy. We seek to win over those who have abandoned a high view of Scripture. But we must stand firm, or we too will become casualties of the battle.

BOOK REVIEWS

La Elección Divina: Sí o No? By Marino Monegro. Dominican Republic: N.P. 103 pp. Paper, \$5.00.

GES has published some books in Spanish to reach the Spanish-speaking world. GES does not publish this book, but it is in Spanish. Monegro is an elder in a church in the Dominican Republic. The title means: *Divine Election: Yes or No?*

Moreno explains that when he was younger, he was taught the Calvinist doctrine that people were elected to eternal salvation before they were born. He even taught others this view, even though he had problems with it and did not understand how it could be true. One major reason he did so is there is very little written in Spanish that contradicts Calvinism (pp. xi-xiii).

Moreno says that many Spanish-speaking teachers accept election but realize many verses in the NT teach the opposite. Many passages point to the ability of the unbeliever to believe. These teachers are not able to reconcile those verses (p. xv). He wrote the book to help “simple” pastors and teachers who are looking for answers.

Calvinism and Arminianism are two theological systems that attempt to explain the relationship between human free will and the sovereignty of God (p. 17). After a discussion of the five points of Calvinism, Moreno correctly points out that Spanish-speaking pastors will often pick and choose which points they accept and which they reject (p. 21). There is no consistency.

Another option is that election in the Bible is corporate and not individual. Calvinists will often use philosophical arguments that elevate the greatness of God. Moreno argues that election not only doesn’t make sense, it makes God evil (pp. 26-28).

The book looks at verses that mention election in both the OT and NT. Moreno rightly points out the importance of context. In the OT, the verb “to elect” refers to things, places, and people. But it never refers to eternal salvation (p. 35). When it deals with people, it is an election to service. Among the verses discussed are Neh 9:7-8, Ps 106:23, and Deut 4:37. God “chose” Israel to be His people and to be a light to the nations (p. 37).

In the NT, Moreno discusses how Judas was elected to be an apostle but was not saved from hell. In Acts 13:45-48, the elect are those who were disposed to listen to the message of life. They were willing to look at the evidence (p. 49). Moreno has a very good discussion on Rom 8:29-30. He rightly concludes that predestination in these verses refers to the reward of reigning with Christ, and not to eternal salvation (p. 57). God has chosen that those who suffer with Christ will reign with Him. Not all believers will reign with the Lord in His kingdom.

Another excellent treatment in the NT is Moreno's discussion of Eph 1:4. He concludes that election in this verse refers to the church. It is corporate. God calls it to holiness (p. 69). In 2 Thess 2:13, Paul says that the church was chosen by God to be saved from the wrath of the Tribulation (p. 75). In 1 Pet 1:2, Peter's readers were elected to obey (p. 81).

In chapter five, Moreno discusses the negative consequences of the Calvinist doctrine of election in the church. It robs people of the assurance of salvation (p. 87). It takes away the desire to evangelize (p. 88). It causes divisions both in Evangelicalism in general and local churches (p. 95).

Chapter six deals with issues that challenge the doctrine of election. Moreno asks if Adam and Eve were elect, why did they sin? What happens to babies who die? If they were not elect, will they go to hell? Why does God "look" for those who will worship Him if they are elect (John 4:23)? Second Chronicles 16:9 says that all the earth can have a heart ready to turn to God. The same is true for Ps 53:2.

Spanish-speaking teachers often do not have Free Grace material at their disposal. They are held captive to Reformed and Calvinistic literature. Many of these works have been translated into Spanish. If you go into a church office, you will find that practically all of their books are written from a Calvinist perspective. Calvinists have done a great deal of work to propagate their teaching. Moreno's experience is all too common.

With the growing Spanish-speaking population in the US, as well as Spanish-speaking churches, there is a need for books in Spanish that promote sound teaching. This book contributes to the great need in this area. I highly recommend it. If you know somebody who is ministering to Spanish-speaking people, this is a great tool. Contact marino.martinezjr@gmail.com on how to get a copy of it. Along with

the books in Spanish published by GES, the Holy Spirit can use us to have a great impact on millions. Like Moreno, they can be set free from contradictory and unbiblical doctrine.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Multisite Churches: Biblical Foundations and Practical Answers.

By Dustin Slaton. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2023. 316 pp. Paper, \$15.24.

A multisite church can be defined as one church that meets in multiple locations. These locations share a vision, budget, and leadership (p. 22). There is one main church and many different “campuses.” Slaton points out that these kinds of churches are growing.

There are supporters and critics of this trend. The Southern Baptist Convention maintains that a multisite church does not meet the definition of an autonomous local church. Slaton is a supporter and says that the Scriptures do not give clear direction on this issue and we have flexibility (p. 25).

Slaton acknowledges that multisite churches follow many different models and practices. This makes it difficult to determine if a particular situation is Biblical or not. Each case must be evaluated individually (p. 37).

In chapter one, various movement leaders list different ways a multisite church can function. For example, one lists ten different models. A multisite church might exist in order to make the satellite churches separate, autonomous churches in the future. A dying church might join with a healthy church so that the dying church may become revitalized (p. 53). Sometimes multisite churches have a single pastor, while others have a pastor at each location. When there are multiple preachers, they coordinate with each other in order to have a centralized message. Sometimes, multisite churches blend different models (p. 63).

Slaton says that this is not a new movement. The circuit-riding preachers in the First Great Awakening followed this pattern (p. 67). In the US, multisite churches began to appear in the 1950s (p. 80). By 2009, there were 3,000 multisite churches and the number is growing. Advocates suggest that Acts 2:46 and 5:42 give Biblical support for

multisite churches. Those early Christians met together as a large group in the temple and then in smaller congregations in homes. John Piper says that the NT does not forbid the practice so we have the freedom to use it (pp. 92-93).

A multisite model may use one speaker whose message is sent through video to the various campuses. If there are different speakers at each campus, they can have a “weekly preparation meeting” where they agree on their messages. The main idea will be preached in all the campuses, even though the messages will be different (p. 117).

Slaton deals with certain theological issues in a multisite situation. How do believers involved in the movement take the Lord’s Supper and baptize new believers? He concludes that the early church took the Lord’s Supper as a “whole church” as well as in small groups. According to Slaton, we have flexibility (pp. 121-34).

Other issues that present problems for the multisite model include how leaders function within the various congregations. Is the “main” pastor at the main campus the leader, or does each campus have its own leadership? Related to leadership is how church discipline is exercised. However the leadership decides to discipline sinning believers, Matt 18:15-20 suggests the whole church needs to be involved before a believer is excommunicated (pp. 142-49). Slaton feels that each campus will make certain decisions that only impact that campus, even though they will delegate other decisions to the whole body (p. 163).

The finances of a multisite church can be handled in different ways. Slaton says it will take wisdom and discernment. There may be one central budget, managed from the main campus, that resources the various locations. Another option is that each campus manages its own budget (p. 210).

Slaton understands that a major problem many have with this movement is the danger of losing a sense of community. He suggests that each campus needs to have “vibrant small groups” to address this danger (p. 221).

Even though Slaton is a fan of the multisite model, he does address the various arguments against it. There is a danger that the main campus preacher will be seen as a celebrity (p. 233). It is difficult to develop new leaders in such a situation (p. 234). The music in video services can easily take precedence over sound Biblical teaching. There is no clear example of a multisite church in the NT (p. 246). A multisite

church is not a church because the members cannot assemble together (p. 250). Such a church cannot perform the functions of a church, such as discipline and the sacraments (p. 256). The leaders of a multisite church can't shepherd the flock because they do not even live in the same city (p. 262). The NT teaches us to plant new churches. We are not called to unite under a central campus with video preaching. It would be better (and more Biblical) to have many smaller churches than one large congregation united through technology (p. 273).

The reader will need to determine if Slaton is correct when he says that the NT gives us flexibility in these areas. Most readers of the *JOTGES* will have serious reservations. In addition, how will such a model ensure that the various campuses are teaching sound doctrine? At face value, it appears that the multisite model might place a higher value on numerical success instead of doctrinal purity.

The Biblical model is that smaller home churches are the answer. They might be seen as "dying" because of their small numbers, but that is the example given in the Scriptures. Multisite churches can be seen as an exciting, but unbiblical, alternative. A charismatic preacher, with great music, can add to that excitement.

But I recommend this book. It gives us food for thought concerning a modern movement. In the Free Grace movement, many believers do not have a local church in their area. With the growth of Zoom classes, is it proper for such believers to meet for common instruction? The answer must be yes. But we must seek to establish independent local congregations. That is the NT model.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Five Views on the New Testament Canon. By Darian R. Lockett, David R. Nienhuis, Jason David Benduhn, Ian Boxall, and George L. Parsenios. Edited by Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 287 pp. Paper, \$24.99.

I find these "views" books to be very profitable. Most books of this genre are to be found in the Zondervan Counterpoints series or the InterVarsity Press Spectrum Multiview series. Before the publication of *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*, Kregel Publications only had three other books of this type (on the Synoptic Gospels, Israel and

the church, and the warning passages in Hebrews). This volume is a welcome addition to a growing body of literature on the formation of the NT canon. However, this is not because of anything written by any of the contributors.

Before seeing this book, I had never heard of any of the contributors. The book contains no information about them other than where they teach and where they got their Ph.Ds. Co-editor Stanley Porter—president, dean, professor of New Testament, and Roy A. Hope Chair in Christian Worldview at McMaster Divinity College—is, of course, well known. Co-editor Benjamin Laird is associate professor of Biblical Studies at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. He is the co-author of the recent (and recommended) works *40 Questions About the Apostle Paul* (Kregel Academic, 2023), *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament* (IVP Academic, 2023), and *The Pauline Corpus in Early Christianity: Its Formation, Publication, and Circulation* (Hendrickson Academic, 2022).

The format of *Five Views on the New Testament Canon* is a little different from what is usually found in other “views” books. Typical is the presentation of a viewpoint by a contributor followed immediately by responses from the other contributors. In this case, after a detailed introduction by the editors, each contributor addresses historical, theological, and hermeneutical questions related to the NT canon from his own perspective. The five perspectives are: conservative Evangelical (Lockett), progressive Evangelical (Nienhuis), liberal Protestant (Benduhn), Roman Catholic (Boxall), and Orthodox (Parsenios). This first section (pp. 41–187) is then followed by a second section (pp. 189–251) of responses where each contributor responds to the others one at a time. Then follows a hefty conclusion by the editors, a name index, and Scripture and ancient sources indices.

The conservative Evangelical perspective is naturally the one that readers of this journal would align themselves with. Lockett argues for “the early development of the New Testament canon” (p. 55). He makes good points about the development of the NT canon being “a collection of collections” (pp. 52–55), about how “reading Luke and Acts as a single canonical unit obscures the canonical association of Luke with the other Gospels” (p. 66) because “no extant manuscripts appear to place Luke and Acts together as a literary collection” (p. 65),

and about how “the Gospel of John appears to have been read in the early church as part of the fourfold Gospel rather than as part of a set of Johannine writings” (p. 66).

Nienhuis divides the Pauline Epistles into “authentic” and “deutero-Pauline” (p. 78) and believes that “many of the New Testament texts are anonymous” (p. 88). He maintains that his “perspective has far more in common with that of my Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox colleagues than that of my two fellow Protestants” (p. 201).

Benduhn’s view of the canon is grounded in his belief that “the books of the New Testament are understood as humanly composed records of the spiritual experiences and insights of key figures and communities within early Christianity” (p. 112). They are “neither verbally inspired nor equally authoritative in all parts” (p. 113).

Boxall, as expected, argues that “the decisive date in the formation of the New Testament canon is arguably April 8, 1546, when the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent promulgated its ‘Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures’” (p. 131).

Parsenios focuses on the practice of the church over time. He argues that “the evolution of the canonical Scripture did not end completely until 1672 CE when the Council of Jerusalem presented the Orthodox Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as it is now construed” (p. 172).

The best things about *Five Views on the New Testament Canon* are not to be found in any of the contributions but in the introduction and conclusion by the editors. I think the book is worth having just to read what Porter and Laird have to say about the NT canon. In their introduction, the editors have a great study of the history of prior discussions of the NT canon and major issues in the canon debate. In their conclusion, they review the common ground of the various contributors as well as the points of contention. This is followed by a very informative study of the primary historical sources for the study of the NT canon: patristic writings, Biblical manuscripts, and canonical lists. The introduction and conclusion by Porter and Laird should be the first thing one consults when undertaking a study of the NT canon.

Laurence M. Vance
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The Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching. By Thomas H. McCall, Caleb T. Friedeman, and Matt T. Friedeman. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Paper, \$27.99.

For decades, Baker Books has published a wide variety of worthwhile Christian books. I still own many books by Arthur W. Pink that were at one time published by Baker. Over the years, Baker has published many titles by D. A. Carson, Millard Erickson, James Montgomery Boice, and Craig Keener. The *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* is a highly-rated series.

However, beginning in 2008 with the inaugural volume on Mark in the now-complete *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* series, Baker has increasingly published books favorable to Roman Catholicism. In 2009, Baker published *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* by Francis J. Beckwith, the president of ETS who resigned after he was received back into the Catholic Church. Baker has published two books by Catholic apologist Robert Barron: *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization* (2015) and *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (2021). Most recently, Baker launched the series, *A Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments*, with the publication of “The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church” (2023) by the Dominican, Romanus Cessario.

It was therefore no surprise when Baker, several years ago, published *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (2017) and *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ* (2019). In these two books, author Matthew W. Bates redefines *faith* as “allegiance” and teaches salvation by works. *The Doctrine of Good Works: Reclaiming a Neglected Protestant Teaching*, with glowing endorsements by Matthew Bates and Ben Witherington, is more of the same.

A book on the doctrine of good works is beneficial and necessary. The Bible certainly encourages and even commands the practice of good works, but I know of no book that specifically addresses that topic. As the authors of *The Doctrine of Good Works* point out: “Textbooks [Erickson, Bird, Grudem] commonly used in evangelical theological education do not contain a *locus* (or similar sustained treatment) on the doctrine of good works” (p. xiii). However, *The Doctrine of Good Works* fails miserably on multiple counts to be the book on good works that is needed.

In their introduction, the authors state that they “argue from Scripture and the resources of the Protestant confessional traditions for a recovery of a positive doctrine of good works” (p. xvi). They assert that this doctrine is positive “in the sense that good works are actually integral to the good news” and that it is Protestant “with respect to basic and fundamental theological commitments” (p. xvi). After the introduction, the book contains “a historical survey of the doctrine of good works in the major Protestant traditions” (p. xvi), followed by a chapter discussing good works in the Old and New Testaments and a chapter that presents a theological summary. The final two chapters are completely different from the first four and could be jettisoned entirely. They involve case studies of congregations and ministry leaders performing “works of mercy” in their communities. Some of the churches referenced have women pastors. The book ends with a conclusion, subject, and Scripture indices. There is no bibliography.

The authors believe that because “the doctrine of salvation is broader than the doctrine of justification” (p. 110), good works are not necessary for justification but are necessary for salvation. They believe good works are a necessary evidence of salvation. They hopelessly misinterpret Matthew 25, concluding that “good works play an important role in final judgment: Jesus will judge all people based on their good works toward the needy (whether Christians or people in general)” (p. 73).

In their discussion of good works in the early church in Acts, it is inexcusable that they never reference Peter’s saying that Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38) or Paul’s admonishing the Ephesian elders to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). These omissions bring to light one of the huge failings of the book. The Pauline Epistles mention *good work* in nine verses (2 Cor 9:8; Phil 1:6; Col 1:10; 1 Tim 3:1; 5:10; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16; 3:1) and *good works* in ten verses (Rom 13:3; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14). Yet, other than Eph 2:10, the only verse mentioned by the authors is Titus 2:14, which is partially quoted four times with no comment or exegesis. No other verse makes it into even a footnote.

Question: How can one write a book about the doctrine of good works without mentioning the majority of Bible verses that refer to good works? Answer: By having an agenda to pollute the gospel of the grace of God by adding to it the necessity of works for final salvation.

How could a Christian ever know for sure that he has done enough good works, either quantitatively or qualitatively, to make it through the last judgment? This is another critical issue that the authors never mention.

Because *The Doctrine of Good Works* not only perverts the gospel of Christ, but also fails in so many ways to live up to its title, the book has no redeeming value whatsoever.

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One Body, One Spirit: Disability and Community in the Church.

By B. Jason Epps and Paul Petitt. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministries, 2024. 204 pp. Paper, \$18.99.

This book was written to encourage believers and churches to reach out to disabled people. They are often overlooked not just in society but in churches. The authors maintain that this is a large but neglected group, as 25 percent of people have some kind of disability (p. 29).

The authors relate many personal stories of those who have struggled with disabilities. They tell of one couple who adopted a special needs child and experienced a multitude of problems. The church they attended was not sensitive to their needs. The couple could not attend church together because of the lack of help they received (pp. 36-37). They eventually changed churches and attended one that reached out to them.

Chapter two deals with the physical barriers at church that impact people with disabilities. These include parking, entrances and doorways, stairwells, bathrooms, and even coffee bars. The authors point out what many may not even consider. People with disabilities may need help in taking communion (p. 54).

Chapter three discusses social barriers. I found a comment by the authors jarring because it shows how our culture can affect how we see disabled people. We want to replace the old with those who are young and healthy. Many would not want a disabled person to sing in the choir because of “practical” concerns. Subconsciously, we might view a handicapped person as “less than” those who are not (p. 61).

In a summary statement, the authors ask if we see the disabled as a burden or a blessing. Such people can add to the ministry of a church

(p. 74), and that is the way we must see them. The book includes a story of a man with a bad stuttering problem. He asks the Lord to take it away because he cannot serve the Lord with such a disability (p. 85). He did not realize that God's grace is perfected in weakness.

The authors discuss people with disabilities in both the OT and the NT in chapters 4–5. They suggest that Naomi was disabled because of her age. Ruth ministered to her.

An interesting discussion revolves around 1 Cor 6:15-20. The authors say that our culture emphasizes healthy bodies that look good. We want our bodies to function properly and have a tendency to look down on bodies that do not (p. 91).

Another example is a woman with type 1 diabetes. She describes how she felt worthless and had nothing to add to the church. She even felt God did not love her. Through a friend, she learned she was a gift to the church and that other believers could learn from her. She also gave other Christians the opportunity to be a servant as they served her (p. 93).

Bartimaeus, in Mark 10, provides an example of how even believers can see those who are disabled. The crowds tell him to be quiet when he calls out for the Lord. They do not think he merits the attention of Christ (p. 102). Not surprisingly, the authors point to the disability of Paul with his thorn in the flesh (p. 105).

The meat of the book is the five-step plan for reaching out to disabled people in the community and the church. We are encouraged to notice them, engage with them, do our research, incorporate them in all the church does, and advocate for them (pp. 123-78).

The strength of this book is that it can wake up believers to a reality of which they might not be aware. We are called to be servants of others, and there is a large proportion of our population that we can serve. We might not even notice them. If we do, we might feel there is nothing we can do. But there is.

I had a sister with cerebral palsy. One of the authors of this book does as well. He speaks from experience. Individuals need the love and friendship of believers, sometimes even to be able to attend church. Can you think of a better way to serve another believer than to make it possible for them to worship with other believers? This book will give us ideas on how we might be able to serve in these ways.

A sobering part of this book is the stories that are told. Often, people with disabilities attend a church that reaches out to them. Doctrinal purity is not discussed. A person who needs a wheelchair will probably attend a church with easy access and has people who reach out to them. They so much appreciate the concern of others that they will attend a church with bad theology.

If there is any group of believers who should minister to people with special needs, it should be Free Grace people. We want them to hear the message of grace. After they believe, only we can teach them about rewards. If they endure through the difficulties of their disabilities, God will reward them greatly in His kingdom. Christ wants us to serve everyone around us, including those with disabilities. If we do, He will be pleased with us at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

I recommend this book. It does not discuss sound theology. But it does give us plenty of food for thought. The bottom line is this: When we reach out to believers (and unbelievers) around us who have unique needs, we are like Christ, the greatest Servant of all.

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