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Believing What the Lord Says (Mark 7:24-30)

Kenneth W. Yates 3

Does the “Drawing” of the Father in John 6:44 Support Calvinism?

Stanley Clark 19

What Is the New Testament Gospel?

Robert N. Wilkin 33

Gethsemane: A Prayer of Faith

Craig A. Blaising 47

Calvinism Ex Cathedra: A Review of John H. Gerstner’s

*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth:
A Critique of Dispensationalism* 61

Grace in the Arts — *The Garden*

Kathryn Wright 75

Book Reviews 79

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BELIEVING WHAT THE LORD SAYS (MARK 7:24-30)

KENNETH W. YATES

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

I. INTRODUCTION

In much theological writing and preaching today, faith is seen as a complicated matter. A synonym of *faith* is *belief*. How do we know whether we believe something? Specifically, how can a person know whether he believes what the Lord says?

In the complicated theological environment in which many find themselves, it is impossible to answer that question. When it comes to saving faith, for example, one author states that it involves three aspects: knowledge, assent, and trust. A person must believe certain things *about* Christ, and this must lead to belief *in* Christ. This can be called “trusting in Him.” But this is only the initial part of faith. For faith to occur, there must be “continuing trust and faithfulness.”¹ Certainly, a layman would read this and ask: “What does all that mean?”

The same question would be asked when one reads that faith is both passive and active. It is said to be both receptive and energetic. The “whole soul” is involved. This involves active obedience and commitment to what is believed.² A faith that does not produce works or a changed life is not faith.³ One is never told what that looks like or how much of a change needs to take place before it can be said that faith exists.

All these declarations make faith or belief appear to be something only a person with a PhD in philosophy could discuss. Fortunately,

¹ Brenda B. Colijn, “Saving Faith,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 345.

² John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He says, “Follow Me”?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 172; John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Pub., 2000), 225-26; William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical*, vol. 2 (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), 381-382.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 354.

many have stated what the average person knows intrinsically: A person has faith—he believes—when he is convinced that what he hears is true. He is persuaded that it is true. It is no more complicated than that.⁴

Paul states this simple fact in a direct manner. Theologians would do well to pay heed to his words in Rom 10:17: “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The “word of God” here is the gospel that both Christ and Paul preached.⁵

Regarding saving faith, a person has that faith the moment he believes that Jesus gives him eternal life that can never be lost. The person is convinced that what Jesus says about this issue is true (John 3:16; 5:24; 11:25-26, etc.). Every person who is spiritually saved—every person with eternal life—has, at some point in his life, been persuaded of the truth of Christ’s offer. This is the case even if the person stops believing it later.

But this definition of faith holds true regarding other things one believes. Faith is always being convinced that something is true. Christ spoke of many things in addition to how to receive eternal life. He spoke of rewards in the world to come, the need for His disciples to forgive and serve one another, the coming Great Tribulation, and that those who suffer for Him are blessed, to name a few. When a person is convinced that something Jesus taught is true, he has believed what Jesus said.

It is clear that a person can believe some things the Lord said, but not others. All believers have believed in Him for eternal life. Not all believers, however, believe Him when He says that He will reward His children in His kingdom and that some will be greater than others. It is common to hear Christians say, “I don’t believe that.”

Often, people speak of faith’s growing. They will comment that a person can have a little faith, or not enough faith. Usually, this means that the person with “little” faith believes something, but needs to believe it more. If they do not believe in rewards, for example, they are told they need to grow, or mature, in their faith. They might be told that their faith is small.

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018) 406; Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 2006), 271. Hodges refers to the excellent discussion about the meaning of faith in Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1983).

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 309-10. Hodges argues that the word *gospel* in the book of Romans includes more than how a person receives eternal life. This verse, Rom 10:17, would then be exhorting people to believe more than one thing.

But this is incorrect. Such a person does not have *little* faith. In that particular area, he has *no* faith. He is not convinced that what the Lord said is true. He may be a believer and have eternal life, but he does not believe something else the Lord taught. He needs to believe something new, something in addition to what he already believes.

When Christians read the Scriptures, they “hear” messages from the Lord. The question is: “Do you believe what you hear?” The more things you believe, the greater your faith.

In the Gospel of Mark, a Syro-Phoenician woman is an illustration of this. She has great faith because she believes many things she has heard from the Lord.

II. A CONTRAST

Immediately before recording the Lord’s encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman, Mark describes an incident in which Christ taught His disciples (7:17-23). Jesus had just been challenged by the Pharisees and scribes about eating food with unwashed hands. The religious leaders taught that such a practice defiled a person. They had elaborate rules that governed how a Jew who wanted to please God should clean his hands before eating.⁶ In their view, eating with clean hands was a way to be clean before the Lord. Christ, however, taught that these outward circumstances cannot make one clean or unclean before God (vv 14-16).

We are told that Jesus taught these truths to the “multitudes.” There would have been both believers and unbelievers in this crowd. What Jesus told them would benefit both. An unbeliever who thought he could earn his eternal salvation through the performance of outward ritualistic acts would see that this was not possible. The believers in the crowd, although not part of the inner circle of the Twelve, would have a clearer understanding of what was required of them if they wanted to follow Christ in discipleship. In the case of both believers and unbelievers, the traditions of the elders were not the answer. These traditions cannot provide eternal life. But neither are they the way to please God after one has eternal life by faith alone.

The disciples were also listening to what the Lord was teaching. Except for Judas, these men were believers. They had believed that Jesus was the Christ; they had eternal life in Him. They had been persuaded that these things were true (John 1:41; Luke 10:20). Now, however, the

⁶ John Murray, “Christian Baptism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 13, no. 2 (1950): 118.

Lord was teaching them new and different truths. It is clear that they did not believe what He was saying about these matters.

A. New Things to Believe (7:14-16)

The Lord was teaching things that were revolutionary to the people in the multitude. As will be seen, this included His inner group of disciples. In other words, believers were challenged by what He said. Would they believe what they heard from Him?

Jesus challenged the status quo and the conventional religious wisdom about defilement. He had done it as well on other occasions in the Gospel of Mark (1:40-45; 2:13-17, 18-22).⁷ As Jewish men, the disciples had grown up in a culture that taught that washing their hands before eating was a commandment of God. The OT taught that priests were to wash their hands before serving Him in the tabernacle (Exod 30:18-20). Wouldn't a direct application be that His people should wash their hands as they serve Him in their daily lives, as the religious leaders said? All their lives, the disciples had heard this taught in their synagogues and from respected rabbis. At the very least, it seemed that washing one's hands before eating was wise. Wouldn't doing a wise thing be pleasing to the Lord?

In addition, how could the Lord say that nothing going into a man from the outside defiled him (v 15)? The OT was full of prohibitions about what could and could not be eaten. Jesus seemed to be saying that He had a greater authority than what had been written in the OT.⁸ Did the disciples believe what Jesus was saying? It was hard for them to believe. It is clear that at this point in the ministry of Christ, they did not.

B. Understand and Hear

If believing in something means being convinced that it is true, it stands to reason that before a person can believe something, he must understand what he hears. You cannot believe something if you don't understand what is being said.

⁷ James R. Edwards, "The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 2 (1994): 225.

⁸ Brian J. Vickers, "Mark's Good News of the Kingdom of God," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 8, no. 3 (2004): 28.

Jesus told the multitude, including His disciples, to “understand” (v 14). A leading Greek lexicon defines this word as “challenging one’s way of thinking or to intellectually grasp what is being said.”⁹ The Lord wanted them to understand what He was saying. Nothing that goes into a man defiles him. It is what comes out of a person that defiles. A person who eats with washed hands, but does so with pride in his heart, is not pleasing to God because the sin of pride is present within him.

It also stands to reason that before one can understand something that is said, he needs to hear it. Three times, the Lord told the disciples “to hear” (v 14; twice in v 16).

It is obvious that they physically heard what the Lord was saying. So, the Lord obviously meant that He wanted something else. He wanted them to believe what He was saying. He wanted them to be convinced that it was true. It is also obvious that they did not believe. When they were alone with the Lord, they asked Him about this new teaching (v 17). The Lord rebuked them for not understanding (v 18). They had not comprehended what He was saying.¹⁰ By definition, they had not believed.

The disciples, who believed that Jesus is the Christ, did not believe what He said about eating with unwashed hands and about defilement. There may have been many reasons why this was the case. They needed time to ponder what the Lord had said. It challenged their traditions. It did not make sense. Maybe some thought that Jesus was picking a fight with the Pharisees and that, in this case at least, maybe the Pharisees had a point.

Some Christians may think it strange that the disciples did not believe what the Lord was saying. It seems illogical that a person could believe in Him for eternal life but not believe what He said about food. But it is clear that the Lord did, indeed, say things the disciples did not believe. Later, when Jesus told them that He would die, Peter spoke for the whole group and informed the Lord that He was wrong (Mark 8:32). They did not believe it, even though they heard the Lord plainly say it.

⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 972.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 674. The Lord uses two different words. The disciples do not understand, which is directly connected with the verb in verse 14. They do not “perceive,” which means they have not comprehended what He means.

The same thing is true today. Believers who have eternal life and have thus believed in Him for this wonderful truth do not believe other things that He has taught.

The disciples heard what the Lord said about eating and washing one's hands, but they did not believe what He was saying. Mark then tells his readers of another person who heard about the Lord and what He had said. She was also one who heard new things that challenged her. But, unlike the disciples, she understood and believed. She became an example for all of us.

III. A GREAT FAITH

One would expect the Lord's disciples to be the ones most likely to demonstrate great faith. If anybody heard new things from Him and was immediately convinced that what He was saying was true, it should have been each one of them. They had already believed that He was the promised Christ and that they had eternal life in Him. They travelled with Him and personally saw His miracles. They had the privilege of hearing His teachings, followed up with private and personal explanations of those teachings (v 17). They had even cast out demons and healed the sick by the authority Christ gave them (Mark 6:13). It would be logical that they would believe whatever they heard from His lips. The more new truths He taught, the more truths they should have believed. That is what "having a great faith" would mean. As has been demonstrated, however, they were sometimes not convinced that what He said was true. Their faith was not great.

Mark then gives an example of somebody who did have great faith. She is not one the reader would expect to be described in this way. She is thus a stark contrast when compared to the disciples.

A. An Unlikely Location (7:24)

The Lord had instructed the multitudes in Galilee, in the presence of Jewish religious leaders (7:1). These Jews and their leaders had a long history of studying the OT Scriptures. Jesus had come to their nation to teach them. They were a privileged group (Rom 3:1-2).

Christ was now in a completely different location. The people here were not as privileged.

In the Gospel of Mark, the Lord left the borders of Galilee on a couple of occasions (4:35; 6:32-44). Mark records that after the confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus completely withdrew from the nation—the only such complete withdrawal recorded by Mark—and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. These were two prominent cities on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This was the only time the Lord went to a place that was completely occupied by Gentiles.¹¹

This was an area northwest of Israel. It does not say that He went into the cities themselves. In fact, it seems that He did not do so, because He entered a house and did not want anyone to know that He was in the region. This implies that He stayed in the countryside where there were no large crowds. This area would have been about 35 miles from the Galilean town of Capernaum from which He probably travelled.

Evidently, Christ wanted time alone with His disciples. This is reminiscent of earlier occasions in Mark's Gospel when, for the same reason, Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds (1:45; 3:7; 6:32). He wanted to remove Himself and the Twelve from the opposition of the religious leaders. This move by the Lord indicated that the nation was going to reject Him. Bad times were coming for the disciples. This retreat would have given them an opportunity to rest, eat, and for Him to teach them. This would prepare them for what they were going to face. As the previous section showed, the disciples were not always open to believing what He taught them. He needed this time to focus on the things they needed to understand (v 18).

In the OT, Tyre and Sidon are presented as the enemies of Israel. The historian Josephus, writing in the first century, said that the people of Tyre were the Jews' bitterest enemies.¹²

This connects this section with the previous one. The people of this region were unclean in the eyes of the religious leaders. These leaders washed their hands when they went to the market because they might have contact with a Gentile. Jesus was entering a region where almost everyone with whom He would come into contact was unclean. According to the Jewish leaders, the Lord was definitely defiling Himself

¹¹ That does not mean that there weren't Jews in the region, since Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. But they would have been a minority. When Jesus went to the area of Gadara in chapter five, there would have been more of a mixture of Jews and Gentiles.

¹² Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.70.

by making this trip. This would have been part of the tradition of the elders that Jesus had just rejected (vv 6-13). In addition, the Lord's actions declared all food clean (v 19). He would now go to a woman who was considered unclean. He would talk to her about eating food.

It would be very strange indeed if the Lord were to find great faith in this location and with this woman. He had not found it in Galilee with those who had believed in Him and were part of the privileged multitude. He had not even found it with His intimate disciples.

B. A Woman Who Had Heard

Even though the Lord desired to be alone with His disciples at this time, His presence in the area could not be hidden. The woman in this account is an example of why that was the case. She had "heard about Him." In the immediate context, this means that she had heard that He was in the area. But, as will be seen, it means more.

At first glance, the very idea that she had heard about Him seems strange. This was the first time Jesus had visited this area, so it would be natural to ask how anybody there knew anything about Him, or why it would be of any concern that He was staying in a nearby home.

The answer is found in Mark 3:8-11. Even though Jesus had never been in their region, the people there had come to Galilee. These visitors from Tyre and Sidon had seen and heard Him. They were well aware of His ability to heal the sick and cast out demons. Teaching was a major part of Christ's ministry in Galilee, so they had heard Him teach. Those who returned to Tyre and Sidon after visiting Galilee would have spread the word of what they had seen and heard about the Man from Nazareth.

The verb *heard* is the same word used in vv 14 and 16. This also connects this woman with the previous episode. The disciples had "heard" things from the Lord, but had a hard time understanding (vv 17-18). How would this woman respond to what she had been told about Him? It is possible that she was one of those who had visited Galilee and had personally seen and heard Him. Then she heard that He was visiting the region where she lived. But even if she was one who had only heard these things from other eyewitnesses, she had "heard" nonetheless. The things she had heard from Him were hard to understand. They were spectacular teachings that challenged her background. These were ideas that were new to her. The disciples struggled when confronted by such

ideas (v 18). She would respond differently and would be a rebuke to the disciples.

C. The Woman Recognized His Authority

If the disciples were questioning the Lord's authority to declare all food clean, or regarding the need to wash one's hands before eating, this woman seems to have had no such difficulty when confronted with His authority and majesty.

She had a problem, and she recognized that only Someone with great authority could help her. She had a daughter at home who had an unclean spirit. This also connects this woman with the previous section. Jesus dealt with the topic of unclean things, such as unclean food and eating with unwashed hands. This woman lived in an unclean area, and her loved one was possessed by an unclean being.

Her situation was dire. But having heard of Jesus' power to cast out demons, she came to Him and fell at His feet. This is not an indication that she recognized that Jesus was God. Nobody in the Gospels understood this wonderful truth. But it is clear that she had a profound respect for Him and a willingness to submit to His power and authority. She was humble before the Lord.

The woman's act of submission reminds the reader of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:33 and of Jairus in 5:22.¹³ Both fell at the feet of Jesus, relying on Him for a healing miracle. Those two individuals were seen as people of faith.¹⁴ This woman is, as well. She believes what she has heard about the Lord. She is convinced that it is true. In the case of the woman with the issue of blood and Jairus, they wanted a touch by the Lord. This woman will be different.

Mark wants to stress that this woman was not a Jew. She was a Greek. This does not mean that she was born in Greece, but that she was characterized as a woman influenced by Greek culture. She was a Gentile, which is also brought out by the comment that she was a Syro-Phoenician by birth. This means that she was from the area of Syria and Phoenicia on the pagan coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

If the Lord's teachings about food and washing one's hands were new to the disciples, one can only imagine how new to this woman

¹³ The exact same verb is used in 5:33, and a cognate (similar) verb is used in 5:22.

¹⁴ Barry K. Mershon, Jr., "Mark, in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 86; William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 194.

were the things she had heard about Jesus. She had grown up in a pagan country and still lived there. She had heard that God had sent to her people's enemy nation a Jewish Man with the power and authority to heal her daughter. This Man would have denounced the idols that she and the people of her country looked to for help. Her neighbors would have told her to consult these false gods in order to have the demon removed from her daughter. Jesus' teachings certainly challenged what she had been taught. But it is clear that she believed what He had said. She believed He had authority and power that the pagan idols worshipped in Tyre and Sidon did not.

Her estimation of Christ's authority and power is seen in her persistence. Since Jesus did not want people to know He was in the area, the woman had to seek Him out. She heard that He was in the house and came to Him. She "kept asking" that He would cast the demon out of her daughter. The word *kept* is in the imperfect tense; she repeatedly made the request of the Lord. The implication is that the Lord was not eager to help her, and that she exhibited perseverance in attempting to persuade Him to grant her request. She knew she was a Gentile and that He had come to the Jewish people. Her humility is exhibited here in the sense that she kept coming to Him for help, all the while realizing that He was not obligated to give it. She could only rely on His mercy and grace and had no right to demand action from Him.

D. She Was Humble before Him

Hand in hand with her belief in His authority, this woman was humble before the Lord. The words Christ spoke to the woman seem cruel to modern readers. They are not. But they do reveal how the woman perceived herself before the Jewish Christ.

If the woman's persistent request that Jesus heal her daughter showed that she recognized that she could not make any demands upon Him, the Lord's initial response to her requests would seem to support that idea. He appeared reluctant to help her. He told her that it is necessary for the children to be filled first. With the emphasis on this woman's being a Gentile, it is clear that the Jews are the "children." Since she is not a Jew, she is not a child. The word for *filled* is the same verb used in 6:42, where—with the feeding of the 5000—Jesus fed His sheep. Jesus had come to minister to the Jews and to meet their needs.

He was their Shepherd and had not come for the Gentiles.¹⁵ He had come to offer the kingdom of God to the Nation of Israel.

In this context, it is probable that Jesus had a particular group of Jews in mind. The Lord was in the house with the Twelve. He was wanting to feed them. They had much to learn, and even though they were slow to believe what He was telling them, they were His priority. He seemed to be saying that He did not have time for the woman. Her request was interfering with His ministry. It was not appropriate for the Shepherd to leave His sheep to feed one who was not part of His flock.

There was, however, a glimmer of hope for this woman. Jesus said He should feed the children “first.” In the parallel passage in Matt 15:26, the word *first* does not occur. In Mark’s account the word might indicate that after the children are fed, this woman and her daughter can be as well.

If the woman found comfort in this hint of help, the Lord’s next words could have put a damper on any enthusiasm she may have had. He said that it would not be good for Him to give the children’s bread to the dogs. These words seem especially harsh coming from the lips of the Lord. They seem to reflect the views of the religious leaders in the previous section. Those leaders would have seen this Gentile woman as being unclean and vastly inferior to the Jews, like a dog compared to a child. This comment by the Lord deserves our attention.

The word *bread* plays a vital role in this section of Mark. After Jesus fed the 5000 with bread (6:36-44), the religious leaders claimed that the disciples were unclean because they ate their bread with unclean hands (7:2, 5). In her conversation with the Lord, this woman wanted to be ministered to by the “bread” that Jesus had. She would have been unclean in the eyes of the Jews, and certainly not “clean” enough to eat the bread of the Jewish Christ. But she was asking for that bread. Jesus seems to be saying that the bread that He had was not for her, at least not at that time.

The word for *dog* is an interesting one. The word *little* does not occur in the Greek, but is in the translation because of an ending on the word *dog*. With this ending, we would say that the word refers to a house dog or pet. There was another word that would be used for a wild dog on the street.¹⁶ Jesus was telling her that because she was a

¹⁵ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 109.

¹⁶ BDAG, 575.

Gentile, she did not have the status of a child, but of a house pet. It is not a statement of her worth, but of practice in a home. People do not take food from the plate of a child and give it to the family pet. Because Jesus was feeding the disciples at this time, it was not appropriate for Him to meet her needs. It was not a question of worth, but of priority.

The entire account shows that the Lord was not being cruel to the woman. He was obviously testing her persistence. He also wanted to see what she believed. She responded well.

The woman took up the familial illustration that Jesus used. She pointed out that it is not necessary that the children eat first and the pet dog later. Neither is it necessary to deprive the children of their food by taking it and giving it to the dog. In the home, that is not how it works.

The woman answered Jesus by calling Him “Lord.” This is the only place in the Gospel of Mark where a person calls Jesus by that title. As mentioned above, it is highly doubtful that she recognized His deity. The term can simply be one of respect. This is a case where somebody says something that has a deeper meaning than they realize. This title and her falling at His feet indicate the esteem that she had for Him.

She pointed out that she could eat at the same time as the children. That is the way it is done, after all, alluding to His illustration. The pet dogs in a family lie under the table and eat the crumbs that the children drop. The children are not deprived in any way by the dogs’ sharing in the food at the same time.

In Jesus’ illustration, she was a pet dog. Her enemies were the children. The illustration came from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth. She was not offended, and acknowledged that the One who spoke those words spoke the truth.

One writer makes some interesting observations about this woman that add to the picture of her humility before the Lord. Tyre was a wealthy city, with certain wealthy citizens. The description of her as “Greek” probably refers to her cultural upbringing and indicates that she was one of the people in the upper class. The word for *bed* probably points to a more expensive kind of bedding. She lived in a region that despised the Jews, but she humbled herself before Christ, a Galilean peasant. If this is true, it is striking that she accepted the fact that the Jewish fishermen in the house with the Lord rightfully took precedence over her.¹⁷

¹⁷ Keldie Paroschi, “Following the Crumbs: Revisiting the Authenticity of Jesus’s Encounter with the Syrophoenician Woman,” *JETS* 64 (2021): 518-20.

E. What She Believed

In the Lord's illustration using children and dogs, the "crumbs" are part of the bread that the children eat. Jesus was feeding the Jews, especially His disciples, this bread. This included His teaching and healing ministries. They were a blessed people. But she could share in that blessing. Her daughter could benefit from this bread. Her faith in His power and authority was so great that she believed that if she received only the residue of what He had, it would be enough for her daughter. In other words, she believed what many others did not. He was so great that even those for whom He did not come could experience great miracles with His "leftovers."

She also believed that she did not need to be a priority. Anything He did for her would not impact the Jews. Just as the children at a table did not miss the crumbs the dogs ate, her receiving His blessing would not impact the disciples in any way. That is how great she believed Him to be. As will be seen, the greatness of her faith was also seen in her belief that He did not have to go to her home or touch her daughter in order for the girl to be healed.

Jesus was clearly impressed by this woman's faith. Because of what she said to Him, He told her that she should go. The demon had been cast out of her daughter. The verb *cast out* is in the perfect tense. This means that the healing had already taken place.

This woman provides a model of faith to the reader of Mark. The verb *go* that Jesus uses with the woman is also used after the healing of the paralyzed man in 2:11, the demoniac in 5:19, and the woman with the issue of blood in 5:34. All these people are pictures of believers in the Gospel of Mark.¹⁸

Based upon these facts, it appears almost a certainty that Mark is presenting this woman as one who has believed that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews. It is not unreasonable to conclude that she had not only heard of His ability to heal, but that she had also heard about His teachings. She believed that the crumbs of the Jewish Christ were enough to heal her daughter. Matthew makes this point explicitly. He records that the woman called Jesus by the Messianic title, "Son of David" (Matt 15:22). By recognizing that Jesus was the promised King of Israel, she believed something that most of the Jews and religious leaders in Israel

¹⁸ The Lord forgives the sins of the paralyzed man. The former demoniac becomes an evangelist for the Lord. See, Lane, *Mark*, 187-88.

did not.¹⁹ Her faith, then, connects this account with the previous one. She is contrasted with the leaders who do not believe.²⁰

The magnitude of her faith is also brought out in Matthew. Jesus speaks of this woman's "great" faith (Matt 15:28). There are only two people in the Gospels whom Jesus says have great faith. They are the Gentile centurion (Matt 8:10) and this Gentile woman.

If the centurion in Matthew 8 is a picture of a believer, this woman is as well.²¹ Both are Gentiles. Both come to the Lord so that somebody they love will be healed. Both are commended for their great faith and are contrasted with the faith that the Lord does not find in Israel. It would seem inconceivable that these two were unbelievers and that the Lord did not address their need for eternal life.²²

The woman's faith is also seen in the fact that this is the only miracle in Mark that is done over a distance (the same is true for the Gentile centurion in Matthew 8). The Lord simply told her that her daughter was healed. That was good enough for her. Many others believed that Jesus could heal and cast out demons. This woman believed that, and something else as well as. She believed that distance was no obstacle to His ability. Not surprisingly, the woman went to her house and found that it was just as the Lord had said.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mark tells us the Syro-Phoenician woman "had heard about" Jesus. In the immediate context, this means that she heard He had come to the region in which she lived. But it is also evident that she had heard about Him in the sense of who He is and what He could do.

What had she heard, and how did she hear it? Maybe she was one of the visitors from Tyre and Sidon who had heard Him teach and seen Him heal (Mark 3:8). Maybe she had been told by those who had.

¹⁹ Hal M. Haller Jr., "The Gospel according to Matthew," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 42.

²⁰ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 56.

²¹ Dillow, *Reign*, 349.

²² Theodore W. Jennings Jr. and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, "Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5–13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 492.

Maybe she had heard some of these things about Him in the synagogue in either Tyre or Sidon.

But the account in Mark's Gospel leaves no doubt about what she heard. Jesus was the Jewish Christ. If she was a believer, which seems evident, she heard that this Christ would establish His kingdom and that His throne would last forever (2 Sam 7:12-16).²³ She heard that Jesus could heal. He was obviously merciful.

Her actions and words when she came to Him reflect that she was convinced that all these things were true. She believed all of them. She called Him by a title of profound respect. She humbled herself before Him in various ways. She believed in His authority.

She had undoubtedly heard that Gentiles will be a part of His kingdom. His mercy will extend to her. She believed it, even if she were not His priority.

Perhaps she had heard how the servant of a Gentile centurion was healed over a distance (Matt 8:8-13). If she had not heard about that particular case, she still believed that He could do it. This faith sprang from what she had already become convinced of: The long-awaited King of the Jews, who will establish an eternal kingdom and who can heal all manner of disease, was not limited by space.

This woman is a model of faith. She is a stinging rebuke to the disciples. She believed many different truths about Jesus. These truths should have seemed incredulous to someone in her situation, but she was convinced that all of them were true.

Like the disciples, she believed that Jesus is the Christ. Like them, she knew she had eternal life. She and the disciples were the same in this regard. But they were different in another. The disciples were not convinced that eating with unwashed hands would not defile them, even after the Lord told them it would not. This woman, by contrast, was convinced that Jesus would be merciful to her, despite her national origin. He is so great that the even the crumbs of His power could do things that nobody else—even supposed gods—could. She was convinced that at His word a demon would be cast out of her daughter even though the girl was not present. That is why she had “great” faith.

Mark wants the reader of his Gospel to see her as an example. Every believer is challenged by certain things the Lord says in His Word. The

²³ John C. Hutchison, “Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 161.

message is clear. As believers we should believe what the Lord says, even if it challenges our traditions and seems difficult to believe. When reading Mark 7, our prayer should be that we will be like the Syro-Phoenician woman.

DOES THE “DRAWING” OF THE FATHER IN JOHN 6:44 SUPPORT CALVINISM?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Calvinism maintains that in eternity past God elected, or chose, certain people for eternal salvation.¹ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn summarized “Total Inability or Total Depravity” in this way:

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not—indeed he cannot—choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit’s assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation, but is itself part of God’s gift of salvation—it is God’s gift to the sinner, not the sinner’s gift to God.²

Electing individuals to be saved is considered necessary because man’s human nature was hopelessly corrupted at the fall. As a result, sinners are “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1-3). They are virtually spiritual corpses. They are unable even to respond to God until He regenerates those He has chosen. Once regenerated, they are able to exercise saving faith.

Palmer explains that for election to work it must be irresistible:

If it is true that God has unconditionally elected some to be saved...then of course, the Spirit has to work in an irresistible way. Otherwise, everyone because of his

¹ Calvinists say that election is necessary because man is “totally depraved.”

² David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, Second Edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2004), 5-6.

depravity would reject Christ, and then there would be no foreordination to eternal life. God could not be sure that those whom he elected would believe and be saved. The certainty of election means that the Spirit works certainly and that he accomplishes what God foreordained. Without the irresistible grace of God, there could be no foreordination or election.³

Palmer also explains that irresistible grace is critical to the entire system of Calvinism, or TULIP:

The five points of Calvinism all depend on each other. If **T** is true, then **U** is true, and so are **L**, and **I**, and **P**. *They all hang or fall together* [emphasis added].⁴

Steele, Thomas, and Quinn explain how irresistible grace works:

In addition to the outward general call to salvation, which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation...By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly *draws* [emphasis added] sinners to Christ...The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.⁵

Steele, Thomas, and Quinn couch their explanation in soothing terms: "The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate," and the sinner comes "freely and willingly to Christ." But the working of the Spirit is also *invincible* (that is, it overwhelms the sinner such that he can't resist). It *causes* the sinner to cooperate.

The notion that the Holy Spirit does this by irresistibly *drawing* the sinner to Christ also sounds benign. But as explained below, the Calvinist conception of "draw" is hardly benign.

³ Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points*, 7.

II. CALVINISM’S UNDERSTANDING OF *HELKUO* IN JOHN 6:44

The Calvinist’s primary proof text that God irresistibly draws sinners is John 6:44: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Olson notes that for some Calvinists, the drawing is so irresistible that they prefer to use the word “compel.”⁶ To other Calvinists, “draw” can be irresistible to the point of “dragging.” This is seen in this statement by Badger commenting on Palmer’s argument:

Palmer uses John 6:37, 44 to argue that Jesus taught irresistible grace...Palmer would argue that the certainty of the result⁷ as well as the meaning of the term ‘draw’ demonstrates the doctrine. Draw, he argues, is used of drawing fish irresistibly in a net (John 21:6, 11) [Palmer 371], of Peter drawing his sword irresistibly to cut off Malchus’ ear (John 18:10), Paul and Silas being drawn or *dragged* into the marketplace (Acts 16:19), and Paul being *dragged* out of the temple (Acts 21:30) by an irresistible mob [Palmer 372]. He says that in each of these cases the object is *drawn irresistibly* [Palmer 373].⁸

Badger then summarizes Palmer’s point: “The same force which extracts the fish drew Peter’s sword. The force that transported Paul and Silas couldn’t be resisted. It was too great. He compares and equates such force with the compulsion the Father must use toward His depraved, helpless elect.”⁹

⁶ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002), 241. He makes particular reference to Sproul and Boettner. Interestingly though, Calvin’s own view was more moderate: “...as to the kind of ‘drawing,’ it is not violent, so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant,” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 1:257. Quoted in Robert J. Kerrey *How Does God Draw People to Believe in Jesus?* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2019), 31.

⁷ Calvinists reason that since hopelessly depraved sinners do come to Christ in response to God’s drawing, the drawing must be irresistible.

⁸ Anthony B. Badger, *Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology* (N.p.: N.p., 2013), 269.

⁹ Ibid.

To the Calvinist then, “drawing” is God’s irresistible work that “inevitably brings sinners to salvation”; it is so compelling that “draw” virtually means “drag.”

But is the meaning “draw irresistibly” to the point of “drag” the only option for “draw”? A study of the context of John 6:44, as well as how the word is used elsewhere, demonstrate that there is a better way to understand the word and what Jesus meant by, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

III. THE LARGER CONTEXT OF JOHN 6:44

John 6:44 is found in a conversation that Jesus has with unbelieving Jews. They take exception to what He is teaching:

⁴¹ Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.” ⁴² They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?” ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him* [emphasis added]; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.”

In vv 41-42, John describes the grumbling reaction of the multitude to Jesus’ claim to have come down from heaven (v 38). In the Bible, grumbling is often associated with unbelief. Just as their forefathers’ unbelief at Massah and Meribah (Exod 17:7) provoked grumbling against Moses, the multitude’s unbelief (v 41) led to grumbling about Jesus: “How can this man be so presumptuous as to claim that He came down from heaven? We know who His parents are (v 42).”

In response to their unbelief, Jesus states what both Calvinists and non-Calvinists agree on. Sinners don’t seek God (Rom 3:10b–11). For sinners to come to Christ, God must “draw” them (John 12:32). The issue is, what does this drawing involve?

IV. IS “DRAG” THE ONLY MEANING FOR *HELKUO*?

For his doctoral dissertation, Robert Kerrey analyzed forty-two instances in which *helkuō* is used in Bible-related literature: eight in the NT, twenty-six in the Septuagint, and eight in the Apocrypha. He categorizes these according to the three possible definitions given in Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich (BDAG). Only the first two definitions are germane to this discussion.

Kerrey quotes the lexicon: “The first definition is: ‘to move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, draw, with implication that the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of pers. [person] is unwilling to do so voluntarily, in either case with implication of exertion on the part of the mover.’”¹⁰

Kerrey then comments on this first meaning for *helkuō*:

Six of the eight occurrences of *helkuō* in the New Testament are listed by BDAG as examples reflecting this meaning. In John 18:10, Peter “drew” a sword. In John 21:6, fishermen try to “haul” a fishing net into a boat, and then in John 21:11, Peter “hauled” the net ashore. In Acts 21:30, Paul was “dragged” out of the temple by the people. In Acts 16:19, Paul and Silas were “dragged” before the rulers by business owners. In James 2:6, the rich “drag” the oppressed into court. Under this definition, the active drawing is said to be physical and forcible.¹¹

These examples, of course, are the same ones to which Palmer refers. But Kerrey goes on to quote what else Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich say about *helkuō*: “The second definition is: *to draw a pers. in the direction of values for inner life, draw, attract*, an extended fig. use of meaning 1.”

The other two instances of *helkuō* in the New Testament are listed by BDAG as examples carrying this second meaning. One is John 12:32, where Jesus

¹⁰ Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 251, emphasis in original.

¹¹ Kerrey, *How*, 31.

says, "...and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (ESV). The other example is our text, John 6:44, where the Father "draws" people to believe. Under this definition, the active drawing is figurative, nonphysical, and attractional.

Based on these definitions, the nature of one entity drawing another is either physical and forcible according to the first definition, or non-physical and attractional according to the second. The authors of this lexicon (BDAG) cast their vote for John 6:44 as an example of a non-physical, attractional drawing.¹²

Olson states succinctly the two different ways that the verb *helkuō* is used: "Note that the primary literal meaning of the verb 'to draw, to drag' has reference to physical objects, whereas figurative usage in reference to the inner life of a person is appropriately not coercive."¹³ Physical objects must be dragged. They cannot come on their own. People however, when appropriately attracted, can respond and come of their own will.

"Draw," when used of persons being drawn non-physically, does not have an aspect of irresistibility. Instead, the best way to understand Jesus' statement in v 44 is not that the Father imposes belief to bring people to Christ, but that He works to "draw" them to Christ by means best described as attracting, influencing, persuading, and enlightening them.¹⁴

V. GOD DRAWS MEN TO CHRIST THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD

It is clear in John 6 that God draws men to Christ through the Word of God. Calvinists seem to miss this important point in the context. But Jesus highlights the role the Word plays in the process of drawing people in 6:45: "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has *heard and learned* [emphasis added] from the Father, comes to Me."

Kerrey points out that, "Jesus connects the drawing to teaching, saying, 'It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to

¹² Ibid., 135-36.

¹³ Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 240.

¹⁴ Adapted from Kerrey, *How Does God Draw*, 156.

me.”¹⁵ “In v 44 *the ones whom the Father draws come to Jesus*; likewise, here in v 45, *the ones whom the Father teaches come to Jesus*.¹⁶ So both the *drawn* and the *taught* come, suggesting that the Father’s teaching is intrinsic to His drawing.”¹⁷

It is widely agreed that v 45, “And they shall all be taught of God,” is a paraphrase of Isa 54:13. In chapter 54, Isaiah is describing how God will embrace Israel anew when she receives her Messiah. When the Lord had cast them aside it was as if they had been widowed. But God now reassures Israel that she does not have to fear being shamed for her past behavior:

“The reproach of your widowhood will be remembered no more...*For the Lord has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected* [emphasis added] says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid my face from you for a moment; but *with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer*” (Isa 54:4, 6-8, NASB), emphasis added.

Isaiah is saying that despite God’s previous anger with the nation (54:8), He will call, or draw, the people of Israel back unto Himself. He will woo the people of Israel like a husband woos his wife with tender and persuasive words.

Jesus skips vv 9-12 of Isaiah 54 and quotes 13a: “All your sons will be taught of the Lord.” Even though Jesus doesn’t quote the second half of the verse, “and the wellbeing of your sons will be great” (13b; “great” in the Hebrew text is *shalom*), the meaning fits His point: When God’s people are taught of the Lord and respond, their lives are made complete, or whole. They are at peace with God, with one another, and with themselves.

So, the connection between teaching and wooing in John 6 is that in the same way that husbands woo, or draw, their wives with persuasive words, so God, in His great love for people, woos and draws them

¹⁵ Kerrey, *How Does God Draw*, 148.

¹⁶ Köstenberger comments, “In Judaism it was held that to learn the Torah was to be taught by God himself” (Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004], 214).

¹⁷ Kerrey, *How Does God Draw*, 148, emphasis in original.

to Himself. One of the primary ways that He does that is through the teaching ministry of his Word.

It is not just John 6:44 that identifies the instruction of the Scriptures as a way God draws people, in this case unbelievers, unto Himself. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus points out that the OT Scriptures were given to point to Him as Messiah (5:37-40, 45-47; 7:14-18; 8:56-58; see also Luke 24:44).

The apostle Paul also testifies that the Word of God is one of the ways (perhaps the primary way) God brings unbelievers to faith: “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:16). The Scriptures have a supernatural ability to convict men of “sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8-11), and persuade them that Jesus is the Savior they need. Through faith in Him, they can receive eternal life.

Of course, the Scriptures are not the only way that the Father draws men to the Son,¹⁸ but the fact that Jesus quotes Isaiah in John 6:45 indicates that it is an important way. But if the Scriptures are God’s way of bringing people to Christ, why were these Jews who were steeped in the OT not more responsive?

In John 5:38-40, Jesus explains the reason why: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about me...(yet) you are *unwilling* [emphasis added] to come to Me” (5:39–40). The evidence was there. It was not that these people were not elect. It was hardness of heart. The unbelieving Jews were simply unwilling to believe their own Scriptures. Olson observes that it was not just during Jesus’ ministry that God intended the Scriptures to bring men to Christ. This is the same method that He uses today:

So, how are people drawn to Christ? The context of John 6:44 makes clear that they were drawn by the testimony of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures, as contemporary Jews checked out the supernatural credentials of Jesus of

¹⁸ Kerrey, *How Does God Draw*, 168-73, describes other ways that God draws unbelievers to Christ, especially during the earthly ministry of Christ. He summarizes them on page 173: “...1) the person of Jesus Himself offered as the bread of life; 2) the Word of God from which we hear and learn; 3) authenticating signs; 4) progressive illumination where human receptivity brings more divine truth; 5) interpersonal proclamation of the gospel; 6) Christ’s loving sacrifice on the cross; 7) the Holy Spirit’s ministry of reproof; 8) creation, which testifies to God’s existence; and 9) the godly behavior of believers.” He acknowledges there may be others.

Nazareth and concluded with Nathaniel, “*Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel*” (Jn. 1:49). Now since Pentecost, God has used the apostolic message and ministry, working mediately through Christian witnesses. It is as simple as that.¹⁹

An additional observation can be made about verse 45b: “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” Learning here is coupled with hearing. It’s possible to hear without learning. “Learning” implies being changed by what has been heard. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus’ admonitions to listen or hear are set forth as something not to be engaged in passively. This is seen in the Greek text where Jesus’ admonition, “whoever has ears to hear, let him hear” includes an imperative: “Let him hear” (Matt 11:15). Hearing carries with it the responsibility of responding. If it was something that was automatic, the Lord would not command it. That is why it is those who “learned” from the OT Scriptures who came to Jesus in faith. The unbelieving Jews, on the other hand, heard the same Scriptures, but stubbornly refused to believe. As stated above, they were unwilling to do so.

VI. CONCLUSION

Calvinists contend that John 6:44, “no one can come to me unless the Father draws him,” supports irresistible grace. This means that God overpowers the elect to figuratively “drag” them to Christ.

Kerry demonstrates that “drag” is an appropriate meaning for *helkuō* when used of inanimate objects such as a fishing net or sword. But Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich state that a second meaning of the word is to be used if it applies to animate objects. In these cases, the word has the notion of “woo,” “draw,” “entice.” Thus, God’s drawing of lost sinners is not coercive. The use of *helkuō* in the Septuagint of Isaiah 54:13 likens the drawing of a nation estranged from God to that of a husband who woos his wife with tender words.

The best way to understand Jesus’ statement in v 44 is not that the Father imposes belief to bring people to Christ, but that He works to “draw” them to Christ by means best described as attracting, influencing, persuading, and enlightening them.²⁰ So while inanimate objects are dragged; animate objects (people) are drawn or attracted.

¹⁹ Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 241, emphasis in original.

²⁰ Adapted from Kerrey, *How Does God Draw*, 156.

As noted by Olson above, this is the way “draw” is used in John 6:44 because people, not inanimate objects are in view. Furthermore, Jesus says that God draws sinners to Himself by the hearing of the Word (Rom 10:14), which convicts sinners of sin, righteousness and judgment—that is, it persuades them of their need of a Savior.

A correct understanding of John 6:44 does not prove that all of Calvinism is invalid. What it does is demonstrate that v 44 cannot be used to support the I in TULIP.

VII. APPENDIX

This chart is from Robert Kerrey’s book, *How Does God Draw People to Believe in Jesus?*, 138-40.

All Uses of <i>helkuō</i> in the New Testament and Septuagint					
Reference	Verbal Sense of <i>helkuō</i>	Entities Drawing	Entities Drawn	Definition (BDAG)	Willing?
Deut 21:3	Heifer draws a yoke	Impersonal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg. 5:14	People draw a staff	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 20:2	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 20:15	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 5:17	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 20:25	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 20:35	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Judg 20:46	Men draw a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
2 Sam 22:17	The Lord draws David	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
Neh 9:30	The Lord draws along with Israel	Personal	None	3. Intransitive	Does not apply

Job 20:28	Destruction draws a house	Impersonal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Job 28:18	You draw wisdom	Personal	Impersonal	2. Non-physical	Does not apply
Job 39:10	An ox draws furrows	Impersonal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Ps 10:9 (9:30 LXX)	The wicked draw the poor	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Willing
Ps 118:131	The psalmist draws a breath	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Prov 25:20	Vinegar draws a sore or soda	Impersonal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Eccl 1:5	The sun draws along to its place	Impersonal	None	3. Intransitive	Does not apply
Eccl 2:3	Qoheleth draws his body with wine	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Song 1:4	Women (or the bride) draw(s) the groom	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Willing
Hab 1:15	The wicked draw the righteous	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Unwilling
Isa 10:15	A person draws a saw	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Jer 14:6	Donkeys draw wind	Impersonal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Jer 31:3 (38:3 LXX)	The Lord draws Israel	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
Jer 38:13	Men draw Jeremiah	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
Dan 4:14 (4:17 LXX)	Nebuchadnezzar draws leaves from a tree	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Dan 7:10	A stream of fire draws along from the throne	Impersonal	None	3. Intransitive	Does not apply

New Testament Uses of <i>helkuō</i>					
John 6:44	The father draws one who comes	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
John 12:32	Jesus draws all people	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
John 18:10	Peter draws a sword	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
John 21:6	Fishermen draw a net	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
John 21:11	Peter draws a net	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
Acts 16:19	Business owners draw Paul and Silas	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Acts 21:30	People draw Paul	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Jas 2:6	The rich draw the oppressed	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Extra-canonical					
1 Macc 10:82	Simon draws troops	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
3 Macc 4:7	Captors draw captives	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
3 Macc 5:49	Infants draw milk	Personal	Impersonal	1. Physical	Does not apply
4 Macc 11:9	Guards draw a brother	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
4 Macc 14:13	Parental love draws everyone	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
4 Macc 15:11	Love draws a mother	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
Wis 19:4	Fate draws enemies	Impersonal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
Sir 28:19	A person draws the tongue's yoke	Personal	Impersonal	2. Non-physical	Does not apply

Willingness to be Drawn Among Persons Drawn Physically					
II Sam 22:17	The Lord draws David	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
Ps 10:9 (9:30 LXX)	The wicked draw the poor	Personal	Personal	1. Physical 2. Non-physical	Willing
Song 1:4	Women (or the bride) draw(s) the groom	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Willing
Jer 38:13 (45:13 LXX)	Men draw Jeremiah	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
1 Macc 10:82	Simon draws troops	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Willing
Hab 1:15	The wicked draw the righteous	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Unwilling
Acts 16:19	Business owners draw Paul and Silas	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Acts 21:30	People draw Paul	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Jas 2:6	The rich draw the oppressed	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
3 Macc 4:7	Captors draw captors	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
4 Macc 11:9	Guards draw a brother	Personal	Personal	1. Physical	Unwilling
Willingness to be Drawn Among Persons Drawn Non-Physically					
Ps 10:9 (9:30 LXX)	The wicked draw the poor	Personal	Personal	1. Physical 2. Non-physical	Willing
Song 1:4	Women (or the bride) draw(s) the groom ♥	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Willing

Jer 31:3 (38:3 LXX)	The Lord draws Israel ♥	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
John 6:44	The father draws one who comes ♥	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
John 12:32	Jesus draws all people ♥	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
4 Macc 14:13	Parental love draws everyone ♥	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
4 Macc 15:11	Love draws a mother ♥	Personal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
Wis 19:4	Fate draws enemies	Impersonal	Personal	2. Non-physical	Willing
Hab 1:15	The wicked draw the righteous	Personal	Personal	1. Physical or 2. Non-physical	Unwilling
♥ The heart symbol “highlights the prevalent theme of love as an attractational force that draws.” Kerrey, 145.					

WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL?

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I. INTRODUCTION

The word *gospel* is part of modern Christianese. “I shared the gospel with my parents this past weekend,” means, “This past weekend I told my parents how they could be born again.” The same truth is conveyed by, “I gave the gospel to...”

I quickly adopted that way of speaking after I believed in Jesus for everlasting life. Every Jesus person I knew (we called ourselves *Jesus people* in the early seventies) used the term *gospel* to refer to the message of life, the saving message.

Looking back at my early writings, I see that I often used the word *gospel* to refer to the saving message.

But is that accurate? Is the expression *the gospel* equivalent to the saving message in the NT?

It wasn't until long after I received my doctorate that I changed my thinking about *the gospel*. But once I did, I found the change to be very helpful.

The NT rarely uses the expression *the gospel* to refer to the message of life—the saving message. The primary place where *gospel* means “the saving message” is the Book of Galatians.

Paul told the Galatians, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6-7).

What is *the gospel* that Paul preached to the Galatians and that was being perverted by men we now call *Judaizers*? We will consider that soon.

What if I'm correct, and the term *gospel* rarely refers to what we might call “the saving message” (which in itself is potentially misleading) or to what the Scriptures call the “word of life” or the “promise

of life”?¹ Paul spoke of himself “as a pattern to those who are going to believe *on Him for everlasting life*” (1 Tim 1:16, emphasis added).

My thesis about the word *gospel* is simple: It means *good news*.

The NT’s primary use of the word *gospel* is in reference to Paul’s total ministry, which included evangelism and discipleship. Other major uses concern Jesus’ death and resurrection, justification by faith alone, and the good news to Israel that the kingdom of God was at hand.

We err if we think there is only one NT gospel. There are many different gospels in the NT. We are also mistaken if we think that all who believe in only the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection are born again.

I realize that this is a major paradigm shift for many people and that there will be many questions.

I hope, however, that you don’t reject what I’m saying simply because it doesn’t fit your current understanding. I also hope that you won’t accept what I say as being true simply because I say it is. You need to examine what is said in light of Scripture, as the Bereans of Acts 17:11 did. The Bible alone is God’s infallible Word and our only way of knowing what He has revealed to us.

This article is essentially a concordance study of the word *gospel* (*euangelion*). For our study’s starting point, we will look at how the word *gospel* is used in the Gospel of John, the only Bible book designed to tell the unbeliever what he must believe in order to be born again.

II. THE WORD *GOSPEL* IS NOT FOUND EVEN ONCE IN THE BIBLE’S ONLY EVANGELISTIC BOOK

The word *gospel* is not found anywhere in the text of the Gospel of John—the only evangelistic book in the Bible.

The Lord Jesus did not tell Nicodemus that *whoever believes the gospel has everlasting life* (see John 3:14-16).

The Lord Jesus did not tell the woman at the well that *whoever drinks the gospel will never thirst again* (see John 4:10-14).

He did not tell Martha that *the person who believes the gospel shall never die* (see John 11:26).

¹ See Acts 5:20, “the words of this life”; Phil 2:16, “the word [or message] of life”; 2 Tim 1:1, “the promise of life.”

I am using the words *evangelize* and *evangelistic* as they are commonly understood, that is, in connection with the proclamation of the message of everlasting life. Of course, any time we share any of the good news messages, we have evangelized. However, in order to avoid cumbersome detailed explanations, I will, for the purposes of this study, restrict the words to the sense of sharing the message of everlasting life by faith in Christ.

The term *gospel* does, of course, appear in the title the *Gospel of John*. But the word *gospel*, when referring to the first four books of the NT, does not mean *good news*. Rather, it means something like *holy biography*.² In this sense, *Gospel* refers to a genre or type of literature—a holy biography of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord identified Himself as the bread of life, the water of life, the life, and so forth, He called for faith in Himself for everlasting life. He never said that the gospel is the way, the truth, and the life, or that the gospel is the Good Shepherd.

In John's Gospel, Jesus always called for faith *in Himself*. He said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47; see also John 3:14-16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35; 11:25-26).

In John's Gospel, the object of faith is always Jesus and His promise of everlasting life. The object of faith is never something called *the gospel*.

Of course, we know from Mark 1:15 that the Lord Jesus called upon Israel to repent and believe the gospel of the kingdom. However, Mark 1:14 makes clear that the Lord was speaking about the good news that Messiah King, Jesus Himself, was present, and that He was ready to give Israel her kingdom. It was good news for the Nation of Israel that her Messiah King was here and that His kingdom had drawn near.

Even in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the Lord Jesus never said that the one who believes the gospel (or the gospel of the kingdom) has everlasting life.

It should be noticed that this is not an argument *from* silence. This is an argument *about* silence.

² Each Gospel has a Greek title that uses two words: the name of the author and the word *kata*, meaning "according to." So, the word *Gospel* was not actually in the Greek titles. It is uncertain as to whether the authors wrote the titles (e.g., *Kata Matthaion, According to Matthew*) or if they were added later as the books were circulated. Mark's Gospel is the only one of the four that gives itself a sort of title: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

This alone should cause us to reject the idea that the word *gospel* is a special word that always means the message we must believe in order to have everlasting life.³

III. VARIOUS USES OF THE EXPRESSION *THE GOSPEL*

The English word *gospel* occurs 103 times in 97 verses in the NKJV. However, the underlying Greek word, *euangelion*, only occurs 77 times in 74 verses. The cognate verb, *euangelizein*, occurs an additional 55 times. It refers to preaching many different things, including the kingdom,⁴ peace,⁵ the gospel,⁶ the word,⁷ Jesus [or Him],⁸ and the faith.^{9,10} Sometimes it just refers to a proclamation with no object stated.

We will focus on the uses of *euangelion* as a noun. Here is a breakdown of the word's uses in the NT, in order of prevalence.

A. *Gospel* Is Christian Ministry (52%)

The word *gospel* is most commonly used to refer to Christian ministry (good news ministry about Christ), including both evangelism and discipleship, especially in Paul's ministry. This gospel ministry is to both believers and unbelievers and is by far the number one use of *the gospel*.

³ Some have argued that John's Gospel is actually no longer a valid means of determining the saving message. They argue that after Jesus ascended to heaven, the saving message changed. In this Dispensation, they believe that the Apostle Paul, not the Lord Jesus, tells us what one must believe in order to be born again. In this view, Paul taught that one must believe the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection in order to have everlasting life. I have dealt with this argument elsewhere. But it should be noted that John wrote long after the start of the Church Age for the purpose of leading people on this side of the cross to faith in Christ for everlasting life (John 20:30-31). In addition, never once does Paul say that the person who believes the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection has everlasting life. Rather, Paul says one must believe in Jesus for everlasting life (e.g., Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16).

⁴ Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:12.

⁵ See Acts 10:36; Rom 10:15; Eph 2:17.

⁶ See 1 Cor 9:18; 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7; Gal 1:11; Rev 14:6.

⁷ See Acts 8:4; 15:35, 36; Heb 4:2; 1 Pet 1:25.

⁸ See Acts 5:42; 8:12, 35; 11:20; 17:18; Gal 1:16.

⁹ See Gal 1:23.

¹⁰ There are also many other instances in the NT of *preaching* these concepts (the kingdom, peace, the gospel, the word, Jesus [or Him], and the faith), using verbs other than *euangelizein* (e.g., *laleō*, *katangellō*, *diangellō*, and *kērussō*).

Slightly over half—40 of 77—of the NT uses of *euangelion* are general references to Christian ministry or instruction.¹¹

Paul said in Rom 1:15 that he wanted to come to Rome “so that I might preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.” He was talking about preaching the gospel *to the believers in Rome*. He longed to give them Christian instruction. They had already believed in Jesus for everlasting life.

Believers in Jerusalem glorified God because of the believers in Corinth “for the obedience of [their] confession to the gospel of Christ, and for [their] liberal sharing with them and all men” (2 Cor 9:13). The expression *gospel of Christ* refers to their confession of sound doctrine.¹²

Paul had a right to be paid for his ministry. But when he was in Corinth he did not exercise that right, “lest we hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12). It would have hindered Paul’s ministry to the believers in Corinth if he had appealed to them to support his ministry financially.

The church in Philippi supported Paul’s ministry. Paul thanked them “for [their] fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:5). That is, they shared in his ministry by sending him financial help.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that “our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit...” (1 Thess 1:5). *Our gospel* refers to the ministry that Paul and Silas brought to them, especially concerning discipleship, as the following verses show (vv 6-10).

In 1 Thess 2:2-3, Paul equates his preaching of “the gospel of God” with “our exhortation.”

Timothy was “our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ” (1 Thess 3:2).

Paul wrote to Philemon, asking that he allow his servant Onesimus to “minister to me in my chains for the gospel” (Phlm 13). Paul was imprisoned for his ministry of both evangelism and discipleship.

¹¹ Those forty uses include eight in Romans (1:1, 9, 16; 10:16; 11:28; 15:16, 19, 29), six in 1 Corinthians (9:12, 14 [2xs], 18 [2xs], 23), seven in 2 Corinthians (2:12; 4:3, 4; 8:18; 9:13; 10:14; 11:7), eight in Philippians (1:5, 7, 12, 17, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15), six in 1 Thessalonians (1:5; 2:2, 4, 8, 9; 3:2), one in 2 Thessalonians (2:14), one in 1 Timothy (1:11), one in 2 Timothy (1:8), one in Philemon (13), and one in 1 Peter (4:17).

¹² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), p. 414.

B. The Gospel of the Kingdom (15.5%)

This expression is found three times in Matthew (4:23; 9:35; 24:14) and seven times in Mark (1:14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15). It refers to the good news *that the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. It is not the message that all who believe in Jesus have everlasting life.

Twelve of the 77 uses of *euangelion*, or fifteen percent, refer to the gospel of the kingdom.

The gospel of the kingdom was the message preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His apostles. They proclaimed the good news that the kingdom had drawn near for Israel.

It was a message directed to Israel. The conditions the nation had to meet in order for the kingdom to come at that time were to believe in Jesus and to repent of their sins (cf. Mark 1:15). This was not a faith-alone message.

This message will also be preached during the Tribulation (Matt 24:14).¹³

C. The Gospel of Justification by Faith Alone (14.3%)

The message of justification by faith alone is called *the gospel* seven times in Galatians (1:6, 7, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14), twice in Acts (15:7; 20:24), and once in 1 Corinthians (4:15) and 2 Corinthians (11:4).¹⁴

D. The Gospel Regarding the Rapture, Kingdom, and Bema (10.3%)

Eight times, the expression *the gospel* refers to the good news of the Rapture, the Bema, or the kingdom. The Bema is evident in Rom 2:16 and Rom 14:24 (=16:25 NKJV, KJV).

In Rom 2:16, Paul wrote, "...God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, *according to my gospel*" (emphasis added). Notice that Paul's gospel includes the message of the coming judgment of believers at the Bema and of unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment.

¹³ Some Dispensationalists have wrongly thought the way to be born again during the ministry of Jesus (the gospel of the kingdom) was different from the way to be born again during the Church Age. However, they fail to consider the message of the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus taught that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life and will never perish (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35-40, 47; 11:25-27). That is precisely the same evangelistic message that Paul and the other apostles proclaimed (Acts 15:7-11; 16:31; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23).

¹⁴ I've included several places in which Paul refers to false gospels (Gal 1:6; 2 Cor 11:4) since these are gospels contrary to justification by faith alone.

First Corinthians 15:1-11 is probably the most famous gospel passage. It is also one of the most misunderstood gospel passages. Paul used *the gospel* in this passage to refer to the good news about our guaranteed bodily resurrection and future judgment at the Bema (see the final verse of the chapter, 1 Cor 15:58). He said that we must cling to that message in order to remain spiritually healthy (“if you hold fast,” 1 Cor 15:2). This is a sanctification passage, not a justification passage.

However, because the word *gospel* is widely understood in Christendom today as referring to the saving message, most people understand 1 Cor 15:1-11 as delineating that message.

There are three reasons why this is incorrect.

First, the NT rarely uses the word *gospel* to refer to justification by faith alone (less than fifteen percent of the time).

Second, 1 Cor 15:1-11 is not about justification by faith alone.

Third, the issue in 1 Cor 15:1-11, as in the whole chapter, is the glorious future for believers. Believers who are spiritually healthy remain that way if they hold firmly to the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

N. T. Wright sees the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection in 1 Cor 15:3-11 to be the good news of a new creation. He says:

For Paul, it’s quite clear again and again that the goal of the whole thing is a new creation with renewed humans playing their full part within that new creation. Paul never talks about people going to heaven when they die. The closest he comes is Philippians 1 when he says, “my desire is to depart and be with the Messiah, which is far better.” But by the end of Philippians 3, it’s clear that the real goal is when Jesus restores the whole creation and gives His people new bodies to live within that new creation. And this is, of course, the great climax of Romans 8, which we’ll get to later. All of this is attained by the death and resurrection of Jesus and, as we quoted yesterday, 1 Corinthians 15:3: “the Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; He was buried; He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and was seen by people.”¹⁵

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, “Paul and the Cross,” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUuDI2RkpgE>. Time 25:49 to 26:51.

E. The Gospel of Jews and Gentiles United in One Body (5.2%)

In Ephesians the word *gospel* refers to Jews and Gentiles being united and at peace in one body, the Church (Eph 1:13; 3:6; 6:15, 19). Notice that in Eph 6:19 Paul spoke of *the mystery of the gospel*. The promise of everlasting life by faith in Christ was not a mystery in the OT (John 5:39-40). What was a mystery was that the Church—in which Jews and Gentiles would be united in one body—was coming.¹⁶

F. The Everlasting Gospel (1.3%)

The “everlasting gospel” in Rev 14:6 relates to Jesus since He is the One who pours out judgment on the wicked. But it is not good news about who is born again and how they became so. Instead, it is the good news that all who do not fear God and worship Him will be judged.

It is interesting to see how the otherwise very helpful *Nelson Study Bible* views this as an offer of everlasting life to all who fear God and worship Him.

14:6, 7 The angel who preaches the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people helps to fulfill God’s promise that the gospel “will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (Matt. 24:14) before Christ returns...[God] continues to offer everlasting life to the world (see John 3:16). The gospel message at this point beseeches unbelievers to fear God and give glory to Him and to escape the hour of His judgment.¹⁷

The *Nelson Study Bible* teaches elsewhere that the sole condition of eternal life is believing in Jesus, not fearing God and worshipping Him. The note at Rev 14:6,7 is therefore confusing.

Similarly, the *Ryrie Study Bible* has excellent notes, but at Rev 14:6 follows this same line of thinking: “An eternal gospel to preach. God’s last call of grace to the world before the return of Christ in judgment.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Second Corinthians 9:13 might have this sense as well. However, I counted it under “Christian Ministry” since I think it fits better there.

¹⁷ *Nelson Study Bible*, s.v. Rev 14:6.

¹⁸ *Ryrie Study Bible*, s.v. Rev 14:6.

This comment by the late Dr. John Walvoord is helpful in explaining the actual meaning of *gospel* in Rev 14:6:

Because of the word “gospel,” some have felt that this was a message of salvation or the good news of the coming kingdom. The context, however, seems to indicate otherwise, for the message is one of **judgment** and condemnation. The angel announced, **“Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of judgment has come.”** So the “eternal” message seems to be a message of God’s righteousness and judgment rather than a message of salvation (emphasis in original).¹⁹

G. The Four Gospels about the Lord Jesus Christ

The titles of the four Gospels are not part of the NT itself. Hence those four uses are not considered because they are not part of the 77 NT uses of *euangelion*. However, as mentioned previously, the word *Gospel* in this case refers to a biography of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

All believing parents long to know that their children are born again. This leads them to evangelize their children.

However, if the parents don’t know precisely what their children must believe in order to be born again, they will not really know whether they are born again.

If the parents are wrong about what one must believe in order to be born again, they will not actually be able to lead their children to the new birth.

Let’s say the parents think that all who believe the gospel as laid out in 1 Cor 15:1-11 are born again. They teach their children this passage. They have their children memorize it. They are convinced that their children believe it. So, they are happy that their kids are born again.

But they do not seek to convince their children of the promise of everlasting life, since they themselves do not believe it. Only if they themselves are convinced it is true will parents share the message that whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life and will never perish.

¹⁹ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament Edition (N.P.: Victor Books. 1983), 964.

The message we share regarding what people must believe in order to be born again makes a big difference. Whether we are witnessing to our own children, our parents, our siblings, our neighbors, our friends at school or work, or total strangers, we must get the message right. If we tell people that anyone who believes X is born again, and that isn't true, then we are misleading people whom we care about. And we are misleading them on the most important issue in life!

It is my experience that this is the reason many parents entrust the evangelization of their kids to someone else. They hope the youth pastor knows what to tell them. After all, he went to Bible college or seminary.

Many people don't evangelize their friends, but instead invite them to church where they hope the pastor will tell them how to be born again.

I suggest that the main reason people shirk evangelism is not, as is often taught, that they don't care or are unwilling to risk persecution. Instead, they don't evangelize because they don't know what to say and believe it best not to evangelize without knowing what to say.

The Gospel of John is written to tell the unbeliever what he must believe in order to be born again. It shows us how to lead people to faith in Christ. John 3:16 is simple.

Many tracts hop all over the Bible and include lots of seemingly unrelated teachings. People therefore conclude that evangelism should only be done by the professionals.

Confusion about the meaning of the word *gospel* greatly contributes to people's not knowing whether or not they are born again; therefore, they do not know how to tell others how they can be sure that they themselves are born again.

If we know that the good news of Jesus Christ is meant to lead people to faith in Christ for everlasting life, then we need to be clear about what that good news is.

Many people who say they believe that Jesus died for everyone (unlimited atonement) actually say the opposite when they evangelize. They will say something like this:

You are a sinner, and your sins separate you from God. See Rom 3:23. But the good news is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross in your place, paying for all your sins—past, present, and future.

If you believe that He died on the cross for your sins, then He will remove your sins so that they are no longer a barrier to your being saved.

You see, He potentially paid for your sins at the cross. But His blood is ineffective until you apply it to your life (like the Jews applying the blood of lambs on the doorposts in Exodus 12). If you do not believe that He died on the cross for your sins, then you remain separated from God due to your sins.

But if you do believe that He died on the cross for your sins, then you are saved forever, even if you do not believe that salvation is secure prior to death.

In reality, we should say just the opposite:

You and I are both sinners. Indeed, every living human being is a sinner. See Rom 3:23. But the good news is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, "[took] away the sins of the world," as John the Baptist said in John 1:29. The Apostle John said the same thing in 1 John 2:2.

So, neither of us is blocked from God and from His kingdom because of our sins. He has removed the sin barrier so that now we are all savable. All we need to do to have everlasting life—life with God that can never be lost—is to believe in Jesus Christ. Look at John 3:16. Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Because of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, all who simply believe in Him for everlasting life have that life and will one day be physically raised from the dead to live forever in perfect, glorified bodies.

I am sure I have everlasting life, and I know it has nothing to do with how good or bad I am. It is all about Jesus' faithfulness to His promise.

Those two messages are radically different! The second message proclaims true unlimited atonement. Jesus didn't potentially die for the sins of the whole world. He actually did die for the sins of the whole world. No one will be condemned because of his sins.

Revelation 20:11-15 shows that the basis of condemnation is a person not being found in the Book of Life. Since the way people get into that Book is by believing in Jesus, unbelievers are not in the Book. Believers are in the Book.²⁰

V. THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS THAT RUNS FROM EDEN TO THE NEW EARTH

In one sense, everything from Creation to the New Earth is part of the good news. That is how many in New Tribes Mission (now called Ethnos 360) evangelize people who have never heard about Jesus. They gradually present the good news over the course of thirty or more sessions. But it is not until the last session that they talk about the cross and the promise of everlasting life.

I would suggest telling people at each session that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him. I wouldn't wait until the last of scores of messages to explain the message of John 3:16.

But I do agree that the Creation, the call of Abraham, the birth and growth of Israel, the prophets, John the Baptist, and the ministry of Jesus are all part of the good news.

A person, of course, need not know every aspect of the good news in order to be born again. A person could be born again without knowing about Mary's anointing Jesus for burial (Matt 26:13), or Judas's betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, or Jesus' being born in Bethlehem or being buried in a rich man's tomb.

But that is all part of the good news.

The gospel's first goal should be that the hearer will believe in Jesus for eternal life. Once a person believes that Jesus died on the cross for his sins and rose bodily from the dead, he is a great candidate for believing that he has eternal life simply by faith in Him (John 3:16) and that he is justified (Gal 2:16). The gospel message should lead people to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

But that is not all. The gospel message should also lead a person to live for Christ in light of His soon return. Because He died for us, we ought to love Him and seek to please Him in all we say and do (1 John 3:16) so that when He returns, we might hear, "Well done, good servant," (Luke 19:17a) and might be given the privilege of ruling

²⁰ In a sense, the Book of Life is a book containing spiritual birth certificates.

with Him (Luke 19:17b). There should be excitement and anticipation about the prospect of living in Jesus' eternal kingdom.

Of course, once a person comes to faith in Christ for eternal life, there is certainly much more of the good news to learn and apply. The longer we live with and for Christ, the more precious the good news of Jesus Christ should become to us.

VI. CONCLUSION

What is *the gospel*?

There are multiple gospels in the NT.

About half the uses of the word *gospel* refer to Christian ministry, which includes both evangelism and discipleship.

The gospel of the kingdom was the announcement by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His apostles that the kingdom had drawn near and that Israel could enter that kingdom if the nation both believed in Jesus and repented of its sins.

Justification by faith alone, apart from works, is called *the gospel* by Paul in Galatians.

The coming Rapture, kingdom, and Judgment Seat of Christ are sometimes called *gospel* as well. Possibly the most famous gospel passage, 1 Cor 15:1-11, comes under this category. The good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is that one day soon we will be resurrected, glorified, and rewarded by Christ for our labor in the Lord.

The gospel in Ephesians is the good news that Jews and Gentiles are united and on equal footing in the church.

There is one reference to "the everlasting gospel," a gospel of coming judgment on the wicked (Rev 14:6).

Whenever you see the word *gospel* in the NT, ask yourself which particular good news is in view.

GETHSEMANE: A PRAYER OF FAITH

CRAIG A. BLAISING¹

Gethsemane reveals a highly personal yet intriguing glimpse into the life of our Lord. It discloses a deep agony gripping the inner person of the God-Man that is difficult to understand. Geldenhuys' warning concerning this passage is typical of many expositors: "No man will ever be capable of sounding the depths of what the Savior experienced in Gethsemane."²

Many conflicting interpretations have been offered, serving as a warning to those who would examine it today to proceed with caution and, above all, reverence. A majority of the opinions offered center around a certain common framework: Jesus desired to avoid the cross and expressed this desire to the Father in prayer, but then he readjusted his desire to God's will and in obedience suffered the cross. This interpretation, however it may be embellished, is not without its problems. Questions immediately arise concerning the will (or wills) of Christ in relation to the will of the Father. The sinlessness and impeccability of Christ are questioned. The problem of consistency with Christ's own teaching concerning the necessity of the cross must likewise be adequately explained.

Why did Jesus pray this prayer? What did he mean by it? It is hoped that this paper will contribute to a further investigation of these matters, and that it will do so with the reverence that is demanded and with the humble admission that we see like the three that were with him, from afar off and through dim eyes.

¹ Craig Blaising was a doctoral candidate at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland when this article was published. This article first appeared in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in December 1979. Used by permission. Except for putting translated Greek words in italics, it appears as it did in *JETS*. After completing his degree at Aberdeen, Dr. Blaising taught for many years at Dallas Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

² N. Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951) 574.

I. EXEGETICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Gethsemane prayer is recorded by all three synoptic writers.³ It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze all the problems in the harmonization of these accounts. Only those matters that bear on the meaning of this prayer for Jesus need to be considered. Consequently, attention will be focused on two areas: the events leading up to the prayer, and the form and content of the prayer itself.

1. *Events Preceding the Prayer.* There are three observations concerning the events preceding the prayer that are important clues to its interpretation. First, there is the fact of Christ's awareness of and preoccupation with his imminent death. Second, there is evidence that Gethsemane is a temptation scene, a confrontation between Christ and Satan. Third, there is the change of mood that comes over Jesus in the garden on his way to prayer.

The synoptics emphasize Christ's preoccupation with his imminent death by locating the account of Gethsemane within a larger pericope that opens with the decision of the chief priests and scribes to put Jesus to death.⁴ He is then anointed for his death in the house of Simon the leper. Following this, Judas Iscariot contacts the chief priests and an arrangement is made for the arrest of Jesus. Then is recorded the incident of the last supper. The whole scene is charged with Jesus' knowledge that his death is imminent. He knows that his time is at hand.⁵ He declares that it is his last meal before he suffers.⁶ He prophesies that one will betray him,⁷ and identifies that one as Judas.⁸ He

³ Matthew 26:37-45; Mark 14:33-41; Luke 22:40-46. A somewhat similar incident is found in John 17:1-18, and many expositors see allusions to this prayer in Heb 5:7. The accounts of Matthew and Mark are remarkably similar, almost verbatim. Luke is notably brief, although including the unique accounts of the sweating of blood and the appearance of a comforting angel. Benoit argues for the authenticity of these verses because (1) the earliest MSS that include this section of Luke include this passage (MSS that exclude it are later than 300 A.D.) and (2) it fits the Lukan emphasis on the humanity of Christ and the appearance of angels (in contrast to docetic and gnostic conceptions of Christ that prevailed in the fourth century in areas where MSS omitted this), Cf. P. Benoit, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (tr. B. Weatherhead; New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 17-18.

⁴ Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2.

⁵ Matthew 26:18.

⁶ Luke 22:15-16.

⁷ Matthew 26:21 and parallels.

⁸ Matthew 26:25; also John 13:26-30.

recalls and interprets prophecy that he will be struck down that night.⁹ The supper itself is interpreted in light of his death.

Jesus' knowledge of his death is consistent with the development of both the synoptic and Johannine narratives to this point. Repeatedly he told them that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised up on the third day.¹⁰ His resolve to see this accomplished confused and bewildered his disciples. Any attempts to dissuade him were sharply rebuked.¹¹

The second observation is evidenced by the increasing activity of Satan. After the wilderness temptation narratives¹² Satan is not heard from again until prior to the transfiguration, when Peter suggests that Christ should not have to die.¹³ The synoptics attribute this suggestion directly to Satan. Satan evidently tempted Peter to offer it, since Jesus expressly rebukes him, commanding him to withdraw. In the events immediately preceding Gethsemane, it is Luke who calls attention specifically to Satan's actions. While Matthew and Mark record Judas slipping away to bargain with the chief priests for the life of Jesus, Luke notes that Satan had entered him.¹⁴ John also observes that Satan entered Judas but places the event during the passover meal when Jesus identifies him as the betrayer.¹⁵ During the passover meal, Jesus discloses to Peter that Satan had been asking to sift him like wheat but that Jesus had prayed for him.¹⁶ As a result Jesus says that his faith would prevail over the satanic attack and instructs him how to help his brothers through it also.

There is no direct mention of Satan in the accounts of the garden, but most commentators agree that his presence is not only detectable but to be expected. R. S. Barbour¹⁷ and E. Best¹⁸ see the passion in Mark as the climax of the struggle between Christ and Satan, light

⁹ Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Zech 13:7.

¹⁰ Matthew 16:21-28; 17:9, 12, 22-23; 20:18-19; also parallels in Mark and Luke. In John, references to being lifted up: 3:14; 8:28; 12:32; also see 6:51-52; 7:33; 8:21; 10:11-12.

¹¹ Matthew 16:22-23.

¹² Matthew 4 and parallels.

¹³ Matthew 16:22-23 and parallels.

¹⁴ Luke 22:3-4.

¹⁵ John 13:27. John sees in the entire passion Satan's presence whose coming coincides with the arrival of the hour (14:30).

¹⁶ Luke 22:31-32.

¹⁷ R. S. Barbour, "Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion," *NTS* 16 (1970) 231-251.

¹⁸ E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

and darkness, good and evil. The struggle is pronounced in Mark, who specifically develops this theme in the confrontation between Christ and the demons. Barbour writes concerning Gethsemane in Mark:

Jesus is here to be thought of as engaged with the power of the evil one. The Gethsemane struggle in Mark points forward through the cry of dereliction and the cross, to the final overthrow of evil and the appearance of the Son of Man in xiii. 26, with its quotation of Dan. vii.13, to which xiv. 62 also points.¹⁹

The third observation may be made after Jesus and his band of eleven disciples enter the garden. Leaving eight behind, he proceeds a little further with three of his disciples to pray. On his way to pray, however, in the presence of these three men, a change comes over Jesus. Mark describes it using *echthambeisthai* and *adēmonein*. Matthew has *lypeisthai* in place of *echthambeisthai*, meaning to be sad, grieved or sorrowful, but *echthambeisthai* is much stronger, so that in Mark there is a much more graphic picture of what comes over Jesus—a picture of shocking horror, awe and dismay. Cranfield observes that *echthambeisthai* “denotes a being in the grip of a shuddering horror in the face of the dreadful prospect before him.”²⁰ Rawlinson notes that it “is a strong expression, suggestive of shuddering awe, as of one conscious of being in the presence of a supernatural mystery which excites terror.”²¹ Swete calls it a feeling of “terrified surprise.”²² This feeling of sudden shock and surprise is noted also by Krummacher, who writes:

He [Mark] makes use of a word, the original of which implies a sudden and horrifying alarm at a terrible object. The Evangelist evidently intends to intimate thereby that the cause of Jesus’ trembling must be sought, not in what might be passing in His soul, but in appearances from without which forced themselves upon Him; something approached Him which threatened to rend His nerves, and the sight of it to freeze the blood in His veins.²³

¹⁹ Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 237-238.

²⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959) 431.

²¹ A. E. J. Rawlinson, *St. Mark* (London: Methuen, 1925) 211.

²² H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1927) 322.

²³ F. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947) 99.

The second word, *adēmonein*, appearing in the NT only in Mark 14:33, Matt 26:37, and Phil 2:26, denotes great anguish. Benoit translates it as distress and notes that “it is used of a man who is rendered helpless, disorientated, who is agitated and anguished by the threat of some approaching event.”²⁴ Lightfoot also describes it as “the confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical derangement, or by mental distress, as grief, shame, disappointment, etc.”²⁵ Swete adds that it “forms a natural sequel to *echthambeisthai*, representing the distress which follows a great shock.”²⁶

It is this element of surprise and shock in this distress that provides a clue to the mystery of Gethsemane. Something unexpected, something not previously considered, something outside the conscious contemplation of Jesus at that moment is suddenly thrust upon him, and he shudders in shock and alarm. Whatever it is, it is out of continuity with what Jesus has known, considered or expected up to this time.

It is possible that the sudden shock causes Jesus to change his plans to pray with his disciples. They have already observed the change that has come over him, and he makes reference to it as the reason for leaving them behind to keep watch while he goes on to pray alone. “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”²⁷ It is against this background that Jesus offers his prayer.

2. *Form and Content of the Prayer.* The synoptics give five versions of Jesus’ prayer, all basically similar except for minor variations.²⁸ Each is notably brief, expressing Jesus’ request that the cup be taken away. It should be noted that the actual prayer lasted for perhaps an hour (Mark 14:37), so that what is offered in these accounts are summaries of that prayer, summaries that describe in essence the petition Jesus was laying before the Father.

Some have tried to interpret the summaries as providing a progression in the meaning of the request Jesus was making during the course

²⁴ Benoit, *Passion*, 10.

²⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1913; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953) 123.

²⁶ Swete, *Mark*, 322.

²⁷ Mark 14:34.

²⁸ Swete, *Mark*, 324.

of his praying.²⁹ The problem with the idea of progression is that it ignores the synoptic insistence that Jesus prayed the same words on both the second occasion, according to Mark, and the third occasion, according to Matthew. Furthermore, Mark demonstrates the fallacy in seeing a progression when he summarizes the first prayer twice, once indirectly in conditional form and once directly without the condition. It is more likely that over the course of an hour Jesus repeated the same request in different ways, asking the same thing and including more detail that has not been recorded.

Two aspects of these summary prayers are most crucial to their interpretation. The first is the conditional framework that is common to all with the exception of Mark 14:36. Reserving Matt 26:42 for a special comment later, note the conditional structure of the petitions in Mark 14:35; Matt 26:39; Luke 22:42. In each case the request is stated using a first class conditional clause. “This class of condition assumes the condition to be a reality and the conclusion follows logically and naturally from that assumption.”³⁰ Therefore in the synoptic portrait of the Gethsemane prayer not only does Jesus assume, according to Matthew and Mark, that his prayer is possible, but according to Luke he actually considers it to be the will of God and offers his request on that basis. This harmonizes with the prayer found in Mark 14:36 where the conditional structure is lacking. Jesus states the fact that all things are possible with the Father and on that basis makes his request implying that he assumes the Father is able to grant it.

The second aspect of these prayers to be considered is the final clause, “not what I will but what you will,” that appears in Mark 14:36; Matt 26:39; Luke 22:42. An ellipsis is present, and the manner in which it is to be filled will affect the interpretation of the prayer. Lenski expresses what seems to be a popular opinion on this matter when he concludes that this is an objective clause that “lets us supply the verb: ‘let that be done.’”³¹ This stems in part from the desire to cor-

²⁹ Plummer, for example, sees such a progression in Matthew’s two summaries so that the prayer offered in Matt 26:42 is actually a different request than the one in v 39. He sees in this a progression in Christ’s submission to the Father’s will so that although he expresses his own will in v 39 he submits to the Father’s will in v 42. Plummer goes on to speculate that if Matthew had summarized the third prayer it would have indicated even more strongly Christ’s desire to do the Father’s will and thus complete the progression. See A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott Roxburghe, 1909) 370.

³⁰ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934) 1007.

³¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1946) 638.

relate this prayer with the Lord's Prayer.³² However, the Lord's Prayer was formulated for Jesus' disciples; there is no reason to suppose that he prayed it himself. The main reason for holding this view is that it harmonizes with the interpretation that Jesus was actually requesting what was contrary to the Father's will but that, knowing this to be impossible, he subsequently conditioned it on the Father's will, resolving himself to obedience.

As it has been noted, the first class conditional nature of these prayers conflicts immediately with this view. In view of Luke 22:42 in particular, it is impossible to take the last clause as a second petition requesting the Father's will to the exclusion of Christ's will. The first clause clearly assumes that the request that is Christ's will, since he requests it, is precisely the Father's will. A better way to take the last clause would be to see it in a declarative sense, filling the ellipsis with "it is" or "this is." It may then be translated, "But this is not what I will, but what you will." This declaration would be similar to others made by Jesus elsewhere, particularly in John's gospel.

For example, when Jesus says he has come down from heaven not to do his own will but to do the Father's will, it means that he is not acting on his own initiative. It does not mean that he does not will to do the Father's will; he does. But the initiative belongs to the Father. It is the Father's will first in that sense, and Jesus harmonizes his will to it rather than acting independently.

Thus in Luke 22:42, Mark 14:36 and Matt 26:39 Jesus declares his prayer to be not his own will acting on his own initiative but rather the will of the Father, initiated by the Father, to which his own will agrees.

The request itself is expressed in the following ways:

Mark 14:35: *parelthē ap autou hē hora...*

Mark 14:36: *parenengke to potērion touto ap emou...*

Matt 26:39: *parelthatō ap emou to potērion touto...*

Luke 22:42: *parenengke touto to potērion ap emou...*

The two verbs *parerchomai* and *parapherō* are very similar in meaning. When referring to time, *parerchomai* means "to pass." While it can mean "to pass away" as it does when used with *potōrion*, it is not possible to understand it this way in reference to time. Thus in Mark 14:35 Jesus is not praying that the hour will not come as if to request that time will suddenly come to an end and the hour, still future, will vanish. Rather, the use of *parelthē* indicates his request to be that the

³² Swete, *Mark*, 325.

hour pass on by after it comes—that is, that the hour pass by as all hours pass by and not fail to pass by after it arrives. Jesus seems to be concerned lest when the hour comes, then for him time will stop and he will forever be in that hour. In reference to the cup, *parerchomai* is best translated “pass away from.”³³ In this sense it is very close to the use of *parapherō* in Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42, which means “take away from.” Thus Jesus is requesting here that “the cup” be taken away or removed from him.

At this point it will be helpful to comment on Matt 26:42. From the way this petition is stated it should be clear that Jesus is not concerned so much with the drinking of the cup as he is with its passing away. The first class condition emphasizes that it is not possible for the cup to pass away unless he drinks it. Stated positively, it is possible for the cup to pass away if he does drink it. This is declared to be the Father’s will, and it is not incompatible with Christ’s willful request in verse 39. Both prayers indicate that it is the Father’s will to do what Christ requests—that is, to take the cup away. Verse 42 adds the further information that before the Father does this Christ must drink it first.

The two metaphors, cup and hour, are closely related. It is significant that “hour” appears only in Mark’s indirect summary of Jesus’ prayer, which is followed immediately with the summary attributed directly to Jesus in which the term “cup” is used. This causes Lane to conclude that “the two expressions are synonymous: both are metaphors for the passion in its deeper redemptive significance.”³⁴

The use of *hōra* for the passion is much more frequent in John than it is in the synoptics.³⁵ Perhaps the most interesting use in John for comparison with the Gethsemane prayer is John 12:27. The hour has come, but Jesus says that he does not pray to be saved from the hour but that the Father glorify his name.³⁶

³³ The use of *parerchomai* with *apo* is noted by Arndt and Gingrich to mean “pass without touching” when referring to suffering. The evidence cited for this is Matt 26:39, Mark 14:35 and a reference from Josephus. This interpretation, however, hinges on whether “cup” and “hour” refer to suffering alone. This will be examined later. It should be noted that *parerchomai* with *apo* is used in Matt 5:18 where it clearly does not mean “pass without touching” but rather “pass away from” or “disappear from.” See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th rev. ed., s. v. “*parerchomai*.”

³⁴ W. L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 517.

³⁵ John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:21; 17:1; cf. Matt 26:45; Mark 14:41.

³⁶ There would certainly be a contradiction between Jesus’ attitude in the Johannine account and the Markan record of Jesus’ prayer if *parerchomai apo* in Mark 14:35 is taken to mean “pass by without touching.” As was noted above, however, it is most proper to take the Markan prayer to be a request that the hour come and go, and this is consistent with the Johannine emphasis that the hour will come and that Jesus does not seek to avoid it.

There is an eschatological sense to *hōra*. It is used in both the synoptics and in John to refer to the time of the coming of the Son of Man.³⁷ This has caused some to look for an eschatological meaning in Gethsemane. In this sense the prayer is that the eschatological kingdom come, but through other means than his own suffering.³⁸ It is best, however, to take *hōra* as referring to the coming passion and as a parallel to the term “cup.”³⁹ The meaning of cup then becomes crucial to the understanding of the prayer. Basically two suggestions have been advanced: Either it is a symbol of human suffering and death, or it is a picture of the wrath of God.⁴⁰ Of course the wrath of God when poured out results in human misery and death, but it goes far beyond that to include spiritual (and for Israel in the OT, national) suffering.

Many commentators see human suffering and physical death primarily in view here. Benoit, Lange and Rawlinson are among those who share this view.⁴¹ There are many, however, who regard the view of suffering as incomplete and have offered plausible evidence for understanding the cup as a figure for divine wrath. The figure of the cup of wrath comes primarily from the OT⁴² and has been carefully studied by C. E. B. Cranfield, who concludes:

It hardly seems adequate to say, as some commentators do in connexion with the N.T. passages, simply that the “cup” is used in the O.T. as a metaphor for suffering. Surely we must go further, and say that in

³⁷ C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1968) 46-47; also see Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 233; K. G. Kuhn, “Jesus in Gethsemane,” *EvT* 12 (1952-3) 260-285.

³⁸ Matthew 24:36, 44; 25:13; Mark 13:32; Luke 12:40; John 5:25, 28.

³⁹ Both Kuhn and Barbour divide the Markan narrative into two pericopes, one containing a reference to “hour” and one to “cup.” This author, however, agrees with Lane that this is unnecessary when the synthetic parallelism of the two verses is recognized (Lane, *Mark*, 517).

⁴⁰ The choice presented here is between human suffering and divine wrath with respect to the cross. Another view has been raised by J. O. Buswell, Jr., who suggests that the cup is physical death in the garden. Buswell suggests that Christ petitions the Father to take away the threat of death in the garden. The impossibility of this view is clear from the parallel between “hour” and “cup,” the former being consistently used of the cross. Also it conflicts with Matt 26:42 where the removal of the cup is dependent on his drinking it. If Jesus had to drink it before it could be removed, then he would have had to die in the garden for God to answer this prayer. J. O. Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962) 2, 61-65.

⁴¹ Benoit, *Passion*, 11; J.P. Lange, *The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ* (5 vols.; tr. R. E. Wallis and S. Masson; ed. M. Dads; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958) 3, 210; Rawlinson, *Mark*, 211-212 (see also Swete, *Mark*, 324).

⁴² Psalm 11:6; 75:7, 8; Isa 51:19, 22; Jer 25:15-16, 27-29; 49:12; 51:57; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2; see also Job 21:29; Ps 60:3; Isa 63:6; Obad 16.

the O.T. the metaphorical use of “cup” refers predominantly to God’s punishment of human sin. If Jesus did have the O.T. use of this metaphor in mind, then the O.T. use is of real importance in understanding the significance of these N.T. passages (particularly Mk 14:36 and parallels) as part of the evidence for His own thought about His approaching sufferings and death. The cup, from which He shrinks, is not merely physical suffering, nor yet the spiritual anguish of perfect love met by hate. It is not merely that His heart is wrung by the sight of the wickedness of men. His cup is the cup of God’s wrath against sin.⁴³

Regarding the usage of *cup* in Mark 10:39, which some use to support the idea of suffering, Cranfield suggests that while Jesus refers to himself using the OT sense of “cup” he nevertheless used the same metaphor for the two disciples, but in a weakened sense.⁴⁴ H. Summerall agrees that the cup before Jesus symbolizes the wrath of God as is typical in the OT. Particularly, he sees Jer 25:27-29 in the background where all the inhabitants of the earth are forced to drink the wine of God’s wrath for their sin.⁴⁵ Lane and Taylor prefer the imagery of wrath over human suffering, and both have observed that

⁴³ C. E. B. Cranfield, “The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv.36 and Parallels,” *Exp Tim* 59 (1947-8) 137-138; also see idem, *Mark*, 433. A challenge to this view has been raised by M. Black in “The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv.36,” *Exp Tim* 59 (1947-8) 195. Although he agrees that Cranfield’s exegesis of the cup metaphor in the OT is basically sound, Black questions whether Jesus actually used the term in the OT sense. He raises the possibility of a parallel to rabbinic thought and gives as an example the free haggadic paraphrase of Gen 40:23 in *Pal. Tg.* where it speaks of “the cup of death.” Black’s suggestion is accepted by Barbour, who notes that “we can assume that this is the cup of suffering and death, although not necessarily of the wrath of God” (Barbour, “Gethsemane,” 234). Obviously the strength of this view depends on the ability to establish a rabbinic rather than an OT background for Jesus’ prayer. The difficulty with Black’s view is twofold. First, Jesus’ teaching was notably distinct from the traditional rabbinic school, as has been noted by R. Longenecker in *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975) 51. Second, the entire passion narrative and particularly the immediate context of the Gethsemane account is full of allusions to the OT with a heavy appeal to the Psalms and prophets. This includes a use of the title Son of Man in Matt 26:24, 45 (immediately after the prayer), 64 (a direct reference to Ps 110 and Dan 7). There is expressed concern for the fulfillment of Scripture (Matt 26:54, 56) with the prophecy of Zech 13:7 weighing heavy on the mind of Christ before and during the prayer (note his concern for those who would be scattered; cf. Matt 26:31, 41). This particular prophecy contains a reference to the cup as a figure for divine judgment within its context.

⁴⁴ Cranfield, “Cup Metaphor,” 138; cf. Lenski, *Mark*, 457, 459; also G. Stahlin, “*orgē*,” *TDNT* (1964).

⁴⁵ H. Summerall, Jr., “What Was the Cup That Jesus Had to Drink?,” *Christianity Today* (July 17, 1970) 11-12.

the emotional distress that is described in Mark 14:33 fits better with the cup as a figure for wrath than for human suffering.⁴⁶

There is one more important consideration as to why the cup should be seen in the context of the OT as a cup of wrath. It is the OT that provides the interpretive frame of reference for the request that the cup be removed. The particular passage that speaks to this is Isa 51:21-23. Of the many passages that mention the cup of wrath only Isaiah 51 gives the clue concerning its removal.⁴⁷

Therefore, please hear this, you afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: thus says your Lord, the Lord, even your God Who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of reeling; the chalice of My anger, you will never drink it again. And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, 'Lie down that we may walk over you.' You have even made your back like the ground, and like the street for those who walk over it."⁴⁸

The setting for this passage is the Day of the Lord, a day of judgment and wrath on all nations. However, interwoven throughout the larger context is revelation concerning the Servant of God, the righteous Sufferer.⁴⁹ It has already been noted that Christ applied Isa 53:12 to himself just before retiring to the garden.

It should be noted that the cup of wrath that will be taken away from the people of God in Isaiah 51 has already been drunk by them even to the dregs (v 17). They are staggering under his wrath with the cup in their hand. The cup remains in their hand even after it has been drunk to symbolize that they continue to be under God's wrath. The removal of the cup from their hand indicates that God's wrath is lifted and they are restored. Note that in this passage, after the cup is removed, God's people will never drink it again (v 22). The cup is then placed into the hands of the enemies of God's people to symbolize the falling of his wrath and judgment on them.

⁴⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 516-517; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (New York: St. Martin's, 1966) 125, 552, 554.

⁴⁷ Jeremiah 25:27 mentions those who try to refuse to drink the cup but are forced by the Lord to drink it anyway. There is no mention here of the cup being taken away.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 51:21-23, NASB.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12.

The implication for Jesus' prayer is this: As in this passage, where God will remove the cup of his wrath from his people after they have drunk it, so Jesus prays that the cup of God's wrath for sin, which he drinks for all, will in the same way be removed from his hand by the Father after he has drunk it. Cranfield notes this when he says, "Isaiah 51:22 speaks of the cup of God's fury being taken away from Jerusalem. Now Jesus prays that it may be taken away from Him."⁵⁰ However, Cranfield misses the point that the cup in Isa 51:22 is taken away only after Jerusalem has drunk it, and so he has the difficulty of explaining how there is not a conflict of wills here. Lane also sees the parallel between Isaiah 51 and the Gethsemane prayer but struggles with the same difficulty as Cranfield when he writes:

The thought that the cup could be removed may have come from Isa. 51:17-23 where God, in a proclamation of salvation, summons Jerusalem to arouse from its drunken stupor and to recognize that "the cup of staggering" has been taken away. Yet Scripture also speaks of those who "did not deserve to drink the cup (but) must drink it" (Jer. 49:12). The tension between these alternate expressions of grace and judgment, respectively, seems to be reflected in Jesus' prayer with its confession of God's ability ("all things are possible to you"; cf. Ch. 10:27) and the firm resolve to submit to God's sovereign will. The metaphor of the cup indicates that Jesus saw himself confronted, not by a cruel destiny, but by the judgment of God.⁵¹

When it is noted that the removal of the cup occurs after it is drunk in Isaiah 51, then there is no tension with Jer 49:12, which teaches the necessity of its being drunk. In conclusion, the synoptics indicate that in Gethsemane Jesus prays a prayer of faith, that after he drinks the cup the Father will not abandon him forever to the desolation of wrath and judgment for sin but, as he has promised Israel in the last days, will remove the wrath of God from him, resurrecting and restoring him.⁵²

⁵⁰ Cranfield, *Mark*, 433.

⁵¹ Lane, *Mark*, 517.

⁵² Such an allusive use of the OT is characteristic of Jesus. Note for example Matt 13:13 (and parallels) with respect to Isa 6:9-10; Matt 21:33 (and parallels) with respect to Isa 5:1-2; and also Matt 11:5 (Luke 7:22) with respect to Isa 35:5-6; 61:1 (Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 59).

II. SUMMARY

At this point it may be helpful to summarize the exegetical results that have been enumerated in the study of the prayer itself. There are basically four that are crucial:

1. By the nature of the conditional clause, the request is assumed to be possible and to be the will of the Father.
2. In conjunction with this, the final clause can quite naturally be taken as a declaration that the request is the Father's will, not simply Christ's alone.
3. By the nature of the verb *parerchomai*, Jesus prays not that the hour will disappear but that it will go past after it arrives.
4. The cup is a figure for the wrath of God, which on the basis of Isa 51:17-23 can be taken away after it has been drunk.

On this basis it is the conclusion of this study that the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was a prayer of faith, in complete agreement with the will of the Father and in total harmony with all that he had taught about himself to this point. As such it reveals the consistent impeccable nature of Christ and His unchanging resolution to do the Father's will.

III. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Perhaps it may yet be asked why Jesus should pray that the cup be taken away after he had drunk it since he already knew that he would rise from the dead just as surely as he would be put to death. The answer comes primarily from the fact that this is a temptation scene. Satan is present, though not directly mentioned, in the garden. It has already been recorded that Satan tempted Jesus through Peter by suggesting that "this shall never happen to you," when Jesus announced his forthcoming death and resurrection. It is in light of Satan's continuing opposition to his passion for the cross that the suddenness and severity of the shock that comes over Christ in the garden takes on significance. The suggestion is that as Jesus saw the cup of wrath approaching with all its horror and desolation of abandonment by the Father, and as he

faithfully contemplated rising from this awesome abyss, Satan, in characteristic fashion and with all his power of deceit, focused his utmost energies at this most precise moment of Christ's contemplation with the suggestion, "This shall never happen to you." The awfulness of this cup, such as no man before or since ever saw prior to death, coupled with the horror of this fiendish lie hit our Lord so forcefully that his human constitution visibly shook with emotional shock. Though filled with dread and horror, though he staggered before the cup that threatened to consume him forever, his faith did not waver. He defeated the tempter in his most devastating temptation as he had always done before. He turned to the Word, and he did so in prayer.

To Satan's lie that the cup would not pass away as he drank it but would rather consume him forever, Jesus responded, "Father, as you have promised in your Word, take the cup from me after I drink it; yet this is not my will alone, it is your will that this be done." It is a prayer of faith, a full entrusting of himself to the Father's promise and power to raise him from the dead. It is an expression of that faith, a reaffirmation of what he has consistently taught and believed. He does not request this because he has forgotten that he would be resurrected, but precisely because he believes that he will be resurrected. It is a victory over the most deceitful temptation Satan had ever proposed, and it is a victory that reveals the true nature of the impeccable Rock of our salvation.

**CALVINISM EX CATHEDRA:
A REVIEW OF JOHN H. GERSTNER'S
Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth:
A Critique of Dispensationalism^{1,2}**

BY ZANE C. HODGES

John H. Gerstner is a well-known and prolific writer/theologian from the Reformed tradition. His recent book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, is a trenchant assault on Dispensationalism in general and Grace theology in particular. The latter he flatly labels as Antinomianism.

I welcome this book. The issues are sharply drawn and the author has largely avoided pejorative rhetoric and harsh verbal abuse. Some readers may not think this is so, but this reviewer would differ with them. Gerstner's criticisms of Dispensationalism are certainly severe. But given his own position, they must be seen as his frank and candid assessments of an opposing theology.

Perhaps the last paragraph of his conclusion expresses his spirit as well as anything else that he says:

My plea to all dispensationalists is this—show me the fundamental error in what I teach or admit your own fundamental error. We cannot both be right. One of us is wrong—seriously wrong. If you are wrong (in your doctrine, as I charge), you are preaching nothing less than a false gospel. This calls for genuine repentance and fruits worthy of it before the Lord Jesus Christ whom we both profess to love and serve.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*³

Fair enough! Who could object to such an attitude? We have no quarrel with Gerstner himself, therefore. Our quarrel is with his

¹ This article was originally published in the Autumn 1991 issue of *JOTGES*. In this review, Hodges followed Gerstner's policy of capitalizing Dispensationalism (the theology) and lower-casing dispensationalists (its adherents).

² John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), xii+ 276 pp.

³ Gerstner, 263.

theology. Within the obvious limitations of an article like this, we will examine that theology as best we can.

I. WHAT GERSTNER PRESUPPOSES

Gerstner rejects the apologetic presuppositionalism which is associated especially with the name of Cornelius Van Til and Westminster Seminary.⁴ Yet the theological approach of Gerstner's book seems to this reviewer to be essentially presuppositional.

Accordingly, on just the fourth page of his section on "Theology" (Part III of his book) we read this:

We believe with the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that Calvinism is just another name for Christianity. The denial of Calvinism is a very grave mistake.⁵

"*Calvinism is just another name for Christianity*"! This is an astounding claim even if it *was* previously made by Spurgeon! We would expect, therefore, some systematic defense of such a bold assertion.

But this we do not find. What we have instead is the measuring of Dispensationalism by the yardstick of Reformed theology, especially as articulated by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).⁶ Thus Gerstner is committed to 5-point Calvinism or, as I will call it for clarity's sake, "Classical Calvinism."

To be sure, Gerstner *does* interact with, and seeks to refute, dispensational arguments against his theological stance. But this is not the same as establishing the case for "Classical Calvinism" from the Bible. Of course, to do *that*, Gerstner would have needed to write another book, if not a series of books. That would have been impractical.

But the overall effect of Gerstner's approach is unsatisfactory. The grid out of which he works ("Classical Calvinism") becomes, in effect, the arbiter of dispensational exegesis and theology. His outlook is not much different than that of a committed Roman Catholic polemicist who takes the authoritative doctrines of his church as his starting point.

In other words, here we have Calvinism *ex cathedra*! Dortian theology is Gerstner's starting point as well as his only goal. Whatever contradicts his "Classical Calvinism" is of questionable orthodoxy for

⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁶ Ibid., 105.

this author. We are not saying that Gerstner is not entitled to his convictions. He surely is. But his approach will hardly be persuasive to those who wonder whether “Classical Calvinism” is a Biblical form of theology at all.

II. WHAT GERSTNER IGNORES

Strikingly, Gerstner passes by in silence one of the most significant theological issues of our day. This issue touches close to the core of the dispensational/Reformed debate. The issue is the relationship between Calvin himself and “Classical Calvinism” regarding the nature of saving faith and the grounds for the assurance of salvation.

Again, for purposes of clarity, we shall refer to “Calvin’s Calvinism” as over against “Classical Calvinism.”

The two are *not* identical. As R. T. Kendall has so effectively shown, Calvin himself held to *unlimited* atonement and to the doctrine that *assurance is of the essence of* (i.e., an integral part of) *saving faith*. Kendall’s book on this subject (1979)⁷ is based on his D. Phil. thesis done at Oxford. Kendall told this reviewer in person that one of his readers was J. I. Packer, a well-known “Classical Calvinist,” and that Packer told Kendall that he thought Kendall had demonstrated his case concerning Calvin’s beliefs. So also M. Charles Bell agrees with Kendall in *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (1985).⁸ Another Calvin scholar, A. N. S. Lane, took much the same view independently of Kendall.⁹

Gerstner refers only once to Kendall’s work, and that in a footnote referring to the subject of the atonement.¹⁰ (Strangely, Kendall’s name is omitted from the index of Gerstner’s book, perhaps because it does not appear in Gerstner’s text.) So far as the reviewer has noticed, there is no reference at all to Bell or Lane.

But a scholar of Gerstner’s stature cannot possibly be ignorant of the discussion about the nature of faith in “Calvin’s Calvinism” vis-à-vis “Classical Calvinism.” Perhaps he would have found it awkward to admit that “Classical Calvinism” no longer holds *Calvin’s* view of faith and assurance, whereas many dispensationalists do! And that includes this reviewer.

⁷ See R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979).

⁸ M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985).

⁹ A. N. S. Lane, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance,” *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 32–54.

¹⁰ Gerstner, 125, note 48.

Such an admission by Gerstner would indeed be necessary. Even in the nineteenth century, the distinction was forthrightly admitted by Robert L. Dabney, a Reformed theologian and scholar. Dabney wrote two articles entitled (in his collected writings) “Theology of the Plymouth Brethren.” There he says this:

The source of this [Plymouth Brethren] error is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Calvin and Luther, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome...These noble Reformers...flew to the opposite extreme, and (to use the language of theology) asserted that the assurance of hope is of the essence of saving faith. Thus says Calvin in his Commentary on Romans: “My faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has pardoned and accepted *me*” [italics in Dabney].¹¹

Later he adds these telling comments:

It is very obvious...that these views of faith and assurance...ground themselves in the faulty definitions of saving faith which we received from the first Reformers. They, as we saw, defined saving faith as a belief that “Christ has saved *me*,” making the assurance of hope of its necessary essence. Now, the later Reformers, and those learned, holy and modest teachers of the Reformed Churches, whose influence the Plymouth Brethren regard as so unhealthy for true religion, have subjected this view to searching examination, and rejected it (as does the Westminster Assembly) on scriptural grounds [italics in Dabney].¹²

Here, then, is a facet of the discussion *which Gerstner has completely suppressed*. According to him, Dispensationalism has its roots in the Plymouth Brethren movement.¹³ The gospel proclaimed by both, he charges, is antinomian in character.¹⁴ But we are never told by this

¹¹ *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney*, ed. by C. R. Vaughn (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 1:173.

¹² *Ibid.*, 183.

¹³ Gerstner, 21-56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 209-230.

writer that the dispensational/Plymouth Brethren view of saving faith has its roots in *Reformation theology*!

This is a little bit like trying to explain the World Series competition to someone without ever mentioning the baseball season which led up to it. In tracing the roots of the contemporary debate on the gospel, Gerstner stops digging just before he hits pay dirt!

III. WHAT GERSTNER BELIEVES ABOUT FAITH

The reviewer confesses that he is displeased with Gerstner's claim that "Hodges fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the issue when he thinks that works are some sort of addendum, something beyond the faith itself. We maintain that it is *implicit in the faith* from the beginning" [italics added].¹⁵

Gerstner has just quoted a statement I made in *The Gospel Under Siege* to the effect that "to faith are added other conditions or provisos, by which the essential nature of the Gospel is radically transformed."¹⁶ I doubt that Gerstner would deny that some theologies do exactly that.

But Gerstner should have read on.

In the next few sentences, I state exactly what Gerstner has claimed I don't understand:

Often, in fact, a distinction is drawn between the kind of faith which saves and the kind of faith which does not. But the kind of faith which *does* [italics in my text] save is always seen to be the kind that results in some form of overt obedience. By this means, the obedience becomes at least *an implicit part of the transaction between man and God. "Saving" faith has thus been subtly redefined in terms of its fruits* [italics added].¹⁷

Isn't this precisely what Gerstner has claimed I do not comprehend? Reformed theologians are fond of asserting that those who oppose their theology do not understand it. This implies that, if their

¹⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶ *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1981), 4.

¹⁷ Ibid.

opponents *did* understand, their objections would be null. But that is not the case.

Many contemporary Grace writers understand the Reformed position perfectly well. But they charge that such theology is doing a semantic dance around the Biblical concepts of faith and works. Thus, Reformed writers like Gerstner want to have it both ways—salvation by faith alone, but no salvation without works! In this way they affirm Pauline orthodoxy and subvert it at the same time.

Nowhere is this clearer in Gerstner's book than when he writes (speaking about an article by L. Blauvelt), as follows:

Again, this fundamental failure to comprehend is evident. [Again, this charge!] Lordship teaching does not “add works,” as if faith were not sufficient. *The “works” are part of the definition of faith* [italics added].¹⁸

Exactly! And this is precisely the error of Reformed thought about faith. Reformed theology teaches a synergy of faith and works which is blatantly at odds with Paul and with the Reformers.

Thus the apostle wrote:

And if by grace, it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work (Rom 11:6).

Compare this with:

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace...(Rom 4:16).

Reformed theology has created a theological hybrid which abandons the Pauline antinomy between faith and works. From the Pauline perspective, the “grace” of which Reformed thinkers speak is no longer grace at all. Once “‘works’ are part of the definition of faith,” faith has been redefined in non-Pauline terms.

John Calvin knew nothing of any such definition of faith, either. Indeed, his own definition is justly famous:

Now, we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both

¹⁸ Gerstner, 257.

revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit (*Institutes* III. ii. 7).¹⁹

Note that for Calvin faith is “knowledge.” Elsewhere Calvin “describes faith as illumination (*illuminatio*) [*Institutes* III. i. 4], knowledge as opposed to the submission [!!] of our feeling (*cognitio, non sensus nostri submissio*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 2], certainty (*certitudo*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 6], a firm conviction (*solidapersuasio*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], assurance (*securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], firm assurance (*solida securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 16], and full assurance (*plena securitas*) [*Institutes* III. ii. 22].”²⁰

The Reformed “definition” of faith *as including* “works” is utterly alien both to Calvin and to Paul. Insofar as such a definition depends on Reformed theology’s standard treatment of Jas 2:14-26, it is resting on a foundation of sand.

To his credit, Gerstner seeks to address my argument from Jas 2:26. There James states: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

I have urged that this simile clearly implies that a *dead* faith was *once alive*, just as a dead body that has lost its spirit was once alive.²¹

But what is Gerstner’s own reading of Jas 2:26? It is this:

James 2:26 makes the point of the passage perfectly clear. All that James says is that, just as you cannot have a man without a body and spirit together, so you cannot have a Christian without works and faith together.²²

What impartial reader would ever get *this* idea out of the text of James? In no way does James say that one does not “have a man” without body and spirit being together. Is a man non-existent simply because his spirit has left his body? Has he *never* existed? But Gerstner implies that a Christian has *never existed as a Christian* if his faith is not accompanied by works!

¹⁹ Quoted from the 2-volume edition of the *Institutes* translated by John Allen and published at Philadelphia by the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education [n.d.].

²⁰ Quoted from Kendall, 19.

²¹ See *The Gospel Under Siege*, 30; see also my *Dead Faith—What Is It?* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1987), 7-9.

²² Gerstner, 229.

James is manifestly comparing a dead faith to a dead body from which the spirit has departed. Gerstner's exegesis is a transparent case of reading into a text what one wants to get out of it.

Of course, Gerstner would also say to me (as in fact he does) that I am overlooking a significant distinction when I discuss "works." Gerstner writes:

So we see...that Hodges does not critique the traditional orthodox [!] position accurately...Hodges, and virtually all dispensationalists, do not see the elementary difference between *non-meritorious* "requirements," "conditions, necessary obligations," "indispensable duties," and musts, as the natural outworking of true faith, in distinction from faith in the Savior plus meritorious works as the very basis of Salvation.²³

Here I plead guilty. I admit that I "do not see the elementary difference" Gerstner is talking about. In fact, I deny it. Not only is it in no way "elementary," it is not even Biblical!

We must note that Paul did *not* say, "Now to him who works *meritoriously*..." but simply, "Now to him who *works*, the wages are not counted as grace but as *debt*" (Rom 4:4, italics added).

For Paul, "works" always implied "debt"—i.e., they were meritorious! Neither does Paul say, "But to him who does not work meritoriously, but believes (and is willing to work non-meritoriously)..." but he *does* say, "But to him who does not *work* but *believes* on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5, italics added).

Reformed theology makes a shambles of the Pauline contrast between faith and works. Gerstner's "elementary difference" is really a *non-existent* difference!

IV. WHAT GERSTNER SAYS ON OTHER MATTERS

Even in an article-size review like this one, it is impossible to deal with all the significant issues raised by Gerstner's book. We must now be satisfied to discuss more briefly a number of other matters addressed by this author.

²³ Ibid., 226.

A. The Atonement

Gerstner is a frank and unapologetic believer in the doctrine of limited atonement. Indeed, his statements on this issue are so bald that one is tempted to shudder at them.

Take this one as an example:

[John 3:16] is supposed to teach that God so loved everyone in the world that He gave His only Son to provide them an opportunity to be saved by faith. What is wrong with this interpretation? First, such a “love” on God’s part, so far from being love, would be *a refinement of cruelty*. As we have seen, offering a gift of life to a spiritual corpse, a brilliant sunset to a blind man, and a reward to a legless cripple if only he will come and get it, are *horrible mockeries* (italics added).²⁴

But can we not say that if God ordains the existence of immortal beings for whom He makes no provision at all that they should escape eternal torment, that this too is a “refinement of cruelty”? Is it not also a “horrible mockery” for God to send His temporal blessings (Matt 5:45; Acts 14:17) on the “unjust” whose fate is eternally sealed and whose creation had no other possible outcome in view except everlasting damnation?

With its total rejection of any and all capacity in man to respond to God’s love and favor, “Classical Calvinism” leaves itself with a cruel God who is only a caricature of the generous and loving Creator of the Bible.

B. Sanctification

As is characteristic of “Classical Calvinists,” Gerstner charges that dispensationalists hold to a “total separation of justification and sanctification.”²⁵ But this is a manifest distortion of our convictions.

Just because a dispensationalist does not hold that a high degree of present sanctification is an “inevitable result” of justification, does not mean that his theology views them in “total separation.” An astute theologian like Gerstner should know better than to say so.

In fact, most dispensationalists (including the reviewer) hold that some measure or degree of sanctification *will* indeed result from

²⁴ Ibid., 124.

²⁵ Ibid., 24.

justification.²⁶ Moreover, we hold that final sanctification *is* an inevitable result of justification (“and whom He justified, these He also glorified”—Rom 8:30). What we do *not* believe is that *assurance of salvation* is dependent on the measure or degree of one’s sanctification in this life.

It is in his discussion of sanctification that Gerstner makes perhaps the most wildly inaccurate statement in the entire book:

Its [Dispensationalism’s] preaching has *always* been very lopsidedly balanced in favor of their notion of grace with *a conspicuous absence* of moral stress [italics added].²⁷

To anyone who has moved for years in dispensational circles, as this reviewer has, this claim is absurd. Evidently the author has heard very few dispensational messages indeed. Either that, or he has heard the wrong kind!

C. Antinomianism

Gerstner makes liberal use of Reformed theology’s favorite theological “cuss word”—Antinomianism. According to him, both the Plymouth Brethren and consistent dispensationalists (such as John F. Walvoord and Charles C. Ryrie, for example) preach an antinomian gospel. He even states that my book, *The Gospel Under Siege*, “should be entitled, ‘Antinomianism Under Siege’”²⁸—an amusing suggestion which I have no plans to act upon!

But the meaning of the term, *Antinomianism*, is notoriously slippery. Gerstner holds this view:

From the essential truth that no sinner in himself can merit salvation, the antinomian draws the erroneous conclusion that good works need not accompany faith in the saint. The question is not whether good works are necessary to salvation, but in what way they are necessary. As the inevitable outworking of saving faith, they are necessary for salvation [italics in Gerstner].²⁹

²⁶ See my discussion in *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 213-15 (found in endnote 4 for chapter 6).

²⁷ Gerstner, 250.

²⁸ Ibid., 225.

²⁹ Ibid., 210.

This statement is preceded, two sentences earlier, by this:

Thus, good works may be said to be *a condition for obtaining salvation* in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith [italics added].³⁰

This is precisely the issue. In Reformed thought good works *are* a *condition* for salvation. A deft Reformed thinker, like Samuel Logan, might add that good works are not a *cause* of salvation, while faith is both a *cause and a condition* for this.³¹ But the bottom line is that, for Reformed Theology, there are two conditions for final salvation—faith and works!

This articulation of things is clearly foreign, not only to the Apostle Paul, but also to Calvin and Luther, who confronted essentially the same theology in Roman Catholicism. No doubt Gerstner would argue that the NT teaches the necessity of good works for final salvation; and, if it did, they *would be* a condition for that. But the NT does not teach this, not even in James 2.

The real issue is not quite what Gerstner appears to think it is. One can hold (as I do) that some good works, at least, *are* inevitable—unless the Christian dies immediately after believing in Christ. But one can equally hold that the presence or absence of good works would not at all determine the validity of a person's faith. With Calvin I can affirm that "my faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has saved me,"³² "which is founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ."³³ Since assurance is of the essence of saving faith, such confidence in God's Word is self-authenticating and does not need further confirmation by works. Whether works are present or absent is irrelevant. Faith in Christ saves and the believer has assurance at the moment of faith.

It is the Reformed effort to verify and authenticate faith by works which leads to a redefinition of faith in which "works" are a part of the definition of "faith."³⁴ Thus "works" logically become a co-condition

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Samuel T. Logan, Jr., "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *Westminster Theological Quarterly* 46 (1984): 26-52.

³² See the quotation in Dabney which is cited in Section II above.

³³ See Calvin's definition quoted in Section III above.

³⁴ Gerstner, 257. I am aware that both Calvin and Reformed thinkers maintain a doctrine of spurious, temporary faith. For a good discussion of this issue, see Kendall, 21-28. Calvin, it seems, did not really consistently integrate his concept of temporary faith with his own definition of saving faith. I think he would be appalled at the way Reformed theology has done this.

with faith for final salvation. The result is not reformational or Biblical orthodoxy at all, but a full-scale retreat toward Roman Catholic synergy. Though expressed in theological categories quite different from Catholicism, the results of Reformed and Catholic thought about final salvation are not fundamentally very different at all.

We could define “Antinomianism” in the way the *American Heritage Dictionary* does as “holding that faith alone is necessary for salvation.”³⁵ If that were what was meant by the term, I would be quite comfortable with it. Unfortunately, because “Antinomianism” implies to many minds a disregard for moral issues, I must reject this designation. I urge my Reformed counterparts to drop this term because of its pejorative, and often unfair, connotations and overtones. But I will not hold my breath waiting for them to do so!

V. CONCLUSION

Although this review has been primarily negative, the reviewer does not mean to leave the impression that everything in this book is wrong. That is certainly not the case.

Gerstner is correct in perceiving a theological drift by some dispensationalists in the direction of Reformed thought. Dallas Seminary is his major illustration of this (47-49). Gerstner is also right, I believe, in his claim that dispensational theology and Reformed theology are essentially incompatible. In Gerstner’s view, no one can be a true dispensationalist and a Calvinist (= “Classical Calvinist”) at the same time. Rather effectively he shows that dispensationalists have normally rejected or modified all of the so-called “5 points of Calvinism.” The reviewer wonders why anyone would wish to plant his foot in both theological camps. The doctrinal divide between them is enormous and essentially unbridgeable.

Thus, overall, Gerstner’s book has the effect of sharply and clearly delineating the two camps which are the primary participants in the debate over “Lordship Salvation.” Gerstner clearly dispels the myth that this debate is largely semantic and does not represent a significant cleavage in evangelical thought. We appreciate this result and commend Gerstner for his effectiveness in bringing this deep cleavage to

³⁵ *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), s.v., “antinomianism.”

light. For that reason alone, if for no other, every serious student of Grace theology ought to obtain this book.

And for responsible leaders in the Grace movement, Gerstner's volume is not optional—but mandatory—reading.

GRACE IN THE ARTS

The Garden

KATHRYN WRIGHT

When the light of the world dipped low
And twilight enclosed,
Do you suppose
The sweat from his brow dripped down¹
Onto the dust-formed ground?²

With calloused hands, would he lay the plow
As the glow of the fire sparked anew?
Do you suppose the man would groan
As he turned to find his way home
And thought about me and you?³

Would the woman squint to see as the shadows grew thin,
While murder⁴ slept in her arms...
Would grief grip at the first sight of him,
As the flecks of gray on his face
Reflected back the price they pay?⁵

Or would she think of grace
And of the coolness of the days?⁶

Would they speak of the trees—
How their limbs bowed with fruit,⁷
Of the moss at their feet
And the peace they once knew?
Would they sigh at the thought
Of the nights that they shared?
Of the innocence and unimpaired?⁸

¹ Genesis 3:17.

² Genesis 3:18-19.

³ Rom 5:12.

⁴ Genesis 4:1, 8.

⁵ Genesis 2:17.

⁶ Genesis 3:8.

⁷ Genesis 2:8-9, 16.

⁸ Genesis 2:25.

Or would they recall
How their fingers stuck...
As the juice from the fruit⁹
Covered their hands;
How they plucked the leaves
To hide their shame;¹⁰
How they laid the blame¹¹
On another?
Do you suppose the mother
Of all the living¹² ever spoke of how He came,
Calling out the sinner's name?¹³
Do you suppose,
In shame-filled tones
As the fire would grow dim,
These ancients would whisper
And huddle close,
And speak of the days they walked with Him
In the garden?
When the bride of Christ would gather
In cramped and sweaty rooms—¹⁴
Sleepy-eyed and tired—
To hear about her Groom,¹⁵
Do you suppose,
As the meeting closed
And hands rubbed wearied eyes,
Two figures sitting set apart
Would share a silent, knowing spark?
As the body knelt down to pray
Would they ponder on His grace?
Would the two speak of the trees,
How the grapes hung low on the vine,

⁹ Genesis 3:6.

¹⁰ Genesis 2:25; 3:7.

¹¹ Genesis 3:12-13.

¹² Genesis 3:20.

¹³ Genesis 3:9.

¹⁴ Acts 1:13-14.

¹⁵ Acts 20:7-9.

Of the springtime in the breeze
That rippled through Gethsemane?¹⁶
In unspoken grief, would they recall the peace
Of bellies full of lamb?
How they struggled to withstand blissful sleep¹⁷
In the presence of the I AM?¹⁸
Or would one recall the sweat He shed,¹⁹
The other his blood-soaked hands,²⁰
As one by one, they all had fled²¹
And left the Son of Man?

Do you suppose,
With quivering lips
As the crowd would grow thin,
The apostles would whisper
While leaning in,
And speak of when they walked with Him

In the garden
When the Light of the world speaks anew²²
And darkness scatters off,²³
Do you suppose we'll wear shoes—
For who will worry about the dust?²⁴

Do you suppose—
As the nations grow²⁵
And gather to take the leaves,²⁶
One by one, with jubilee—
They'll praise the Lamb born King?
Will you follow the path drawn by the stream²⁷
And pluck a fruit borne by the tree

¹⁶ John 18:1.

¹⁷ Mark 14:37-38, 40-41.

¹⁸ John 18:6.

¹⁹ Luke 22:44.

²⁰ John 18:10.

²¹ Mark 14:50.

²² Genesis 1:3; Rev 21:5, 23.

²³ Revelation 22:5.

²⁴ Revelation 22:3.

²⁵ Revelation 21:24-26; Isa 9:7.

²⁶ Revelation 22:2.

²⁷ Revelation 22:1.

Found in the center of the street?²⁸

Perhaps—

You'll even sit with me.

Will we speak of the feasts

We have yet to plan,

Of cities we have yet to build?

Will we chat about uncharted lands

We still have yet to fill?

And drawing near with outstretched hands,

With uncontainable thrill—

When we see Him face to face²⁹

And all we'll know is grace upon grace...

Do you suppose,

In joy-filled tones,

We'll trim the trees with hymns...

And in the coolness of the day,

With all His glory on display,

Once again, we'll walk with Him

In the garden?

²⁸ Revelation 22:2.

²⁹ Revelation 22:4.

BOOK REVIEWS

Road to Heaven?: Constructed by Men Alone. By Dale Taliaferro. Dallas, TX: Equipped for Life Ministries, 2018. 160 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

This book is written in response to Robert Jeffress's book, *Not All Roads Lead to Heaven*. Taliaferro sees that book as a clear example of the Evangelical consensus that one must believe in Jesus in order to go to heaven. He strongly disagrees.

It is of interest that for years Taliaferro agreed with Jeffress. He studied at conservative Evangelical seminaries, and even holds degrees from such an institution. Readers of the *JOTGES* might find it interesting that early in his ministry Taliaferro was influenced by Earl Radmacher.

After searching the Scriptures, Taliaferro concludes that the Evangelical consensus is not *explicitly* taught in the NT (emphasis his). One of his major points is that in the NT the word *salvation* is not about going to heaven (p. 15). The doctrine that one must believe in Jesus for eternal life is turning people away from the Scriptures because of its exclusivity. Taliaferro says that faith in Jesus is not the only way (p. 17).

Taliaferro makes a number of points with which almost all our readers will disagree. He maintains that hell is a remedial place. Once a person goes there and his sins have been duly punished, he will be released. He sees it as a kind of purgatory (p. 23). In addition, Christ's death has reconciled everyone to God. We ought to expect a universal reunion with God one day (p. 25).

Taliaferro says that God has provided many different ways by which people may acquire the forgiveness of sins. All men have a revelation of God, and this revelation can be used to lead others to God as each person knows Him (p. 27). Each person can, as well, walk with God as he understands Him. This is what Biblical *salvation* is. The NT never uses it to refer to getting eternal life or going to heaven (p. 55). One can be acceptable to God if he walks righteously, even if he does not believe in Jesus (p. 30). The NT does not promise a heavenly destination or give us a road to travel in order to get there (p. 43). Justification is not related to going to heaven at all. Rather, it is God's approval on a life that is pleasing to Him (p. 47). If a person does not live righteously, he will temporarily go to hell. This is true, as well, for the person who has believed in Jesus (p. 60). Taliaferro says James 2 shows that one must have works in order to be justified before God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 is not about salvation from hell, according to Taliaferro. It is being set free from slavery to sin as a way of life (p. 74). Readers of the *JOTGES* will read with interest Taliaferro's claim that it doesn't matter whether one is a Lordship Salvation adherent or a Free Grace person. The grace of God does not make possible a trip to heaven. *Eternal life* describes a quality of life in this present world. Christ brought heaven to man. He did not come to bring men to heaven (pp. 77-79).

The word *destruction* is not used in the Bible to describe hell. Instead, it refers to destroying one's earthly life (p. 95). *Entrance into the kingdom* describes living a righteous life that is not destroyed.

Taliaferro states that when Jesus talked about going to the Father and said that He was the way (John 14:4-6), He was not talking about how to get to heaven, but about how to get to the Father. The Father will render judgment on each person's life. The issue is how a person has lived. A person does not have to believe in Jesus in order to get to the Father; Jesus is the way to the Father, whether a person believes in Him or not (pp. 98-102).

An interesting idea presented is the author's belief that OT people were forgiven and *saved* without believing in Jesus. The OT does not say that they believed in the coming Messiah. Taliaferro maintains that this shows faith is not the issue. Jews in the OT could be righteous before God by following the Law of Moses (p. 109), even if they did not believe in the coming Christ.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Taliaferro believes that the rich man is in hell. However, he will be removed from this judgment when he has paid the sufficient penalty for his sin. The rich man is seen as being repentant. A loving, merciful God would not keep a repentant person under eternal torment (pp. 116-17).

Final judgment, according to Taliaferro, is based upon works. It will not be based upon faith. Evangelism should not be done in order to tell people how to go to heaven. Instead, its purpose is to tell people to live righteously and to reveal, by their conduct, the character of God. It deals with this present life (pp. 145-46).

The book's final chapter discusses those who have never heard the message of life in Christ. Not surprisingly, Taliaferro says that they will not be in hell. He says that Jesus never spoke about saving a person from hell, but only about saving them from the corruption of sin in

this life. Anybody who fears God, regardless of what they believe, is acceptable to Him. Any punishment in hell will be remedial.

This book would have been easier to read if Taliaferro had given a summary of his beliefs. It takes a little bit of digging, but those beliefs do eventually come through. At the core of these beliefs, Taliaferro is a universalist. He does little exegesis, and it is very unlikely that many will be convinced by his arguments.

I do, however, recommend this book. Based upon his own words, I assume that he is a believer. If so, he will be in the kingdom. But he is a believer who now denies many fundamental doctrines of the NT. Even though many say it is not possible, he shows us that a believer can indeed deny the fundamentals of the faith. As such, his value exists in being a warning to all of us. Any of us can make a shipwreck of our faith. If we do, we can even try to convince others to follow in those footsteps.

Kenneth Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique. Edited by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2022. 540 pp. Hardcover, \$39.99.

Until July 31, 2022, David Allen was the Distinguished Professor of Preaching and Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Steve Lemke is Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique* is the second book on the subject of Calvinism that they have edited together. The first was, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (B&H Academic, 2010), which came about as a result of the John 3:16 Conference held in 2008 at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia. Four of the original chapters from *Whosoever Will* are retained in the new volume, but have been “revised and updated” (p. 8).

In the new work, “the focus is not on Southern Baptists specifically, as was *Whosoever Will*, but on the broader evangelical world” (p. 8). It “includes authors from the Baptist, Methodist, and Arminian

traditions” (p. 8). The contributors “do not all agree on the security of the believer” (p. 9); however, “none of the authors in this project is a Pelagian, a semi-Pelagian, or a five-point Calvinist,” and all “join the long history of the church in affirming that Pelagianism is a heresy” and “oppose the ‘openness of God’ perspective” (p. 9). I would classify contributors Brian Abasciano, Roger Olson, J. Matthew Pinson, and Ben Witherington as Arminians.

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique is divided into three parts: (1) a Biblical and theological critique of the soteriology of five-point Calvinism; (2) historical issues with Calvinism; and (3) crucial theological, Biblical, and ecclesiological issues with Calvinism. Acknowledgments, abbreviations, and very brief information about each of the contributors precede an introduction by the editors, each of whom also wrote a chapter. The book concludes with an epilogue, a very good appendix on semi-Pelagianism, and name, subject, and Scripture indexes. I was surprised that there was no bibliography of at least the books and articles referenced in the book’s footnotes.

The first section of the book offers a critique of each of the five points of Calvinism. The chapters not only vary greatly in length, but are also of unequal quality.

Two-thirds of the first chapter on total depravity are spent on the concept of original sin. Although Adam Harwood does a thorough job on that subject, he devotes only eight pages to a critique of total depravity. The result is an inadequate treatment of the subject.

Chapter two on unconditional election by Leighton Flowers is, surprisingly, the shortest of the chapters on the five points of Calvinism. Unfortunately, it, likewise, is inadequate. The preeminent Calvinist proof text for unconditional election (Acts 13:48) is not even mentioned, nor are the subjects of God’s decrees and reprobation. The relationship between predestination and election is not discussed. The omission I find most glaring is the failure to interact with the most infamous statement from the Westminster Confession of Faith: “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (3:1).

Although limited atonement is the most controversial and disputed of the five points of Calvinism, it is actually unnecessary to the Calvinistic system. If men have the inability to believe on Christ

unless they are elected to salvation and called by irresistible grace, then whether Christ died for them makes absolutely no difference. They can't be saved no matter what. As the author of the massive work, *The Extent of the Atonement* (2016), David Allen is eminently qualified to write the chapter on limited atonement. He begins with a simple yet profound statement: "Limited atonement is a doctrine in search of a text" (p. 71) and concludes that "limited atonement is a doctrine that is hermeneutically flawed, theologically unsound, and logically defective" (p. 127). This is by far one of the best chapters in the book.

After a thorough discussion of what Calvinists mean by irresistible grace, Steve Lemke in chapter four considers what the Bible says about resistible grace. And how could he not do otherwise, since the concept of irresistible grace is nowhere to be found in Scripture? Lemke examines key texts affirming resistible grace in the OT, the NT, and the ministry and teaching of Jesus, as well as in the all-inclusive invitations in Scripture, in the Prophets, by Jesus, by the apostles, and in Revelation. He concludes that "the Scriptures contain significant evidence against irresistible grace," that "the Bible specifically teaches that the Holy Spirit can be resisted," and that "God's grace, by His own intent and design, is *resistible*, and choosing Christ is *voluntary* (guided by the conviction and convincing of the Holy Spirit)" (p. 150). Lemke then examines Calvinist proof texts for irresistible grace and finds them wanting. He also tackles the Calvinist theological arguments that "irresistible grace is required for God to be sovereign," and "it is necessary for God to receive glory" (p. 150). This is another of the book's best chapters.

In the fifth chapter, Ken Keathley writes about eternal security and assurance of salvation. His position "is very close to the once-saved-always-saved view" (p. 208). He believes that perseverance "should be understood as a faith that cannot be annihilated and therefore persists" and concludes that it "should be viewed more as a promise than a requirement" (p. 209). I was glad to see him emphasize that "there are rewards that are subsequent to salvation for the believer to win or lose" (p. 209). Although Keathley interacts quite a bit with Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, authors of *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (1991), he offers little interaction with Calvinism as a whole, relative to its fifth point.

The book's second section contains three historical discussions: Calvinism is Augustinianism, dissent from Calvinism in the Baptist tradition, and a Wesleyan critique of Calvinism. In the first, Kenneth Wilson destroys Calvinism's "biblical foundation" of "Augustine's deterministic interpretations of Scripture" (p. 236). He concludes that Augustine "baptized his prior pagan philosophies and religion into Christianity, resulting in an unrecognizable doctrinal conglomeration" (p. 237). In the second, J. Matthew Pinson contributes a learned and fascinating historical study that will be of special interest to Baptists. In the third, Ben Witherington offers not his own critique of Calvinism, but that of the Methodist theologian Richard Watson (1781-1833). One of the most important objections of Wesleyan Arminian theology to Calvinism is that it "besmirches the very character of God" (p. 288). It is unfortunate, though, that Witherington also uses his contribution to promote his Wesleyan Arminian theology. He muddles salvation by grace and slights justification. I am actually a little surprised that Witherington's contribution was included in the book.

The third section of the book "addresses a variety of crucial issues from theological, Biblical, and ecclesiological perspectives" (p. 10). These are expanded treatments of things that could have been addressed in the chapters on the five points of Calvinism: Romans 9, corporate and personal election, the character of God, determinism and human freedom, evil and God's sovereignty, and the public invitation. The contribution by William W. Klein on "corporate and personal election" is an especially welcome and necessary supplement to chapter two on unconditional election.

The epilogue by Trevin Wax is a plea for Calvinists and non-Calvinists to work together for the gospel. This is the other subpar contribution to the book. Trevin professes to be a modified four-point Calvinist (p. 483). That alone should disqualify him from contributing. Although he personally believes that "faith precedes regeneration," he qualifies that with the remark that "that faith, however, remains a gift of God and springs from the effectual call" (p. 483). But because Calvinism *does* maintain that regeneration precedes faith, I fail to see how Calvinists and non-Calvinists can agree on a gospel that they can work for together.

Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique is one of the few thorough books against Calvinism since the publication of the revised edition of my book *The Other Side of Calvinism* in 1999. I recommend

it as a supplemental antidote to combat the resurgence of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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The Hope of Life after Death: A Biblical Theology of Resurrection.

By M. Jeff Brannon. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. 185 pp. Paper, \$24.00.

This book is part of the *Essential Studies in Biblical Theology* series, which traces central doctrines through the Bible, starting with Genesis 1–3. Since these studies are introductory, the intended audience consists of students and lay people. Brannon maintains that Christians focus on the death of Christ, but that little is written about the significance of His resurrection with regard to salvation and discipleship. He writes from a Covenant theology perspective.

Readers of the *JOTGES* will agree with certain points made by Brannon. He says that faith in Christ leads to eternal life (p. 4). Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life that has already begun (p. 95). The Gospel of John shows that Jesus gives eternal life to all who believe in Him and that the miracles the Lord performed were done to provoke faith (p. 136). John 3:16 says that eternal life is given through faith in Christ. The Gospel of John teaches that the believer has spiritual life in the present and will experience resurrection in the future (p. 104).

Brannon rightly points out that many have a wrong view of “heaven.” It will not be a place where believers sit around playing harps. He says that Christians will have various skills and jobs to do. They will also eat food (p. 162). Even though our bodies will be glorified, there will be a continuity between our present and future bodies (p. 157). Eternity will not be a place of misty spirits floating about. It will be an exciting place.

The author also correctly states that believers who die are with the Lord. He calls this the “intermediate state” (p. 147).

While these statements are accurate, Brannon is not consistent. Though not a major feature of the book, his Reformed theology comes through on certain occasions. For example, He seems to forget about having said that eternal salvation is by faith when he declares that the saving gospel includes repentance of sins and turning to God (pp.

32, 131, 141). He says that all believers persevere in faith and that the warnings in Revelation 2–3 to the seven churches are addressed to people who might only claim to be believers. Since, according to Brannon, true believers continue in good works, then all believers will reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:11-12; p. 155). It is not surprising, then, that he never discusses rewards.

For Dispensationalists or those not familiar with Covenant theology, many of Brannon's comments will sound strange. He does not see a distinction between Israel and the Church, nor does he believe in a millennial kingdom. He believes that Christ is ruling now at the right hand of God, that all believers currently reign with Him, and that all will reign with Him in eternity (pp. 28, 118, 120-21). The twelve disciples replace the twelve tribes of Israel (p. 41). The new covenant in Jeremiah is not for Israel, but for the Church in heaven (p. 151). This reflects the already/not yet aspect of our salvation (p. 138). Daniel 12:2-3 is a picture of the resurrection of the church rather than of believing Israel at Christ's return (p. 84).

Brannon's Covenant theology comes through most strongly when he discusses certain passages in Revelation. The Great Tribulation is not a time of worldwide travail; instead, it refers to the present lives of believers, all of whom suffer for the Lord (p. 148). The millennial kingdom in Revelation 20 is a description of the present intermediate state of dead believers who are now with the Lord. The "first resurrection" refers to dead believers who have spiritually risen from the dead and are now ruling with Christ in heaven (p. 149).

The author rightly maintains that the resurrection of Christ is an important but neglected doctrine. However, he misses a major point of its significance. Brannon constantly speaks of what Christ's resurrection means regarding our eternal salvation, but he does not see what it means regarding our sanctification. Since he believes that all believers persevere in good works and faith, the resurrection of the Lord means that all believers will live godly lives and go to heaven. In Brannon's view, Rom 4:25, Rom 8:11, and Romans 6 deal only with eternal salvation and not with Christian living (pp. 113, 130).

Readers might question Brannon's use of types. He says that the hope of resurrection undergirds much of the OT (p. 35). The salvation of Noah's family from the flood, Moses' salvation from the Nile when he was a baby, and Israel's exodus from Egypt and entrance into the

Promised Land, as well as its return after their exile, all point to the resurrection from the dead (pp. 38, 42, 44, 46, 71-72). The blessings in Proverbs that lead to life are, as well, seen as pointing to the resurrection (p. 67). No doubt, many will, instead, see these passages as addressing the blessings of sanctification and obedience.

It is true that the resurrection of Christ does not get the attention its importance deserves, and Brannon tries to address this problem. That is to be commended. However, he misses the impact of Christ's resurrection on Christian living. His Covenant theology and belief in Lordship Salvation cause him to misinterpret certain passages that deal with Christ's resurrection and thereby to teach an unbiblical gospel. The lay person, I am afraid, will not be helped by this book.

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The Spirit, Ethics, and Eternal Life: Paul's Vision for the Christian Life in Galatians. By Jarvis J. Williams. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023. 240 pp. Paper, \$32.00.

Williams, Associate Professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, holds to a strong form of Lordship Salvation. As I will show, this book is filled with that teaching. However, the book has many excellent insights provided one understands inheriting the kingdom as ruling in it and not simply getting into it.

Williams defines *faith* as being both persuaded and obedient: "Paul's gospel must be both cognitively affirmed and experientially obeyed" (p. 189). "An affirmation of facts in the gospel without the presence of a daily walk of faithful living in step with the Spirit in obedience to the gospel proves one does not have the Spirit and therefore lacks faith and participation in God's vertical, horizontal, and cosmic saving action in Christ" (p. 189).

Williams often refers to the three-fold guarantees of salvation: our vertical relationship with God is begun, our horizontal relationships with others will be loving if the vertical relationship perseveres, and the entire world is being and will be transformed.

Williams, presumably a Calvinist, suggests that perseverance is required in order to gain eschatological salvation: "A faithful walk of obedience in the power of the Spirit is both the *necessary proof* [italics

his] that Jews and Gentiles have already *begun to participate now* [italics added] in this present evil age *in God's saving action in Christ* [italics added] *and what God requires* [italics added] for those who receive the gift of the Holy Spirit before...[they] *would inherit the kingdom of God* [italics added]" (p. 195). In this book, Williams indicates that inheriting the kingdom is getting into it, rather than a reward that only some believers will receive (e.g., pp. 167-71, 217). He says that believers

...can, must and will [italics his] walk in step with the Spirit and not conduct themselves in accordance with the flesh...However, *they will not participate in the future inheritance of the kingdom of God* [italics added]...which is one aspect of life in Christ, *if they choose to walk in the flesh now instead of walking in step with the Spirit*" (Gal 2:16–5:21) [italics added] (pp. 170-71).

When he says that believers will walk in step with the Spirit, the reader initially gets the impression that he is affirming that all believers persevere. He is not, because he goes on to say that believers may choose to walk in the flesh and may fail to participate in Christ's future kingdom; this is a denial that all believers persevere.

Throughout the book, he speaks of the *already, not yet* idea. This idea was first popularized in terms of the coming kingdom. The kingdom is said to be here already but, at the same time, not to be here. Williams applies that to everlasting life. A believer already has everlasting life, but he does not yet have it; one's eternal destiny depends on his continued choice to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Williams lists ten things believers must do or not do if they are to gain eschatological salvation. He says that they must: "stand firm," "walk in the Spirit," "not devour one another, be arrogant toward one another, or irritate one another," "not practice vices contrary to the Spirit," "humbly and wisely restore with compassion the brothers or sisters who fall into transgression," "share all good things with those who teach them the word," "not mock God," "sow in the Spirit," "not grow weary," and "daily conduct themselves by the standard of new creation" (p. 190). That list is an assurance killer. If one is not already certain of his eternal destiny simply by faith in Christ for everlasting life, he can never become sure through self-examination.

I like the way Williams speaks of “God’s invasive disruption of the present evil age” (p. 113) and His “disruptive and apocalyptic invasion of the cosmos” (p. 127). While he is wrong in suggesting that we must participate in that invasion in order to win eschatological salvation, he is right in stating that God has invaded this world, and that believers who walk in the Spirit are part of that invasion.

Toward the end of the book, Williams discusses his view of race (pp. 202-204). He suggests that we are all one race, the human race. He says that skin color has nothing to do with ethnicity. “God created humans in his image, but then humans arbitrarily created the social fiction of racial groups within the one human race and forced (and continue to force) humans into a specific artificial racial box because of this social construct” (p. 204). “Ethnicity has nothing to do with race or skin color” (p. 204).

I recommend this book to those who are well-grounded in the faith and who wish to read a scholarly defense of Lordship Salvation from the book of Galatians. I would not recommend this book for new or poorly taught believers since it would almost certainly be very confusing to them.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Second Testament: A New Translation. By Scot McKnight. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023. 303 pp. Cloth, \$35.00.

McKnight is a famous NT scholar whose daily blog, *Jesus Creed*, is one of the most popular Evangelical blogs. This translation of the NT is designed to be radically different from any other translation. IVP calls it “a daring approach to an ancient text.”

John Goldingay wrote a unique translation of the OT called *The First Testament*. McKnight’s translation is a companion to Goldingay’s OT translation.

One thing I really like about this translation is that McKnight does not translate the Lord’s name. Instead, he transliterates it; he uses the English version of each Greek letter. Thus, John 11:35 reads, “*Yēsous* teared up.” I also love that instead of translating *Ioudaiōn* as *Jews*, he uses “Youdaians [Judeans, Jews]” (e.g., John 3:1).

One thing I very much dislike is that McKnight regularly translates *pisteuō*, the Greek verb for believing, as *trust*. So, John 3:16 refers to “everyone trusting in Him.”

As far as I can tell, he does not translate *pisteuō* as *believe* even once in John’s Gospel. Even in John 11:26b, the question becomes, “Do you trust this?” not, “Do you believe this?”

I also dislike the fact that he translates *zōēn aiōnion* not as *everlasting life*, but as “Era Life” (e.g., John 3:16).

Let’s consider his translation of some key NT texts, where translations often introduce their own interpretations rather than simply translating.

1 Corinthians 5:11. My own translation of the Greek text is: “But now I wrote you not to associate with anyone bearing the name brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous...” McKnight renders this, “Now I wrote to you not to comix if someone named ‘sibling’ is sexually immoral or one wanting more...” That is much preferable to “anyone who claims to be a brother or sister” (NIV) or “any so-called brother” (NASB). However, *sibling* is an odd choice. McKnight prefers gender-neutral language. So throughout the NT *brothers* becomes *siblings*.

I’d rate this translation a B.

Galatians 1:8. My translation is: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you any message other than what we preached to you, let him be accursed.” McKnight’s translation: “But even if we or an envoy from heaven were to gospel you against what we gospelsed [sic] to you—let the person be vowed-to-destruction.” *Angel* becomes *envoy*. *Preach to you* becomes *gospel you*. *Other than what we preached to you* becomes *against what we gospelsed to you*. *Let him be accursed* becomes *let the person be vowed-to-destruction*.

I’d rate that translation a D.

2 Timothy 2:12. My translation: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us.” McKnight’s translation: “If we are co-resilient, we will also co-rule; if we deny, that one will deny us.”

I’d rate this translation a B-minus. His choice of “co-resilient” is quite odd. The Greek has no *sun* prefix and in no way suggests *co*-anything. The Greek refers to enduring (*hupomenomen*). “Co-rule” is a fine choice. That he leaves out *Him* after *deny* is quite odd since it is implied contextually (and in comparison with Matt 10:33, which Paul explains here).

However, his translation is far better than the NIV, which reads in the second half, “if we disown him, he will also disown us.”

James 2:14. My translation: “What does it benefit, my brethren, if someone says he has a belief, but does not have works? Belief cannot deliver him, can it?” McKnight’s translation: “What is the benefit, my siblings, if someone says to have faith but doesn’t have works? Is faith not able to deliver him?”

I’d rate that translation an A (though I don’t like *my siblings*).

2 Peter 3:9. While 2 Pet 3:9 is typically translated about the same way in all translations, I found McKnight’s translation so bizarre as to be worthy of comment. His translation: “The pledge’s Lord isn’t slow, as some are led by slowness, but [the Lord] is patient for you, not wanting some to be destroyed but for all to find space for conversion.” *The pledge’s Lord* is the opposite of the text, which refers to *His promise*. *Led by slowness* is bizarre. *Not wanting some to be destroyed* is contrary to the text. The Greek says, “not wanting anyone to be destroyed.” However, I do prefer his translation *destroyed* to the typical *perish*. How McKnight came up with the words *for conversion* is hard to see. The text literally says, *for* [or *to*] *repentance*. There is no word for conversion in the verse.

I’d rate that translation a D.

I recommend this NT translation to pastors, educators, and Christian leaders. I would not recommend it to most Christians since they would find it unhelpful and quite pricey as well.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Samaritan Woman’s Story: Reconsidering John 4 after #ChurchToo. By Caryn A. Reeder. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. 206 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

Caryn Reeder challenges a common view of John chapter four’s woman at the well, maintaining that the passage’s usual interpretation—perpetuated by men throughout church history—objectifies women. According to Reeder, faulty interpretations of the Bible, including John 4, have contributed to the abuse of women in the church. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements arose in response to this abuse.

Reeder traces how the church, from the post-apostolic period until the present day, has viewed the Samaritan woman.

Tertullian saw her as a prostitute, a picture of a terrible sinner who needed spiritual salvation. Her many husbands point to her numerous sexual sins (pp. 3-4). The emphasis is on the woman's sexuality and is a warning to the church concerning the dangers of that sexuality. Women are not seen as equals, but are minimized. Tertullian said that having more than one marriage is adultery (p. 26). The woman is a temptress; women can therefore be dangerous by arousing sexual desire in men. The responsibility for men's lust falls on women. Sexual assault is therefore the fault of women who do not dress or behave properly (p. 90).

Others from early church history, such as Chrysostom, saw the Samaritan woman as a sexual sinner, but one who was genuinely seeking the truth (p. 38).

From the Reformation onward, most writers have continued to paint her as an evil sinner who shows that even the worst of people can experience God's grace (p. 49). Calvin said she was a prostitute who mocked Jesus with her questions. Her example shows that women are to be submissive in the church (p. 54). Reeder rebukes D. L. Moody and early Fundamentalists because they used the account of the woman to elevate the position of men in the church (p. 95). Writers who view the woman in a positive light have usually been women.

Because they tempt men, women are often viewed as a danger to men's salvation (p. 76). Reeder particularly attacks John Piper, saying that he is a white man who minimalizes the Samaritan woman's intelligence and worth. According to Reeder, attitudes like Piper's can lead to the abuse of women in the church (p. 85). Reeder states that this "pattern of interpretation develops from and reinforces the reductive sexualization of women," and is a "microcosm of the dehumanizing, sexualization of women in Christian theology and practice" (pp. 93, 175). As a result, there is a crisis of abuse in the church (p. 94).

Reeder believes that the white, European, male view that has dominated the interpretation of John 4:7-42 has caused the church to seriously misunderstand the point of the account. She takes the account as historical and believes that we need to understand its first-century context in order to properly see this woman for who she was. This is the strongest feature of Reeder's book.

Citing original sources, Reeder argues that the woman's multiple marriages and the fact that she is living with a man who is not her husband do not indicate sexual sin or uncontrolled libido on the woman's part. She is not a *femme fatale*. In chapters 5–6, Reeder shows that girls in that culture married very young—often at the age of twelve—and often to husbands who were much older. Divorce and remarriage were very common, and multiple marriages were often arranged by a woman's parents. Women were often involved in businesses, owned property, and had some wealth through dowries. Marriages were most often seen as social and economic contracts. The woman at the well was not looking for romance or sexual conquests in her marriages. Marriage after divorce was most often done out of necessity for all concerned. Husbands would often divorce their wives or die before the woman did (p. 114). Men often married in order to have an heir, but infant mortality was high. If a husband could not have children with a woman, he might divorce her (p. 128). Reeder says that while the husbands of the woman at the well are most often seen as victims, the woman, in fact, probably bore little of the blame for her complicated marital history.

Reeder points out that Jesus does not speak of this woman's sin when He talks about her many marriages and current living arrangement. Her life was not considered shameful in that culture. Jesus used His knowledge of her life to simply show that He is the Christ (pp. 145, 163).

Because of the importance of women in the affairs of home and business, the Samaritan woman would have conducted various activities outside the home. To say that she drew water at noon because she was considered an outcast in the community is to misunderstand the historical context (p. 162). It is not a commentary on how the people of the city saw her. She was simply busy, and this was the time she found appropriate to draw water.

It is wrong to see this woman as an ignorant, uneducated, sexual temptress. When compared to Nicodemus in John 3, she is seen as an example of discipleship. Nicodemus comes to the Lord at night. She meets Jesus in the brightness of day. Nicodemus is ashamed of being seen with Christ. She goes and tells the people of the city that they need to come see Him. They respect her enough to listen to her (p. 63). Nicodemus does not understand what the Lord says, but she

quickly understands that He is a prophet. Then, she understands that He is even more (p. 100). She shows her knowledge of religious and political issues by the questions she asks. She is a partner with Christ in evangelizing the city.

Through her primary sources, Reeder challenges us to reconsider the social circumstances of the woman at the well. We will accept Reeder's presentation of the woman to the degree that we accept her sources as accurately reflective of the day-to-day lives and marriages of first century women in the Middle East. If nothing else, Reeder's argument should keep us from superimposing our own culture onto John 4. I found myself wondering whether my understanding of this woman has been based upon modern Evangelical views of marriage and divorce. I particularly enjoyed her comparison of the woman and Nicodemus. I highly recommend this book for these reasons.

However, it is clear to this reviewer that Reeder has an axe to grind. She is rightly disgusted with the sexual abuse of women in Evangelical churches and with the way that men who are guilty of such sins/crimes are often excused. But she swings the pendulum too far. She believes women should be equal in every way in the church, including being pastors. She rejects a complementarian view of the sexes (pp. 8, 180). She believes that white men are to blame for the faulty interpretation of John 4 because they see women as inferior, sexual objects.

But what is the true cause and effect? A faulty view of John 4 may not be nefarious. Most often it is simply because of historical ignorance and the inability to recognize that our culture is not the culture of Jesus' day. Reeder strongly suggests that faulty interpretations of John 4 lead to, produce, or contribute to the mistreatment and sexual abuse of women in the church. However, while a majority of men may not accurately understand the Samaritan woman's situation, it seems unlikely that this leads many of them to engage in the abuse of women. I would think that other sinful impulses are the real cause of such abuse.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The New Calvinists. By E. S. Williams. Oberlin, OH: Wakeman Trust, 2014. 74 pp. Paper, \$7.99.

I only became aware of this short book in late February.

Williams is a medical doctor from London. He is a Calvinist with a strong dislike for the New Calvinists.

Three New Calvinists are featured: John Piper, Mark Driscoll, and Tim Keller.

What are New Calvinists, according to Williams? They identify as Calvinists, hold to most Calvinist doctrines, embrace “worldly, sensation-stirring, high-decibel, rhythmic music” (p. 11) and “a new social gospel” (p. 13), “work with charismatic and emerging churches” (p. 16), “and wink at the adopting of Catholic and New Age mysticism” (p. 16).

Here are some sample statements by Williams about the three men he features:

Keller. “[Keller’s thinking] is essentially the old liberation theology of the Latin American Roman Catholics...Keller swerves from the central message of Scripture that this is a doomed world that cannot be restored, except by the coming of Christ and end-time events... [He] insists that the church is called to bring about societal change” (p. 21). Williams discusses Keller’s “Affinity with Rome” (pp. 24-25) and the fact that “Catholic authors and mysticism [are] embraced” by him (pp. 25-27). He also shows that Keller believes in theistic evolution or “what he calls ‘progressive evolution’” (pp. 27-28).

Piper. “[Piper] claimed to have heard God speak, directly to him” (p. 33). He has “a deep commitment to contemporary, worldly worship and to the ‘Christian’ rap scene” (p. 34). At the Passion Conference in 2013, “he preached in the dark, except for a spotlight that focused on him. Why no light? Because the mystical, ecstatic atmosphere of Passion, so carefully cultivated by a mix of darkness, psychedelic strobe lights, and relentless, overpoweringly loud beat music, would have been shattered if the youthful audience had been brought to its senses” (p. 35). “The exploitation and approval of charismatic worship and theatricalism is far out of accord with reformed principles...” (p. 36).

I found this statement about Piper to be outstanding: “When a measure of doctrinal soundness is accompanied by such serious mistakes, the damage to God’s people is far greater than where the erring person is altogether unsound in doctrine...vulnerable believers will be plunged into tragic worldliness” (p. 37).

Driscoll. In the same year this book was published, Mark Driscoll resigned as pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. (The following year,

Mars Hill Church folded.) Two years later, he planted a new church in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The concerns that Williams expresses here have followed Driscoll to a new ministry and are still relevant.

At times, Driscoll uses sexually explicit language in his sermons and writings. While this is not a characteristic of Piper or Keller, it is characteristic of some New Calvinists. I cannot comment on some things that Driscoll endorses without offending *JOTGES* readers. His former church provided “hyperlinks to two pornographic websites” (p. 43).

Another feature of Driscoll’s New Calvinism is that he uses coarse language. Donald Miller, author of *Blue Like Jazz*, “nicknamed him ‘Mark the Cussing Pastor’” (p. 44).

Like Piper and Keller, Driscoll endorses charismatic experiences as well as the use of rock music in worship.

What is missing in this book is interaction with *the doctrines* of the New Calvinists. Williams says nothing, for example, about the teaching of some (or most) New Calvinists that a person gains initial salvation by faith, but that final salvation can only be gained by persevering in faith and good works. New Calvinists say that if a saved person fails to continue running the Christian race, he will not gain final salvation. That is not the language of classic Calvinism. It is too bad that Williams did not discuss the doctrinal errors of the New Calvinists.

I recommend this short book to those who wish to have a basic introduction to the New Calvinism.

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Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Pastoral Identity: True Shepherds in the Household of Faith. By Douglas D. Webster. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2023. 186 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Douglas Webster maintains that when it comes to the pastor, the model seen in most churches is based upon medieval Christendom. The pastor is expected to be in charge of all the ministries in the church (p. 9), and many pastors gladly take on that role. This model causes the pastor to be seen as being separate from church members. These members come to church as passive listeners. Webster suggests that a better model would be one in which the pastor is seen as part of the

church and in which all members exercise their gifts by being involved in the church's various ministries.

To better illustrate these two models, Webster provides a chart that summarizes the differences. He calls his proposed model the "Household of Faith" (pp. 44-48).

Under the Household of Faith model, devoted lay leaders are essential, and Webster gives an example from his own history in which that proved successful (pp. 19-20). The usual way of doing things renders the lay person only a recipient of pastoral care, rather than a partner in ministry. The pastor becomes like a "business-savvy CEO" who runs a religious organization (p. 33). This causes the pastor to think that all the work of the church depends upon him and his abilities. This pressure can often lead to burnout.

In most cases, the members of the congregation simply drive to church and leave after the service. There is no sense of community (p. 50). Pastors do not teach the Word and do not disciple. They tell the people what they want to hear (p. 142). Webster quotes from J. I. Packer, who complains that much of American preaching is "man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental...it is 3000 miles wide and half an inch deep" (p. 161).

Most readers of *JOTGES* will agree with Webster that a pastor should focus on the Scriptures. Those who attend church should seek closer relationships with other believers. The church is not to be a place where the non-believer is evangelized, but where believers are taught (p. 65). Webster, however, does not describe what that means. His liturgical background might conclude that this teaching would include the Apostles' Creed and denominational distinctives.

Instead of an all-authoritative leader, the pastor should be a shepherd of the flock. This involves being an example for others to emulate (p. 117).

Webster does a good job when he asks a basic question: What is the goal of the church? The two options he offers are that it can be an organization that seeks numerical growth, or a place that seeks the development of spiritual character among those who attend. Under the first option, sermons are directed towards the individual and focus on him. The second option is one in which there is teaching about the importance of corporate realities and a focus on the church as a community (pp. 164-65).

Those from non-liturgical church backgrounds, such as Baptists and those who attend independent Bible churches, will find much in this book to which they can't relate. Webster speaks of liturgical lay leaders and women pastors. He also sees the office of pastor as a vocation, even though he wants the pastor to be, to a large degree, seen as just another member of the congregation. When Webster talks about the need for racial justice, social righteousness, and the need for the church to be pro-immigrant, it is difficult to determine what he has in mind (p. 167). When he speaks of members of the church having gifts, it appears that he is talking about certain talents, such as music. He does not discuss 1 Corinthians 12–14.

Webster does not exegete Biblical passages. He does not really give a scriptural basis for the way a church should function. Even though he points out many problems with churches today, he does believe the pastor is to be the leader of the church. He does not see leadership as being a plurality of elders.

When he gives twenty practical suggestions about how the Household of Faith model should look, many who do not share Webster's liturgical background will feel that at least some of these suggestions do not apply to their situations (pp. 64–69). Even with these shortcomings, this book has value. It causes any reader to think about ecclesiology. In many non-liturgical churches, we find pastors who are looked upon as "the big star." Such churches can also fall into the trap of satisfying "religious consumers" (p. 39). Webster calls us to think about how we conduct church. This should cause us to more carefully consider what the NT says about such matters. Perhaps we are doing some things in an unscriptural manner. For these reasons, I recommend the book.

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