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EDITORIAL

The primary difference between premillennial and non-premillennial systems is hermeneutical (interpretive), that is, an understanding of the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. The procedure is not to interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament (e.g. Covenant Theology); rather it is to interpret the meaning of an Old Testament passage in its context and to systematize prophetic doctrines from the priority of the Old Testament, as opposed to the New Testament changing the original meaning. The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is a principal emphasis of dispensational premillennialism.

Confusion regarding the church, future events, and Israel is almost always the consequence of giving hermeneutical priority to the New Testament, in such a manner that changes the original intent of the Old Testament. Negatively stated, it is improper to speak of the church as a building, a denomination, or a state or national church. Furthermore, the church is not to be confused with Israel or the kingdom of God. The church is a distinct entity in this age. Both the church and Israel have special relationships with God, but they must be distinguished.

The distinction between Israel and the church is the natural result of interpreting the Bible historically and grammatically (i.e. literal, plain interpretation). One must interpret the words of the Bible in their normal or plain meaning. The opposite would be a spiritualizing (allegorizing) of the biblical text. Charles C. Ryrie wrote astutely, “Use of the words Israel and church shows clearly that in the New Testament national Israel continues with her own promises and that the church is never equated with a so-called “new Israel” but is carefully and continually distinguished as a separate work of God in this age” (*Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995] 129).

Since Israel and the church are distinct entities, and Israel has not possessed the land under her Messiah-King, nor have the promises been transferred to the church, then the timing of fulfillment must be future. Certainly, there is a sense in which the biblical covenants have been fulfilled progressively. For instance, Abraham enjoyed some of the promises that God has covenanted with him. The Davidic Covenant was fulfilled some in David and Solomon’s day, yet there will be a complete fulfillment in a future millennial kingdom. Since the church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost, the church is distinct from Israel, and cannot inherit the unconditional promises that God made with Israel.

The Old Testament refers to the millennial kingdom when referring to the Davidic kingdom, but it did not designate its length (Ps 2:6-9; Isa 2:2-4; 11:6-9; 65:18-23; Jer 31:12-14; 31:37; Ezek 34:25-29; 37:1-6; 40—48; Dan

2:35; 7:13, 14; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13, 14; Mic 4:1-7; Zeph 3:9-20; Zech 14:9). The New Testament teaches that the length of the kingdom will be one thousand years in length when the Lord Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom and reigns on earth from David's throne in Jerusalem (Rev 20:1-9). If the biblical covenants are understood literally (on the basis of grammatical interpretation), then there must be a future, regenerate national Israel in the land under the rule of her Messiah-King. The covenants await fulfillment in the millennial kingdom.

The Old Testament promises made with national Israel will be fulfilled with a future, regenerate national Israel. Since Israel and the church are distinct entities, there is no sense in which the latter can fulfill promises to the former (unless, of course, one *wrongly* assumes priority of the New Testament, resulting in the meaning of the promises in their original context being changed or reinterpreted so that they were not unconditional or eternal; e.g. amillennialism and postmillennialism). God will be faithful to the unconditional covenants that He has made. God has a covenant relationship with Israel that will lead to future fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (and the sub-covenants of land, seed, and blessing). Due to the current disobedience of the nation, she is experiencing the curses of the Mosaic covenant (and just as the cursings were literal so will be the blessings). When those curses have reached their culmination in the seven-year tribulation, resulting in a regenerate nation, God will fulfill the biblical covenants with His chosen people. Since the church does not have any relation to the period of the tribulation, she will be removed prior to the start of that period; and when Christ returns to earth, the church will have already received glorified bodies to rule and serve with Him in the millennial kingdom. *Daniel Goepfrich's article is appreciated for its emphasis upon understanding the nature of the eschatological messianic kingdom as it is revealed in the biblical covenants.*

Based upon the Abrahamic Covenant, and the expression of that covenant in the Mosaic Law, the Jewish Christians may have regarded the blessings of the Messiah as uniquely and particularly applicable to them alone. Consequently, when John wrote δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, he did so as a corrective to what he previously stated with regard to Christ's advocacy and propitiation (1 John 2:1-2). The sacrificial language that John used belonged to the Jewish cult; therefore, John added the corrective statement that Christ's advocacy and propitiation was not only for Jews but also for ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Proclaiming the biblical gospel of grace in accordance with Scripture is the urgent task of the church. *Drew Curley's article, which is an assessment of new Calvinism, is greatly valued; it explains confusion regarding the doctrines of grace, including the movement's eschatological perspective as applied to justification.*

According to Scripture, all humanity possesses knowledge of God's existence. All humanity is without excuse; all have natural revelation

(creation); all have a conscience; consequently, all humanity is accountable to God and without excuse for not living in a manner consistent with such knowledge. Romans 1:18-20 teaches that humanity does not rebel because there is insufficient knowledge of God's existence; it is not that the conscience fails to convict; rather, fallen humanity suppresses the truth of God in unrighteousness.

Probably everyone reading this editorial is able to recollect someone who heard the gospel proclaimed, and did not even want to hear the truth or think regarding the demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They would rather pretend that God does not exist, or that the gospel is unclear or untruthful, which is the same that is expressed in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. God sears the conscience and gives the unbeliever a deluding influence, which leads to eternal punishment. There is a somber application to this text when the church proclaims the gospel; it is to say if the lost hear the gospel and reject it, there cannot be any confidence that God will not send a deluding influence so that there is not opportunity to trust again. For those who do not love the truth and reject it, God will give a deluding influence and help them to believe what is false.

Scripture clearly demonstrates that God not only is glorified in the salvation of the righteous, but He is also glorified in his judgment of the wicked. Humbling is the teaching that God is glorified in the judgment of the wicked, which is something that all humanity deserves. God would be tremendously glorified if there were no saved people, not a soul—if Adam and Eve, and all their children after them, if none of them ever entered heaven, God would be glorified, God would be praised for all of eternity by the angels. The thought is sobering. Why are any saved? Scripture answers that the reason is the grace and mercy of God. He is glorified in the salvation of the righteous; He is also glorified in demonstrating His justice against those who persist in wickedness, which according to Romans 3 and Ephesians 2 included all humanity. The only difference in believers, as the church, is that God in His grace, drew them to Christ, and He is to be praised for His grace and mercy, but the lost are those with whom He does not demonstrate his grace and mercy, and He is glorified for his actions. *Joel Stanley Davis' article succinctly addresses the reality of the eternal nature of God's wrath against the unsaved, and is meaningful not only for its refutation of evangelical universalism, but also in the hortatory application to do the work of an evangelist.* May each of the articles and book reviews herein result in God's church being "sober in all things" (2 Tim 4:5).

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THE NATURE OF THE COMING MESSIANIC KINGDOM AS FOUND IN ITS COVENANTS

Daniel Goepfrich

Much has been written with regard to the kingdom, and it is a common topic in articles, books, and sermons. Leading the discussion are groups like the “Young, Restless, and Reformed,”¹ a new generation of reformed and covenant theologians delineating the evangelical landscape. Phrases such as “doing kingdom work,” “advancing (or building) God’s kingdom,” and “bringing up there, down here”² permeate their writings and teachings. Even one example can demonstrate this doctrine’s obvious confusion regarding the kingdom and the church. In a post on Kevin DeYoung’s blog earlier this year (DeYoung is a proud member of the movement), guest blogger Jason Helopoulos was bemoaning the statistics regarding pastors leaving the ministry.³ In his encouragement to persevere, he gave his readers specific things to be watching or actions to take so that they would not become part of the statistical exodus. As a method to overcome discouragement, Helopoulos suggested, “Read good biographies of saints, who labored long and hard for the good of the

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¹ The term was coined by Collin Hansen on 22 September 2006 in an article he wrote by that name for *Christianity Today* (available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>). A year and a half later, Hansen published a book addressing the same subject: *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). As indicated in the title, the movement was known at that time as “New Calvinism.”

² A quick Google search for this phrase (once song lyrics are eliminated) demonstrates this to be a common refrain based upon Jesus’ words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Often the phrase is related to the concept that the church ought to be “missional,” which is code for increased social programs promoted by a local church.

³ Jason Heropoulos, “Why Pastor’s Quit” [article online] (The Gospel Coalition, 18 April 2013, accessed 30 July 2013) available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/04/18/why-pastors-quit>.

Kingdom.” Later, when addressing moral failure, he noted, “Nothing is more devastating to the Kingdom or the local church,” and thus suggested, “Don’t be busy about Kingdom work and forget Kingdom life.”

Unfortunately, as these phrases become part of the common language of the modern church, so do the false doctrines that they embrace. Misunderstandings concerning the church, Israel, future events, and even the nature of salvation have become commonplace as more and more graduates of both reformed (covenantal) and liberal seminaries become local church pastors. Frighteningly, this is not limited to a particular denomination or segment of the church. Though it is most common in the historically reformed (covenantal) groups (Presbyterians, some Baptists), the “already, not yet” phenomenon has gained momentum in most major denominations and non-denominational churches alike. At the same time, the dispensationalist understanding is acknowledged but disregarded. After correctly explaining the view held by this writer, Grudem essentially warned his readers, with (what seems to be) just a hint of condescension.

But it must be said that behind this argument of pretribulationists is probably a more fundamental concern: the desire to preserve a distinction between *the church* (which they think will be taken up into heaven to be with Christ) and *Israel* (which they think will constitute the people of God on earth during the tribulation and then during the millennial kingdom). But as we noted in an earlier chapter [44], the New Testament does not support a distinction of this kind between Israel and the church. Hence it does not imply a need to see a distinction between these groups at the time of the tribulation and the millennium.⁴

There is little debate concerning the *existence* of the kingdom; rather, as the old saying asserts, “the devil is in the details,” and it certainly proves to be true in this case. As evidenced in his first interaction with humanity, Satan loves to exploit loopholes – real or perceived – in God’s revelation. Therefore, it should be no surprise to discover the primary method of attack against a major doctrine like the purpose and nature of the kingdom sounds suspiciously similar to the words of Genesis 3:2, “did God really say?” Consider the introductory questions (and their subsequent dismissal) in the chapter addressing eschatology (aptly

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 1133.

entitled “The Kingdom of God: Already *and* Not Yet”) in a relatively recent systematic theology that is a required text in some Bible colleges.

As we will see, all Christians have always believed that the world as we know it will end with the return of Jesus Christ; they have always also believed that Christ is not absent now, but that his rule and reign (and God’s through him) is hidden and visible primarily through the church, which anticipates his kingdom when he returns. Christians believe and have always believed that when Christ returns the kingdom of God will be established and revealed in a new way and that eventually God will create a new heaven and new earth that will last forever. But how should these revealed truths about the future be interpreted? How should the enigmatic New Testament book of Revelation and other biblical apocalyptic books and passage be understood? Do they refer to events that were already happening when they were written or to future events or to both? What will Christ’s return be like? Is it imminent? Will it be visible and literal, surrounded by catastrophic events and figures such as the antichrist and the great beast? Will Christ personally and visibly rule and reign on the earth for a millennium? Will the new earth joined with the new heaven be somehow continuous with this world or an entirely new environment? These are just some of the questions that surround universal eschatology and sometimes obsess Christian futurists. Limitations of space will preclude any thorough, detailed examination of these issues and problems. We must settle for brushing with broad strokes and attempting only to portray the general contours of the Christian eschatological landscape.⁵

The purpose of this article is to explore the biblical support for the nature of the kingdom by means of the four unconditional covenants established by the unchangeable God. As the doctrine of the kingdom unfolds, one will discover that each covenant answers one of these basic questions: *what, where, whose, and what kind*. By accepting a literal answer to these questions, readers should arrive at the normative dispensationalist conclusion of a literal, future, earthly kingdom, ruled by Jesus from Jerusalem, Israel. The perspective herein is to be understood as distinct from the current spiritual rule of Christ in the hearts of his people, the church.

⁵ Roger Olsen, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002) 333-34.

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God's covenant with Abraham forms the basis for the very existence and purpose of the kingdom. Consequently, it answers: *why the kingdom?* Although the details of this covenant were presented to Abraham progressively (in multiple conversations with God), and the covenant was not properly instituted until Genesis 15, the basics are found in the compact announcement in Genesis 12:1-3.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land that I will show you. Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will exemplify divine blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name" (NET).

Leading some statements in relation to general blessings, God made one very specific promise: *"I will make you into a great nation."* In English, a nation is defined as "a large body of people, associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own."⁶ Even without the other details that God would provide later, surely these were the same basic assumptions that Abraham would have made based upon the promise to make him "into a great nation."

First, a nation requires people; and, a "great nation" requires an enormous number of people. Abraham (2165-1990 BC) was born between the end of the Akkadian Empire and the emerging of the Sumerian Empire, both of which contained large urban centers. He would have understood the idea of a "great nation" to consist of, at least, hundreds of thousands of citizens.

The fact that God said, "I will make *you* into a great nation," must mean more than Abraham would become the "*leader* of a great nation." The Hebrew verb does not allow that God would simply make a great nation *for* Abraham, but that God would make Abraham *himself* into that nation. In other words, this great nation would have to be connected biologically to Abraham.

Second, a nation needs a physical territory to call "home." Every civilization, whether agrarian, industrial, or ranching must have a locale for

⁶ Dictionary.com, "Nation" [online] (accessed 30 July 2013) available from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/nation>.

its base of operations, a place for its citizens to live and work. Land ownership battles and border disputes have consistently been among the leading causes of civil and multi-national wars, with the search for more or certain land often being a primary component. According to *Social Science Research*, the Akkadian Empire of Abraham's time held approximately 308,000 square miles,⁷ primarily surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. (In comparison, the United States has approximately 3.8 million square miles.)

Third, a nation needs some sort of government to rule all those people. In Abraham's experience, he would have understood this government to be a dynastic monarchy with localized control at the city-state levels. Apparently, a ruling king in a capital city exercising sovereign power over the entire empire is the only type of government this world has truly known. Even our modern representative forms of government follow this pattern to an extent (with a few differences). A nation requires a cohesive government in order to operate successfully, and a resolute authority that is able to squelch those who would rebel against the leadership has historically accomplished this.

Fourth, in Abraham's world, a nation required (or, at least, always had) a common religion. Although Americans have difficulty with the concept of a national religion, this was normal to every ancient civilization. The idea of a nation without supernatural support was a foolish one indeed. How could such a nation survive against her enemies, each of which often had many gods to protect them? Abraham was reared worshiping the moon god, Sin (Akkadian; Nanna, Sumerian), who had several major worship centers, most notably (from a biblical perspective) in Ur and Haran.⁸ Religious life was so powerful in ancient cultures because kings would often designate themselves and their families as either the deities themselves or as priests and priestesses to the gods. Religion and government were often inseparable.

Therefore, when God promised that he would make Abraham "into a great nation," the patriarch would have necessarily understood it to mean far more than a large family, but rather an organized, monarchical government over a large mass of people existing within relatively fixed

⁷ Rein Taagepera, "Size and Duration of Empires: Growth-Decline Curves," *Social Science Research* 7 (June 1978): 180-96.

⁸ Joshua 24:2 notes that both Terah and Abraham worshiped idols before God called Abraham. There is good reason to speculate that this is why Terah decided to settle in Haran after moving from Ur with Abraham; it seems that Abraham was not willing to continue to obey Jehovah and move from Haran until Terah had died. The connection to the temple of Sin there is not insignificant.

geographical boundaries, all sharing a common form of worship. As will be demonstrated, the other three kingdom covenants prove that Abraham's natural understanding is exactly what God intended, and still intends, to accomplish.

As the details were given, Abraham came to know that these promises would be fulfilled through only one of his sons. Isaac was neither the oldest nor the youngest son born to Abraham, but he was the only son born to Sarah. A year prior to Isaac's birth, God clearly told Abraham, "Sarah your wife is going to bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a perpetual covenant for his descendants after him" (Gen 17:19, NET). Later, God narrowed the promise even further, stating that it would be through only one of Isaac's sons (viz. Jacob) that the promises would continue (28:10-15).

LAND COVENANT

As previously noted, a nation needs its own territory or land in which to settle. At some point over the next ten years (after moving from Haran), God gave Abraham this next missing detail. The Land Covenant (sometimes called the "Palestinian" Covenant in older works) answers the second basic question: *Where the kingdom?* Unless the kingdom is viewed as a literal entity, this question does not even matter. If, as many say, the kingdom is purely a spiritual rule, then the location is not relevant because it exists wherever a believer resides, because (in that understanding) "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, KJV). However, Jesus was unambiguous that one day He would come "in his glory . . . and he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matt 25:31, NET). Where will this throne be located?

In Genesis 15, God came to Abraham in a vision and restated his promise to give him many descendants, this time pointing to the stars as an illustration of their number. Although he believed God in a great act of faith (15:6), Abraham still had questions.

The LORD said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." But Abram said, "O sovereign LORD, by what can I know that I am to possess it?" (vv. 7-8, NET).

At this point, God had Abraham make what seem to be customary preparations for a covenant-establishing ceremony. The fact that Abraham did not hesitate to kill and separate the animals, but experienced great terror when the ceremony began is significant; it is likely Abraham had experienced several of these ceremonies or rituals throughout the course

of his business life. During this ceremony, God revealed that Abraham's descendants would be "enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years" (15:13), but subsequent to that time God would rescue them personally, and they would return to that land promised to them (15:16). Specifically, God promised:

"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites" (Gen 15:18-21, NET).

The wording makes it seem that the promise of the land would be fulfilled at the time of the exodus from Egypt. God brought the infant nation of Israel to the border of their new home, only to have them capitulate in fear when they saw that the land was filled with warriors and fortified cities (Numb 13–14). As punishment for their rebellion, God had them remain as nomads in the desert for nearly 40 years until that entire generation of men (more than 603,000, according to Numb 1:46) had died. Upon returning them to the place where they would enter the land to conquer it, God promised the people great blessing if they would obey Him and great destruction if they disobeyed. Part of that destruction would be the temporary loss of their control over that land. However, as it was phrased particularly, within the conditional aspects of their wellbeing, God emphasized the unconditional nature of his covenant with Abraham.

"Even if your exiles are in the most distant land, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. Then he will bring you to the land your ancestors possessed and you will also possess it; he will do better for you and multiply you more than he did your ancestors" (Deut 30:4-5, NET).

True to their nature and God's Word, Israel repeatedly rebelled and faced divine punishment, including their exile to Assyria and Babylon. However, throughout Israel's rebellion, the prophets continued to promise their future restoration. Most notably is the promise repeated in Jeremiah 16:14-15 and 23:7-8 in which God says this restoration would be so amazing that people would cease using the miracle at the Red Sea as the basis for God's notable power in favor of this dramatic restoration!

An important point on this part of God's promise to Abraham is found in 1 Kings 4. Hundreds of years prior to the captivities (under Solomon's reign), God gave Israel a foretaste of what the kingdom would be like, which was literally the Golden Age of Israel.

The people of Judah and Israel were as innumerable as the sand on the seashore; they had plenty to eat and drink and were happy. Solomon ruled all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These kingdoms paid tribute as Solomon's subjects throughout his lifetime (1 Kgs 4:20-21, NET).

Like the stars of the sky (Gen 15:5), God had used “the sand on the seashore” as another hyperbolic illustration of the number of descendants promised to Abraham (22:17), and the writer of Kings noted that it had come true. More importantly, the land that God had promised Abraham was now at Israel’s disposal. David had conquered the surrounding nations and placed them into subjection by charging them tribute. Instead of uprising in mutiny upon David’s death, they stayed subject to Solomon. Since Solomon was not a warring king, but rather a political strategist, it was obviously God’s power that stayed them from committing a coup.

Several older commentators note the comparison of 1 Kings 4:21 to Genesis 15:18 and mention that, had Israel’s population grown significantly during this period, they would have been able to exercise their influence in the surrounding regions, extending not only their reign but also their official borders. Constable seems not to agree with this entirely.

Even though Solomon controlled the land area promised to Abraham's descendants in Genesis 15:18-20, his control did not fulfill these promises completely in his day. The city of Tiphshah (v. 24) stood on the banks of the Euphrates River. The territory described did not lie within the geographic borders of Israel. Israel's geographic extent was only about 150 miles long, from Dan to Beersheba (v. 25).⁹

However, the extent of Solomon’s exact rule over the entire area promised to Abraham is not as important as the fact that (1) a specific tract of land was promised him and his descendants, and (2) they did hold it to that extent during Solomon’s reign, as the Spirit-inspired writer of 1 Kings acknowledged.

⁹ Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Kings* [notes online] (Sonic Light, 2013, accessed 11 December 2013) available from <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1kings.pdf>.

DAVIDIC COVENANT

The third of these four great covenants was not given to Abraham but to King David nearly a thousand years later. Nevertheless, it builds upon the promises given previously, answering the third question: *Whose kingdom?* One finds this covenant made in 2 Samuel 7:8-16.

So now, say this to my servant David: “This is what the LORD of hosts says: I took you from the pasture and from your work as a shepherd to make you leader of my people Israel. I was with you wherever you went, and I defeated all your enemies before you. Now I will make you as famous as the great men of the earth. I will establish a place for my people Israel and settle them there; they will live there and not be disturbed any more. Violent men will not oppress them again, as they did in the beginning and during the time when I appointed judges to lead my people Israel. Instead, I will give you relief from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you. When the time comes for you to die, I will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will make his dynasty permanent. I will become his father and he will become my son. When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings. But my loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent” (2 Sam 7:8-16, NET).

Notice the four key provisions outlined in 2 Samuel 7. First, “*I will make you as famous as the great men of the earth.*” The pledge is comparable to the promise to Abraham that God would “make [his] name great” (Gen 12:2), an indication of assent in recalling the patriarch and his covenant.

Second, “*I will establish a place for my people Israel and settle them there.*” Similar to how the first provision recalls the Abrahamic Covenant, this second promise brings forward and summarizes the Land Covenant. Without addressing all the detail of borders and boundaries, God reminded David that there would come a time when the nation of Israel would have a territorial home and live there in peace, with no disruption or oppression, but rather “relief” from all who would try to harm them.

Third, God “*himself will build a dynastic house for you.*” The pledge is the first promise to David as an individual, rather than the nation as a whole. To Israel’s second king, God promised what every king wants: a ruling dynasty in relation to his name (this would be different, though). As

opposed to David having to defend, plan, and strategize it, God promised that he would build the “house” personally.

Fourth, “*Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.*” The problem with dynasties is that they all eventually end. Sons are not born. Neighboring countries invade. Internal rivalries seethe. Assassination attempts succeed. There are countless ways for a dynasty to end (or be ended), and David was well aware of this. God’s promise to make this dynasty “permanent” was unheard, far more than David could have dreamed; it would take an act of God to accomplish something of this magnitude.

The last provision demands one’s immediate attention. The imperative question is: “Whose kingdom is this?” Grudem, Olsen, and others insist that it is the “kingdom of God.” However, this promise does not allow that interpretation. The coming kingdom will be a continuation of the permanent dynasty of David. The truth of the persistence was confirmed another millennium later in the village of Nazareth, when Gabriel prophesied to young Mary.

“Listen: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and *the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.* He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33, NET) (emphasis added).

Those who wish to perceive a “kingdom of God” rather than a “kingdom of David” cannot understand this verse literally without doing damage to their conclusions. Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* does not even approach these verses, even within 1,200 pages! A staunch advocate of postmillennialism, Boettner ably summarized the issue.

The primary difference between the post- and amillennial view on the one hand and the premillennial view on the other as regards the Kingdom has to do with whether or not the Kingdom is spiritual in nature, now present in the hearts of men, the outward manifestation of which is the Church, or whether it is political and economic, absent from the earth at the present time but to be established in outward form when Christ returns.¹⁰

¹⁰ Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984) 284.

Again, the plain truth is not addressed: Jesus will sit upon David's throne. At least, Berkhof acknowledged this kingship passage, but he, too, refused to interpret it literally: "The spiritual kingship of Christ is His royal rule over the *regnum gratiae*, that is over His people of the Church. . . . The eternal duration of the spiritual kingship of Christ would seem to be explicitly taught in the following passages: . . . II Sam. 7:13,16; Luke 1:33. . . ." ¹¹

However, is it a spiritual kingdom? Is Jesus sitting upon David's throne currently, as many claim? Has he broken the nations "with an iron scepter" (Ps 2:9)? Is he ruling in the midst of his enemies "from Zion" (Ps 110:2)? If this is true, if the nations have been given to Jesus as his "inheritance," as his "personal property" (Ps 2:8), how could John say, "the whole world lies [currently, present indicative] in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19)? What else, but demonic and blasphemous, could one call Paul's assertion that Satan is "the god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4), if Jesus is the reigning king?

The answer is simply that Jesus is not yet sitting upon David's throne. At what point, did God install Jesus as "king on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps 2:6)? David did not say, "Sit down at *my* right hand;" those were the words of Jehovah to his Anointed One: "Here is the *LORD's* proclamation to my lord: 'Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool!'" (Ps 110:1, NET). To the church at Laodicea, Jesus himself claimed: "I will grant the one who conquers permission to sit with me on my throne, just as *I too conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne*" (Rev 3:21, NET). Jesus has not yet returned to sit upon David's throne, "his glorious throne" (Matt 25:31). He is in heaven where "he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3, NET).

Whose kingdom is this? Not God's through the Eternal Son, but David's, through his legal heir, Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, the coming messianic kingdom is not the church, neither is it God's general, universal rule; it will be the continuation of David's earthly rule from Zion, God's holy mountain, much like Abraham would have expected regarding his promised nation.

"The Lord says, 'I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem will be called "truthful city," "mountain of the LORD who rules over all," "holy mountain"' (Zech 8:3, NET).

¹¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 406, 410.

NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant is the last of the four unconditional covenants given by God in the Old Testament, and it reveals *what kind of kingdom* will be. The primary passage with the details of the New Covenant is Jeremiah 31:31-34. In this passage, God described with whom the covenant is made, when it will occur, and how it will function.

“Indeed, a time is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them,” says the LORD. “But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,” says the LORD. “I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people. People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,” says the LORD. “For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done” (Jer 31:31-34, NET).

First, notice that God stated three times that this covenant is “with the people of Israel and Judah . . . when I delivered [their ancestors from Egypt],” that is, “the whole nation of Israel.” He could not have been understood more precisely. Those who would like the New Covenant to apply to the church must have already included the church into Israel in their ecclesiology prior to examining this text. There is no way to read this passage literally and find reference to the church. The New Covenant will be made with the ethnic nation of Israel, that is, the nation of descendants promised to Abraham.

Second, this covenant will not be entirely in effect until God plants “the whole nation of Israel . . . back in the land.” A bit of historical background is necessary here. Assyria had taken captive the ten northern tribes of Israel around 722 BC. Additionally, when Jeremiah wrote his prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar had already executed the first of three captivities of Judah to Babylon in 605 BC (Jer 29:1) and possibly the second in 598 BC as well. Even after the various returns in the 5th century BC, few would call that a “planting back in the land.” The oppression of the Romans for centuries, the scattering of the Jewish apostles in Acts 8:1, and the Jewish dispersion referenced in James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1 are all events indicating that the replanting had not yet occurred within the first decades of the early church. However, because of Jesus’ claim that his blood is “the

blood of the covenant” (Matt 26:28), covenantal scholars like Grudem claim, “In speaking of the new covenant, the author of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah, ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (Heb. 8:10). This blessing finds fulfillment in the church, which is the people of God,”¹² even though Israel has not yet been planted “back in the land” where they are no longer oppressed, as God promised David.

Third, the basis for this covenant is a new relationship with God. Jesus promised that Israel would not see Him again until they say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Matt 23:39). At that time, God had Zechariah proclaim, “They will call on my name and I will answer; I will say, ‘These are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’” (Zech 13:9, NET). Contrary to what Grudem and others would teach, this has nothing to do with individuals believing in Christ for salvation during the church age. When Israel turns to their Messiah, then God will rescue them, “plant them back in the land,” and then he will put his “law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. [He] will be their God and they will be [his] people” (Jer 31:33, NET). Paul explained why this cannot yet have occurred: “A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25, NET).

The nature of the coming kingdom will not be just a monarchy, as Abraham and David would have expected, but a theocracy, where Jesus, the God-Man, will rule supreme, both as David’s earthly heir and as Jehovah’s holy Servant.

A shoot will grow out of Jesse's root stock, a bud will sprout from his roots. The LORD's spirit will rest on him – a spirit that gives extraordinary wisdom, a spirit that provides the ability to execute plans, a spirit that produces absolute loyalty to the LORD. He will take delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by mere appearances, or make decisions on the basis of hearsay. He will treat the poor fairly, and make right decisions for the downtrodden of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and order the wicked to be executed. Justice will be like a belt around his waist, integrity will be like a belt around his hips (Isa 11:1-5, NET).

Jehovah will once again be a resident God, not just hidden behind the curtains in the Tent of Meeting or the Temple, but resident among the people: Immanuel, “God with us.” Everyone from the smallest to the greatest will know Him personally, and He will offer forgiveness for sin

¹² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 520.

both nationally and individually.¹³ Therefore, Israel will finally be renamed from “Lo-Ammi” (“not my people”) to “Ammi” (“my people”) as God promised Hosea.

However, in the future the number of the people of Israel will be like the sand of the sea which can neither be measured nor numbered. Although it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it will be said to them, “You are children of the living God!” Then the people of Judah and the people of Israel will be gathered together (Hos 1:10-11, NET).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, it has demonstrated that, when approaching the kingdom from a literal, normal understanding of the numerous texts written concerning it, one does not find it contributing to an “intricate, complex, imaginative system [that] presents an interpretation that surely never would have been thought of except in defense of a theory.”¹⁴ Nor does one find a nebulous concept that must be rationalized and applied spiritually today. Instead, one witnesses a series of promises, given in plain language, repeated over thousands of years to different people with no contradiction, resulting in one conclusion: a physical kingdom in a physical territory promised to a specific, physical nation.

Each of these four covenants was given prior to the existence of the church, and even though individual salvation is made available in the church age through Jesus’ blood, even the New Covenant was made solely with Israel. Had Abraham been given all of the details immediately, he would not have been surprised to know that the nation promised him would have certain land, a dynastic monarchy, and a religion they could call their own, just like God had promised.

The LORD has made a promise to Israel. He promises it as the one who fixed the sun to give light by day and the moon and stars to give light by night. He promises it as the one who stirs up the sea so that its waves roll. He promises it as the one who is known as the LORD who rules over all. The LORD affirms, “The descendants of Israel will not cease forever to be a nation in my sight. That could

¹³ Ezekiel 40—48 goes into great detail concerning the sacrifices that will occur during the kingdom age. Revelation 20:7 tells of a great rebellion at the end of the kingdom, which is possible only by those who “kept their noses clean” in relation to the civil law, but never reconciled spiritually with the King.

¹⁴ Boettner, *Millennium*, 146.

only happen if the fixed ordering of the heavenly lights were to cease to operate before me.” The LORD says, “I will not reject all the descendants of Israel because of all that they have done. That could only happen if the heavens above could be measured or the foundations of the earth below could all be explored,” says the LORD (Jer 31:35-37, NET).

NEW CALVINISM, PART I: An Historical Understanding and Theological Critique

Drew Curley

In 2009, David Van Biema published an article describing new Calvinism as one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.”¹ Biema’s article gave worldwide recognition to a theological trend that was previously relegated to relative obscurity. The article itself is a reflection of an earlier effort chronicling a new form of Calvinism² emerging among young pastors and seminarians. In the 2008 work by Colin Hansen, *Young Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists*, the author identified many new Calvinists but he did not provide a comprehensible definition of new Calvinism,³ which may be caused in part by a degree of theological fluidity that exists amongst the group’s members.

What will be asserted here is that new Calvinism is not a monolithic entity; it cannot be tracked to a single seminary or institution, but it has been highly influential in several seminaries. The origin of new Calvinism is not related to a particular theologian, but new Calvinists depend upon the influence of several historical persons. In addition to these historical figures, there have been more contemporary voices, while not specifically new Calvinists themselves, have laid the groundwork others have followed. Within the movement, several theologians have attracted a cult-like following that has given prominence to the movement

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¹ David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now: New Calvinism” [article online] (*Time*, 12 March 2009, accessed 20 January 2012) available from http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html.

² What is being observed is what some call “New Calvinism,” and this form of Calvinism and its relationship to other forms of Calvinism is discussed in greater detail in following.

³ Colin Hansen, *Young Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

as a whole.⁴ With all this established, there remains vagary, producing difficulty when attempting to identify what truly unifies the new Calvinists.⁵

Prior to continuing, it needs to be clearly stated that new Calvinists are men of God who are wholeheartedly devoted to serving the Lord. They are brothers in Christ. Their ministries are truly being used mightily by God and are influencing the world. They really are being used of God to change the world. The writer herein is not attempting to attack anyone personally. Instead, an analysis is to be made of the doctrinal and theological trends that can be observed within the movement. The present research, therefore, seeks to be an analysis of the doctrine of this loose confederacy.

The church must be diligent in protecting the biblical gospel. Sproul's words are also appropriate: "an 'inadequate' gospel is not the gospel."⁶ The importance of the topic is without question. Paul's admonition to the Galatians must be remembered; there is only one gospel and

even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (1:8-9, NASB).

Although much of the theological discussion that follows does not flow specifically from Calvin's personal understanding of the gospel, one crucial issue is summarized well by Calvin himself. In commenting upon Acts 16:31, he stated that to believe in the Lord Jesus "is but a short, and, to look to, a cold and hungry definition of salvation."⁷ All too many who have claimed to follow Calvin have built upon this idea. There also remains a necessary call for revision and clarity within new Calvinism because it is a

⁴ The movement as a whole may be just as much about people as it is about theology. New Calvinism is synonymous with names like Driscoll, Piper, Keller, but its theology is yet undefined. More detail addressing this issue follows.

⁵ Many new Calvinists are ardent defenders of the doctrine of grace, but openly reject tradition elements present in reformed theology. The notable aspects include: continuationism, infant baptism, Baptist ecclesiology, etc. In addition to this there is no uniform definition of the terms of TULIP. Differences are present between how one defines total depravity, perseverance, etc.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, elec. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 46.

⁷ John Calvin, *Acts*, elec. ed. (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998) Ac 16:31.

theology that is quickly becoming the consensus opinion of mainstream evangelicalism and will certainly affect the church for many years to come. Any doctrinal deficiencies will certainly be magnified in the next generation.

ORIGINS OF NEW CALVINISM

Since *Time* magazine published its article referencing new Calvinism as one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” new Calvinism has garnered a great deal of attention. Most of this attention focuses upon the relative merits of the movement. One thing that has not been adequately understood is the origin of new Calvinism. Even though the movement began prior to the publishing of the article, the focus herein will be limited to its rise in prominence after the 2009 release of the aforementioned article. One major reason for this is the great difficulty in identifying the exact beginning to any theological movement; it is likely that the movement began to build momentum in the 1980s, but many within the movement trace its roots all the way to Augustine and beyond.

There are several important events that chronicle the more recent developments of new Calvinism. The events include, but are not limited to the publication of *Desiring God* in 1986, the beginning of the *Passion Conferences* in 1997, formation of the Acts 29 Network in 1998, *The Gospel Coalition* in 2005, *Together for the Gospel* in 2006, as well as the election of Al Mohler as president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1993, who is one of the key figures in the Southern Baptist Convention’s conservative resurgence.

Another difficulty is clearly identifying new Calvinism’s beginning. Did old Calvinism actually become new? When did it become new? How has it departed or developed reformed theology? Who is responsible for instigating or authorizing such changes? Why new Calvinism now? Many simply regard themselves in a long continuous line of other like-minded theologians who have just championed the doctrines of grace to a new generation (e.g. men like Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, John Calvin, and Augustine). One proposal would then understand new Calvinism as Calvinism believed in a new generation instead of a new type of Calvinism. If this is not the case, then how many forms of Calvinism are there?

Much has been written in recent years concerning the relationship between John Calvin and those who are known today as Calvinists. Given that no one attempts to hold Calvin’s doctrines exclusively, there are two basic approaches to Calvin and Calvinism. The first is Calvin against the Calvinists as articulated by R. T. Kendall in *Calvin and English Calvinism to*

1649. His basic thesis is that what is called Calvinism today is not the theology of John Calvin, especially in regards to the doctrine of limited atonement. In response to this work, Paul Helm wrote *Calvin and Calvinism*, which sought to refute Kendall and argued for the essential unity between Calvin and Calvinism. In a recent and perhaps more important work, Richard Muller agreed with neither Kendall nor Helm.⁸ Muller stated, “we have no indication from Calvin’s correspondence that his theology was viewed as the primary expression of Reformed thought in his generation.”⁹ The terms Calvinism and reformed theology are not necessarily indicative of Calvin or the Reformation, and this point needs to be understood.

If one were to ask new Calvinists, many of them might be inclined to equate reformed theology with Calvin and the acronym TULIP. Although their definitions of the terms may vary, this is the essential basis for the ecumenicalism within new Calvinism. The origin of the concept of the five points of Calvinism most likely arose in response to the Remonstrants, the followers of Jacob Arminius. The five points, articulated in the Canons of Dordt, were developed in response to the five protests of Arminius concerning the theology of Theodore Beza. The fact that both men were disciples of Calvin further complicates matters. Which disciple followed more Calvin more closely? Kennedy observed, “there are striking dissimilarities between Calvin’s reading of Scripture and that of the later Reformed tradition.”¹⁰

Within this research, it will be demonstrated that much of what is known as Calvinism follows in the line of men like Theodore Beza and Johannes Cocceius¹¹ as much as it does from Calvin. Although Calvin himself was not always consistent in his thinking, others developed his earlier teachings. Ferguson stated:

the interpretation of Beza’s thought and his role in the development of Calvinism has caused considerable controversy. His fidelity to Calvin was accepted by contemporaries, but by the middle of the 17th century Peter Heylyn (1600–62) in England and

⁸ Corresponding to this is another discussion concerning whether the entity referred to as reformed theology is true to the theology of the Reformation.

⁹ Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) loc 372-73.

¹⁰ Kevin D. Kennedy, “Hermeneutical discontinuity between Calvin and later Calvinism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64 (August 2011): 312.

¹¹ Cocceius is also spelled Coccejus (Koch).

Amyraut on the Continent found Beza responsible for hardening Calvin's theology.¹²

A. H. Strong observed:

Beza carried Calvin's doctrine of predestination to an extreme supralapsarianism, which is hyper-Calvinistic rather than Calvinistic. Cocceius . . . made theology centre about the idea of the covenants, and founded the Federal theology.¹³

Likewise, Berkhof described Cocceius' theology in the following way:

others, since the days of Coccejus, distinguish two covenants, namely, the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the Father and the Son, and, as based on this, the covenant of grace between the triune God and the elect, or the elect sinner.¹⁴

Coccejus and his school maintained that in the counsel of peace Christ became a *fidejussor*, and that consequently Old Testament believers enjoyed no complete forgiveness of sins.¹⁵

Coccejus' theory makes the work of God in making provision for the redemption of sinners dependent on the uncertain obedience of man in an entirely unwarranted way.¹⁶

The theology, known as federal or more frequently covenant theology provides the basis for reformed theology.¹⁷ Historically, federal theology became dominant and was expressed in the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity (documents which are said to be the "north star"

¹² Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 91.

¹³ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907) 46.

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938) 265.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 267.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 268.

¹⁷ Not all agree regarding this point. While not all agree concerning this point (cf. R. Scott Clark, "The History of Covenant Theology," *Tabletalk Magazine* (October 2006) more within reformed theology believe there to be a definitive beginning with Cocceius (cf. Strong, *Systematic Theology* or Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. See following for discussion on the connection between federalism and the federal headship of Adam.

of Reformed Theology).¹⁸ Is this the system universally held by new Calvinists? Larsen believes this to be the origin of what is now known as Calvinism, making it more a Bezan theology codified at Westminster.¹⁹

In addition to this, it must be asked whether the title new Calvinism is even a legitimate conclusion given their theology. Muller, in discussing the meaning of the actual terms of TULIP, observes that the acrostic is:

an acronym of questionable pedigree . . . there is no historical association between the acrostic TULIP and the Canons of Dort. As far as we know, both the acrostic and the associated usage of 'five points of Calvinism' are of Anglo-American origin and do not date back before the nineteenth century.²⁰

All too often the acronym TULIP has been equated with not only the Reformation but also Christian orthodoxy in general. TULIP is too vague and imprecise to be the determinative principle by which to judge all post-Reformation soteriology. Even R. C. Sproul, a Calvinist *par excellence*, does not prefer the terminology of TULIP.²¹ This demonstrates the limitations of judging new Calvinism's soteriology exclusively upon the terms and merits of TULIP.

Much of the discussion of whether there is a consistent soteriology within new Calvinism then becomes tied to the question of just how the soteriology of new Calvinism is Calvinistic. Is it Calvinistic in the broadest sense of the word or is it decidedly linked to either Calvin or others like Beza or Cocceius? Thorson's assessment is interesting in that he believed Kendall's view of Calvin and Calvinisms:

may have done an excellent job clarifying the theological drift of Calvin's followers, he did not begin with the actual complexity of Calvin's thought. Some would put it stronger: Calvin is not simply complex, but inconsistent.²²

If there is disagreement with Calvin, one must ask why? Is it an attempt to clarify his doctrines in light of contemporary challenges or is it an effort to

¹⁸ Carl Trueman, phone conversation, 18 June 2013.

¹⁹ David Larsen, phone conversation, 12 June 2013.

²⁰ Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 1013, 1081-83.

²¹ See R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology*, elec. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

²² Stephen Thorson, "Tension in Calvin's View of Faith: Unexamined Assumptions in R. T. Kendall's Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (September 1994): 421.

correct or revise his teaching? While it may seem counterintuitive, it is actually easier to assess the consistency of new Calvinism's soteriology after their continuity (or their relative discontinuity) with the theology of Calvin has been examined.

Overall, there is a difficulty in identifying the movement's origins based upon its use of Calvin's name. No one would argue that new Calvinism truly follows the teachings of John Calvin on all matters.²³ When this point is conceded, the term Calvinism itself may become imprecise to the point of being antiquated. As one professor at Westminster Theological Seminary explained, the term Calvinism is a misnomer.²⁴ He argued that most "isms" are the construct of historians and because of this, no definitive form of Calvinism exists. New Calvinism is, therefore, one shade in the spectrum of many Calvinisms, which begs the question of where they may fall on the spectrum. Should they be seen to align with Hodge? Warfield? Edwards? Beza? Calvin? A specific confessional tradition? Are they more Dutch or Scottish reformed?²⁵

NEW CALVINISM'S SINE QUA NON

Before delving into new Calvinism's *sine qua non*, one must first establish the fact that there is, at the very least, a group of people who comprise the core of the movement. Identifying the new Calvinists is the essential first step. Once this has been established, only then can one attempt to classify their doctrines into a working *sine qua non*. In addition to this, one should understand the historical circumstances that helped to stimulate the rise of the movement.

The essentials that will be focused upon, as a functional *sine qua non* for the purpose of this work, are built upon one new Calvinist's definition of what differentiates new Calvinism from old Calvinism.

1. Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.

²³ Baptism, ecclesiology, and spiritual gifts are noteworthy examples.

²⁴ Carl Trueman, "Calvin and Calvinism" [video online] (YouTube, 2012, accessed 12 June 2013) available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZ-kG_r_OSY.

²⁵ The distinction is not one that many readers of this article will naturally be familiar. An oversimplified answer would be that the Scottish reformed theology is highly confessional while the Dutch (e.g. Kuyper) is more focused upon social reform.

2. Old Calvinism fled from the cities. New Calvinism is flooding into cities.
3. Old Calvinism was fearful of the Holy Spirit and generally cessationist (i.e. believing the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as tongues and prophecy had ceased). New Calvinism delights in the Holy Spirit and is generally continuationist with regard to spiritual gifts.
4. Old Calvinism was fearful and suspicious of other Christians and burned bridges. New Calvinism loves all Christians and builds bridges between them.²⁶

Although this is an imperfect description, until recently, it was the only one produced by a new Calvinist of any significance.²⁷

²⁶ Mark Driscoll, "Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea" [article online] (The Resurgence, 2009, accessed 28 January 2013) available from <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-Calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea>.

²⁷ More recently Piper has said that there are 12 distinctive features of new Calvinism. "1. The New Calvinism, in its allegiance to the inerrancy of the Bible, embraces the biblical truths behind the five points of Calvinism (TULIP), while having an aversion to using the acronym (or any other systematic packaging) along with a sometimes-qualified embrace of Limited Atonement. The focus is on Calvinistic soteriology but not to the exclusion or the appreciation of the broader scope of Calvin's vision. 2. The New Calvinism embraces the sovereignty of God in salvation and all the affairs of life and history, including evil and suffering. 3. The New Calvinism has a strong complementarian flavor (as opposed to egalitarian) with an emphasis on the flourishing of men and women in relationships where men embrace a call to robust, humble, Christ-like servant-leadership. 4. The New Calvinism leans toward being culture-affirming, as opposed to culture-denying, while holding fast to some very culturally-alien positions on issues like same-sex practice and abortion. 5. The New Calvinism embraces the essential place of the local church: it is led mainly by pastors; it has a vibrant church-planting bent; it produces widely-sung worship music; and it exalts the preached Word as central to the work of God both locally and globally. 6. The New Calvinism is aggressively mission-driven, including missional impact on social evils, evangelistic impact on personal networks, and missionary impact on the unreached peoples of the world. 7. The New Calvinism is inter-denominational, with a strong (some would say oxymoronic) Baptist element. 8. The New Calvinism includes both charismatics and non-charismatics. 9. The New Calvinism places a priority on pietism or piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of the affections in Christian living, while esteeming the life of the

A Calvinist Soteriology

The proper understanding of new Calvinism's relationship to Calvinism can only be fully known after defining new Calvinism's *sine qua non*. Essential to this is answering the question: what makes a new Calvinist a Calvinist?²⁸ Are they truly Calvinists in any sense of the word? When these questions are answered, their theological heritage can be unfolded. One can then understand whether there is a great divergence from Calvin by the new Calvinists. For example, do new Calvinists largely ignore Calvin's ecclesiology?

For now, it will be sufficient to conclude that the new Calvinists essentially take their definition of Reformed theology from the five points of TULIP. Crucially important to the task of determining a *sine qua non* is how new Calvinism defines the terms of TULIP, especially total depravity.²⁹ One of the doctrines that characterize this movement is lordship

mind and being very productive in it, and embracing the value of serious scholarship. 10. The New Calvinism is vibrantly engaged in publishing books, and, even more remarkably, in the world of the Internet, with hundreds of energetic bloggers and social media activists, with Twitter as the increasingly-default way of signalling things new and old that should be noticed and read. 11. The New Calvinism is international in scope, multi-ethnic in expression, and culturally-diverse. There is no single geographic, racial, cultural, governing center. There are no officers, no organization, nor any loose affiliation that would encompass the whole. (As an aside, he adds: I would dare say there are outcroppings of this movement that no one in this room has ever heard of.) 12. The New Calvinism is robustly gospel-centered, cross-centered, with dozens of books rolling off the presses coming at the gospel from every conceivable angle and applying it to all areas of life, with a commitment to seeing the historic doctrine of justification finding its fruit in sanctification both personally and communally" (Tim Challies, "John Piper: 12 Features of the New Calvinism" [article online] [Challies.com, 2014, accessed 18 March 2014] available from <http://www.challies.com/quotes/john-piper-12-features-of-the-new-calvinism>). In many ways, these twelve reflect Driscoll's earlier work. The merits of these individual features are discussed through this work.

²⁸ Are they Calvinists in any sense of the word and, if so, in what sense?

²⁹ Total depravity is the core issue at stake in just about any discussion of soteriology. When one defines total depravity, the definitions of unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints follow. The reason is because of the great dependence of these other terms upon the theological concept of depravity. Essentially, if one defines depravity, the other doctrines will follow.

salvation.³⁰ For example, one new Calvinist stated, “salvation bestowed by the grace of God when a sinner turns from sin . . . [is a] black and white and non-negotiable” part of Christian orthodoxy.³¹ While this is an important doctrine to discuss, others have ably handled it.

What is pertinent to this dissertation is an extreme form of lordship salvation, known as future grace or future justification. The doctrine, which is espoused by a few new Calvinists, asserts that a believer is not presently justified by faith, but will one day be justified following the confirmation of their faith evidenced by works. The doctrine is not qualitatively different than what Cocceius asserted concerning “the work of God in making provision for the redemption of sinners dependent on the uncertain obedience of man.”³² The notion reflects the fact that the reformers were not always ready to break with Rome on all matters, and doctrinal vestiges of Roman theology have remained.

Missionally Flooding into Cities

At the outset of this section, one may be confused as to how the new Calvinist’s desire to go missionally into cities has anything to do with the gospel. For starters, new Calvinism’s gospel is misunderstood to involve social action or cultural redemption. One prominent new Calvinist has even produced a major theological work on politics. An outgrowth of this thinking is to focus on cities as their primary mission field. For them, this is the gospel. Later, in this series of articles, discussion will address how the movement missionally floods into cities for the purpose of cultural redemption. The word choice of missionally flooding into cities is very specific because they focus their attention very purposefully on cities. The thinking is reminiscent of the Dutch reformed tradition. Cities are now the focus of their efforts. A city is a modern day Samaria: a place where nice Christian people would not be found. Many promote this modern variation of the social gospel.

The missional aspect of reaching the lost involves contextualizing the gospel. The possible excesses of contextualization have been a point of contention with some evangelical leaders. One should ask: is the contextualization of the gospel taken to unbiblical extremes? How does this affect their view of the sovereignty of God? One may conclude that what is

³⁰ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989); Charles Bing, *Simply by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009).

³¹ Mark Driscoll, *A Call to Resurgence: Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013) 96.

³² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 268.

needed to reach the lost in a major city is a properly contextualized gospel, but is this qualitatively different than an understandable gospel?

Continuationism

Continuationism should be an ancillary issue for the new Calvinist movement, but new Calvinism has claimed that openness to the contemporary use of sign gifts is an essential part of its theology. At first, it may appear that the new Calvinism's continuationist beliefs are an ancillary issue, especially in regards to their soteriology (this is certainly true to an extent, which is one reason for the placement and length of this section of the research, but the doctrine of continuationism does still bear some importance in understanding the movement of new Calvinism and its theology).

The reason for new Calvinism's openness or affinity for the contemporary use of the sign gifts is because their theology is greatly influenced by the charismatic tradition. Although differing from the Roman understanding of justification, which requires other elements to be present for justification (i.e. the sacraments), charismatic theology usually asserts: the Spirit empowers true believers with certain gifts. The spiritual gifts include prophecy, healing, and tongues. The notion is similar in many respects to lordship salvation except the condition for salvation is changed from the necessity of submission to the lordship of Christ to the presence of certain sign gifts. On this point, it is ironic that new Calvinists identify themselves as Calvinists because there is definitive disagreement with Calvin.

Overall, their stance on continuationism betrays a doctrinal shallowness. The aforementioned *sine qua non* identifies as its core a belief in openness to the contemporary use of the sign gifts while not making continuationism a doctrinal qualifier. Put another way, to be a new Calvinist one need not be a continuationist but he or she cannot rigidly be a cessationist; consequently, this is an ecumenical theology that betrays its Calvinist heritage. The ecumenism produces shallowness concerning doctrinal matters that will be witnessed in the theology of many new Calvinists, especially among many young or lay new Calvinists. Overall, this is seen as the outworking of the ecumenical spirit of new Calvinism.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CALVINISM

New Calvinists regard themselves in a long line of other Calvinists.³³ While it is not possible here to discuss the origins and development of new Calvinism exhaustively,³⁴ it is necessary to see some of the theological influences that have come to define their theology; it is also not possible to discuss their theology exhaustively. Much of their theology is genuine Christian orthodoxy that, for the sake of brevity, does not need to be discussed. Instead, the focus herein will lie with the issues of utmost importance. One example of this is the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith and its relationship to sanctification.

In looking to history, the new Calvinists read the works of Calvin, Edwards, Owen and even Augustine with a renewed interest. Among young people today, whether pastors, theologians or laity, there is an earnest desire to regard themselves in a way that transcends the present. Great men like these are the individuals who the young, restless, and reformed regard as their theological forefathers and who have gifted the church with a godly heritage to follow. Determining the exact time to begin is not an easy task. The new Calvinists trace their theology directly to the apostolic church. What they have failed to understand is that the true genius of the reformers is not a return to apostolic doctrines but to the text of Scripture itself in its original languages. The intent of this research, therefore, is to view their theology in light of Scripture.

The new Calvinists also esteem Augustine and connect their theology directly to him. One new Calvinist describes Augustine in the following manner:

more than sixteen hundred years since his conversion, Augustine towers over Western history as arguably the most important

³³ As discussed elsewhere it is very difficult to define Calvinism. Like many other “isms,” eventually it strays from its original meaning and becomes so vague it becomes difficult to actually define. What then makes one a Calvinist? Is it the Westminster Confession? The Canons of Dort? Predestination? TULIP? Covenantal theology? And so forth?

³⁴ Paul M. Dohse Sr. has self-published one of the only works attempting to comprehensively deal with the new Calvinism movement. He traced the origins of new Calvinism to the Australian Forum. The veracity of this claim is not definitive but some theological connections appear to have merit (*The Truth About New Calvinism* [Xenia, OH: Bookman Unlimited, 2011]). In addition, Mark Dever ably traced major influences for new Calvinism on The Gospel Coalition’s website (see <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/08/27/whered-all-these-new-Calvinists-come-from-a-serious-top-10-list-from-mark-dever>).

person outside of Scripture. Augustine's teachings—that God is Trinitarian and holy, that people are evil by the choice of their own free will and born with a sin nature, and that people can only be saved by grace from God that is granted because he predestinated them—are the hallmarks of orthodoxy; what is often called Calvinistic Christian belief is really in many ways Augustinian belief, which is also simply biblical belief. A millennium later, the entire Protestant Reformation exploded in part because of Augustine's lasting influence on men such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, and today we are still benefiting from his teaching.³⁵

Like the term Calvinism, Augustinian is vague and imprecise. While Augustine may have been orthodox in many parts, not all aspects of his theology are equally valid. One theologian said:

a warning needs to be sounded that not everything in Augustine's philosophy or theology can be accepted as biblical. He was a child of his age and some of his views led the church into serious errors. His Neo-Platonism affected his anthropology. His amillennialism and allegorical interpretations were adopted by the medieval church. Premillennialism and dispensationalism have had to fight his influence. He also contributed to the developing power of the Roman Church which led to the medieval papacy.³⁶

No one would ascribe to the whole of Augustinian theology. After all, much of what he believed laid the foundation of medieval Roman Catholic theology (i.e. apostolic succession, perpetual virginity of Mary, etc.). Why then claim to follow in the line of Augustine? Augustinianism is synonymous with predestinarianism; it is due to the shared interest in predestination that new Calvinists claim to follow Augustine. Therefore, it may be best to look at the time of Reformation to draw more important connection to the true origin of new Calvinist theology.

³⁵ Mark Driscoll, "Augustine on Theology" [article online] (The Resurgence, 2009, accessed 19 November 2013) available from <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/17/augustine-on-theology>.

³⁶ Edwin A. Blum, "Augustine: The Bishop and Theologian," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (January 1981): 57-66.

REFORMATION THEOLOGY

The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification**Martin Luther**

Luther, more than any other person, is connected with the renewing of biblical doctrines during the Reformation, which is especially true concerning the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In his own life, Luther witnessed the shortcoming of attempting to be justified by works in addition to faith. In terms of holiness, the monkish Luther saw himself as unrighteous. By understanding his own lack of holiness, he was able to perceive that justification must be by faith alone. While justification by faith alone became the rallying cry of the Reformation, Luther's complete understanding of justification is rarely discussed.³⁷

Luther did see an inevitable amount of growth arising from conversion. He stated, "righteousness (justification) precedes works and good works grow out of it."³⁸ Some have taken this to mean that only those who have an ever-increasing practical righteousness are truly saved, which is not necessarily what Luther taught. While he may have asserted that faith works, he did not go as far as saying that works prove regeneration. He simply recognized that regeneration produces growth.

Luther observed, "God frequently permits a man to fall into or remain in grievous sin, in order that he may be put to shame in his own eyes and in the eyes of all men."³⁹ A Christian then can sin grievously and remain in it, according to Luther. He also recognized that justification comes by faith alone and any discussion of works can only come after justification. He stated, "a true Christian says: I am justified and saved only by faith in Christ, without any works or merits of my own."⁴⁰ Therefore, justification precedes experiential sanctification, which is the gospel message. As he asserted succinctly, "little children are saved only by faith

³⁷ In addition to this, one of the greatest effects of the Reformation was to set aside the Vulgate and return to the original languages of Scripture, which is one aspect of the Reformation doctrine of Sola Scriptura.

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954) 41.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works* (Rockville, MD: Serenity Publishers, 2009) 44.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Tabletalk*, trans. by William Hazlitt, (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2003) 235.

without any good works; therefore faith alone justifies.”⁴¹ Why have so many who call themselves descendants of the Reformation insisted upon putting works in a necessary relation to faith for justification to occur? Modern followers of Luther say:

good works follow such faith, renewal, and forgiveness. Whatever is still sinful or imperfect in these works will not be reckoned as sin or defect for the sake of the same Christ.⁴²

The modern assertion is an ambiguous definition of faith; it can create confusion by placing an asterisk on faith: “to this we must add that if good works do not follow, our faith is false and not true.”⁴³ The contemporary notion is not the doctrine of justification taught by Luther. If it was, he would not have struggled so mightily with the book of James and called it an epistle of straw. He stated, “we always have most certain and sure arguments that necessarily conclude that justification cometh by faith alone.”⁴⁴ If one follows in this attachment of works with faith, they betray the theology of Luther who said:

whereby they would bring us into bondage, and force us to say that we are justified, not by faith alone, but by faith formed and adorned with charity. But we set against them the book of the Acts. Let them read this book, and consider the examples contained in it, and they shall find this to be the sum and the argument thereof: that we are justified by faith only in Christ without works, and that the Holy Ghost is given only by the hearing of faith at the preaching of the Gospel [*Comm. on Gal. 3:2*].

When one says that faith must be of a certain type, Luther explained he is putting the believer under bondage; it is bondage because they must keep the entire Law and keep it perfectly. Luther did say that good works confirm the believer’s calling,⁴⁵ which is likely an unguarded statement that is inconsistent with his overall theology of justification. Luther usually ensured that justification by necessity precedes any confirmation or evidences.

⁴¹ Ibid. 234.

⁴² Charles S. Anderson, ed., *Readings in Luther for Laymen* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1967) 89.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Luther also stated, “there is not one in a thousand who does not set his confidence upon the works, expecting by them to win God’s favor and anticipate His grace.”⁴⁶ There is no sense in which believers are to live in anticipation of future justification. Justification has either already occurred or not. Neither are works a necessary confirmation of faith. The roots of new Calvinism are not to be found in Luther’s theology.

Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession is a product of the Lutheran side of the Reformation; it is of such importance for Lutheran theology that it is contained in entirety in the *Book of Concord*. The Augsburg Confession, therefore, should be seen as the heart of Lutheran theology, which is why it is discussed here. In addition to this, it is a product of the Reformation period, so it is an accurate representation of overall Lutheran theology of the Reformation.

Only one article of the Augsburg Confession describes the Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of justification. Article IV lists only one condition of justification, namely faith, that God will in turn regard and reckon as righteousness. Importantly, it is recognized that Paul taught in Romans 4:5 that it is the ungodly whom God justifies. Justification must occur either before or simultaneously to regeneration. In speaking of the relationship between faith and obedience, the Augsburg Confession simply asserted, “faith should produce good fruits and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded” (Art. VI). The Lutheran understanding, therefore, regards the righteous as possibly producing fruit without lessening the obligation for the believer to produce good works.

The teaching is detailed further in its section (XX) entitled “Faith and Good Works.” What is notable is that this is the longest of the articles of the Augsburg Confession; it sounds surprisingly “free grace” in its soteriology, as it completely distinguishes itself from Roman theology and divorces works from salvation except in saying that works are to be done as expressed in the phrase “that we may do God’s will and glorify Him.” Additionally, it is repeatedly affirmed that works are not forbidden in the Lutheran theology. Perhaps the most important statement in this section is that “the conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is, when it is assured and knows that for Christ’s sake it has a gracious God.” Works cannot give grounds for salvation nor can they truly provide assurance of salvation; it is only through faith in

⁴⁶ Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, 31.

what Christ has done that peace can be obtained in this life. The statement is an affirmation that Luther's theology and Lutheran theology are the not the origin of new Calvinism.

The Reformed Doctrine of Justification

John Calvin

Since nearly all lordship proponents identify themselves as Calvinists, it should be evident in the writings of John Calvin that truly saving faith needs to be accompanied by acts of evangelical obedience, otherwise it is not of the type that God gifts to man; it is said that God imparts only faith of a certain type. The saying asks the age-old question of how Calvinistic was Calvin (and since this issue has been discussed *ad nauseam* elsewhere, it is not going to be discussed here).⁴⁷ Instead, a general survey and examination will be made concerning Calvin's view of justification, and it will be concluded that while Calvin may have had a proper understanding of anthropology, this did not correspond completely and consistently with his understanding of justification. As Enns observed, Calvin taught a type of "double justification."⁴⁸ He did champion justification by faith alone through God's grace alone, but his theology was not limited to this.

The biblical understanding of justification is seen in Calvin's rebuke of the sophist's theology. In responding to them, he stated, "according to them, man is justified by faith as well as by works, provided these are not his own works, but gifts of Christ and fruits of regeneration."⁴⁹ He defined those in error as ascribing justification to being based upon anything other than the work of Christ.

In addition to this, the beginning of covenantal theology is evident in Calvin's theology. The basis of the covenant of works is seen in his describing:

a man will be said to be *justified by works*, if in his life there can be found a purity and holiness which merits an attestation of righteousness at the throne of God, or if by the perfection of his works he can answer and satisfy the divine justice. On the contrary,

⁴⁷ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*; Helm, *Calvin and Calvinism*; Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*.

⁴⁸ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989) 451-52.

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997) book 3, XI:14.

a man will be *justified by faith* when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous.⁵⁰

Did Calvin ever assert that works are not a necessary condition of justification? To answer this is to put too much emphasis on modern terminology for someone who is far removed from the contemporary discussion. Many claim that the answer is straightforward, but Calvin said:

does [Paul] not plainly enough attribute everything to faith alone when he disconnects it with works? What I would ask, is meant by the expressions, "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested;" "Being justified freely by his grace;" "Justified by faith without the deeds of the law?" (Rom. 3:21, 24, 28).⁵¹

Here he specifically disconnected works from any discussion of justification. Calvin did distinguish between justifying faith and evangelical obedience; "even in his variant presentations of the relation of faith to repentance and regeneration this distinction is carefully maintained."⁵² Bromiley concluded:

primarily, justification is acceptance before God through the imputation of righteousness. This comes by faith alone. Secondarily and in consequence, however, justification is the declaration or manifestation before men of the righteousness of faith. This is justification by works⁵³

The debate has arisen whether Calvin confused the timing of justification, which is the double justification mentioned by Enns. He readily perceived justification as an accomplished fact for the believer. In tying justification to the yet future Bema Seat, he placed the actuality of justification at a future point, which provides the groundwork for new Calvinist soteriology, and it may simply be an inconsistency in Calvin's thinking. While he said, "a man is said to be justified in the sight of God

⁵⁰ Ibid. book 3, XII:1.

⁵¹ Ibid. book 3, XI:19.

⁵² Samuel E. Waldron, "John Calvin Versus Norman Shepherd on Sola Fide," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2 (July 2005): 103.

⁵³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 236, as quoted in Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 452.

when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous, and is accepted,"⁵⁴ he also explained:

nothing can be accepted that is not in every respect entire and absolute, and tainted by no impurity; such indeed as never has been, and never will be, found in man. It is easy for any man, within the precincts of the schools, to talk of the sufficiency of works for justification; but when we come into the presence of God there must be a truce to such talk.⁵⁵

Christian humility consists in laying aside the imaginary idea of our own righteousness, and trusting entirely to the mercy of God, apprehended by faith in Christ.⁵⁶

When a person stands before God, he is never able to produce sufficient evidence for his own justification. If this were so, then his obedience will need to be absolute. What the Christian has instead is the righteousness of Christ that will enable them to be in God's presence; it is only when man surrenders his own efforts that he remains true to the Reformation understanding of justification by faith alone. Only when a sinner capitulates his own efforts and sees the limits of his attempts at righteousness does he rely upon Christ alone and trust in his provision for salvation (and this remains true to Calvin's theology).

Those following in the footsteps of Calvin have taken his language of confirmation too far. One may regard it as doubtful that Calvin truly meant that the believers are intended to produce evidences before God. As he observed:

[Paul] calls that glorying when we pretend to have anything of our own to which a reward is supposed to be due at God's tribunal. Since he takes this away from Abraham, who of us can claim for himself the least particle of merit? [Rom 4:2].⁵⁷

Instead of confirming it in the sense that he must produce evidences of regeneration in order to be saved, his acts of evangelical obedience do bear witness to regeneration. In this, he has some limited use in assurance; it is not that man can look at himself and know that he is saved because he is not like those awful sinners. Instead, when looking back at his life, man can

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3, XI:2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* book 3, XII:1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* book 3, XII:6

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Romans*, elec. ed. (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2002).

have assurance based upon an examination of his Christian life in comparison to his previous experience when unregenerate. Works should not be related to justification as a condition of it. Works certainly should not be regarded as bearing any kind of positive judgment before the Bema Seat of Christ. If this were the case, no one would have sufficient evidences, and such misunderstanding stems from Calvin's view of the Bema Seat.

Calvin understood the Bema Seat as a place where believers and unbelievers are separated. He stated, "he . . . is justified who is regarded not as a sinner, but as righteous, and as such stands acquitted at the judgment-seat of God, where all sinners are condemned."⁵⁸ Calvin's misunderstood the function of the Bema Seat. Although Calvin may have missed the mark in describing this aspect of justification, it is clear from his teaching on depravity that he understood justification to be necessarily based upon the grace of God alone. He did not truly view justification as unfolding in the same manner some New Calvinists do.

The Westminster Confession

The Westminster Confession is the standard by which many reformed churches measure themselves. Vance explained, "the literary products of the [Westminster] Assembly, however, have continually been used by Calvinists since their inception."⁵⁹ The confession also formed part of the basis for the rift between covenantal and dispensational theology with the former accusing the latter of departing from this standard.⁶⁰ Some have jokingly stated that dispensationalists view the *Scofield Bible* as inspired both "above and below the line" due to the importance many dispensationalists place upon Scofield's theology. The same could be said of the Westminster Confession in covenantal circles treat it almost as authoritative as Scripture itself.

Fortunately for the discussion here, the Westminster Confession treats the subjects of soteriology, justification, and works at some length.

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected . . . are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3, XI:2.

⁵⁹ Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, rev. ed. (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1999) 175.

⁶⁰ R. Todd Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His Sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice” [3.V.6-7].⁶¹

One of the important stances that this Confession makes is in regard to the vicarious law-keeping of Christ; it is said that justification is accomplished “by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them” (11.I). According to the Confession, it is not enough that Christ has paid the penalty for the sins of man by acting as their substitute; He must also impart his own obedience and righteousness to them. In this, it is said that faith ceased to be a dead faith and becomes a living and active one. Good works are “the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith” (16.II). Despite this, this same chapter readily admits that man “cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment” (16.V).

How can a believer give evidences that will always arise short and cannot withstand the severity of God’s judgment based upon Him as the standard of holiness? Therefore, it must be that the witness borne by the fruits of obedience are for the eyes of man and not the eyes of God. If this is the case, then it is consistent with the biblical understanding of justification within the book of James. Too many modern day reformed theologians wish to make justification ultimately dependent upon obedience. Sproul asserted, “if it is a true faith, good works will absolutely, immediately, inevitably, and necessarily ensue from that faith . . . if works do not follow, there was not true faith.”⁶² In ecclesiology, this gives license for the church to become fruit inspectors, testing the faith of believers based upon the evidence of their life. As Boice stated, “if we do not do good works, we are not justified. We are not Christians.”⁶³ Although Sproul did not take this understanding as far as others, this characterizes many Calvinists today. In the end, the inconsistency is seen when Christ’s

⁶¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996).

⁶² R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman’s Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007) 2:173.

⁶³ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) 119.

obedience has been imputed to man but man still needs his own obedience as proof. The present author is simply calling modern Calvinists back to the true understanding reflected in the Westminster confession that “their justification is only of free grace” (16.III).

The Canons of Dordt

The Canons of Dordt, more than any other place, is where the foundation of new Calvinist theology has been laid. In the fifth article, it is said:

The cause or guilt of this unbelief as well as of all other sins is no wise in God, but in man himself; whereas faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God [First Head of Doctrine, Art. 5].

In the sixth article, it stated, “some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree.” No longer is faith the vehicle for salvation, but the decree of God which issues faith to man. As some new Calvinists will state, God “will(s) that sin exists in the world . . . [and] ordains that a sinful act will come to pass.”⁶⁴ The new Calvinist understanding is an important aspect of their theology. As Cowan explained, this is supralapsarianism.

Sublapsarianism is the orthodox Calvinist view that states that all people stand under the judgment of God for their sin but that God sovereignly chooses to elect some to salvation and actively works in their hearts to bring them to Christ. Those who are not elected are left to perish for their sin. The basis of God’s choice is found in his own “good pleasure” (Eph 1:9) and not in the merit or demerit of the individual, thus repudiating any possibility of boasting. God is free from any charge of injustice in that the unelected are justly punished for their sin and not because they were simply not elected.

Supralapsarianism, on the other hand, teaches that God positively decrees both faith and unbelief, not only working in the elect to nurture faith but also in the reprobate to purposely bring about sin. The basis for God’s choice is still his good pleasure, but the unelected are punished because of their nonelection rather

⁶⁴ John Piper, “Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained that Evil Be?” (Jonathan Edwards Institute, 1 July 1998, accessed 12 November 2013) available from <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/is-god-less-glorious-because-he-ordained-that-evil-be>.

than for their sin. A disposition toward sin is placed in the heart of the reprobate so as to give God a “reason” to punish them. In this view God is the author of sin and his election is completely arbitrary. As Sproul rightly argues, this is not the view of John Calvin. This is unadulterated hyper-Calvinism. Sproul insists that

to understand the Reformed [Calvinist] view . . . we must pay close attention to the crucial distinction between *positive* and *negative* decrees of God. Positive has to do with God’s active intervention in the hearts of the elect. Negative has to do with God’s passing over the non-elect. . . . He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there.

Thus Calvinism formulates election in positive-negative terms, while hyper-Calvinism does so in positive-positive terms. Although both of these views are accurately referred to as “double predestination,” few non-Calvinists understand the fine distinctions between them and subsequently associate the term with supralapsarianism.⁶⁵

The *Canons of Dordt* state:

faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred upon him, breathed and infused into him; nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and to work, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also [Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Art. 14].

POST-REFORMATION THEOLOGY

The Puritans

There has been a great resurgence in the study of the Puritans in recent years. Often relegated to the shelves of history, names like Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, and others have become part of the theological

⁶⁵ Steven B. Cowan, “Common Misconceptions of Evangelicals Regarding Calvinism,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 3 (June 1990): 191-92.

mainstream once again. The modern phenomenon is assuredly connected to the movement of new Calvinism; it is new Calvinism that has brought about a renewed interest in the American Puritan heritage, but the issue that must be addressed here concerns why this has occurred in new Calvinism? First, much of what has been conveyed to the new Calvinism through the Puritans is genuine Christian orthodoxy. Therefore, it would not be beneficial to discuss (at length) the many points of agreement between Puritans and modern-day new Calvinism. Practically speaking, there is a general attitude shared by the Puritans and new Calvinism. Both groups share zeal and a genuine desire for spiritual growth. The seriousness with which the Puritans approached Christian living truly speaks volumes to this generation, but just because the movement has been correct in challenging the church's lack of focus upon sanctification does not mean that the solution to this deficiency lies in combining sanctification with justification. In light of this, it is also beneficial to see where the Puritan's theological shortcomings may be reflected in the theology of the new Calvinism.

Conversion

The doctrine of preparationism has often been the focus of many Puritan studies, which is the concept that there are specific things that must precede conversion. Beeke and Jones, the writers of a massive new work on Puritan theology, do not believe much of what has traditionally been taught concerning Puritan soteriology. On the other hand, R. T. Kendall's earlier work *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1640* has been highly influential in showing that the Puritans diverged significantly from Calvin's theology. Beeke and Jones highly esteem the Puritans and revolt against the notion that "there is said to be a degeneration from pure Reformed theology in the Puritan movement, a degeneration driven by preparationism."⁶⁶

There is disagreement over whether the Puritan concept of preparationism is really true to Puritan theology as a whole, but as Beeke and Jones recognize: "certain Puritans taught aspects of preparation that most other Puritans, indeed most other Christians, rightly reject."⁶⁷ The issue does not center on preparation itself *per se*, but in their understanding of conversion; it is not necessary to get into the specifics of

⁶⁶ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012) 444.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 455.

this debate here, but no matter which side one chooses, the Puritan understanding of conversion is highly flawed. Despite this, it remains influential today in new Calvinism.

In Puritan theology, conversion is not seen as a singular event whereby the sinner believes and is saved. Beeke and Jones even recognize “the Puritan belief that conversion is a process;”⁶⁸ it is not punctiliar and “some Puritans rigorously developed and painfully applied sequences of steps in conversion.”⁶⁹ The Puritan perspective is understood through the Calvinistic lens of predestination whereby God works in the life of the still unregenerate elect to bring them through the process of conversion. They had a definite *ordo salutis* and “the Puritans did not believe in or expect merely ‘sudden’ conversion.”⁷⁰ In addition to this, the Puritans are known for understanding that certain preparatory work needed to occur prior to conversion so that conversion could occur. Prior to conversion, there must be repentance, defined as an acknowledgment of sinfulness, and the Puritans believed that one of the major functions of the Law was to convict the sinner. They saw the Law as paving the way to salvation. Somehow this has not caused many “red flags” to be raised concerning their theology.

The Law

One of the important areas of soteriology where the Puritans struggled to remain biblical is in relation to the Mosaic Law. Like many today, they chose to place the Christian under an obligation to keep the so-called moral law, but not its ceremonial aspects contained within the whole of the Mosaic Law (which does not take into account that the New Testament bears witness to the unity of the Law). While certain moral elements are, in fact, a reflection of God’s righteousness, this does not mean that the New Testament saint is under the Law or any portion thereof (i.e. this is a common misconception).

What is important for the present study of the Puritan’s theology is the purpose of the Law. The Law is meant to convict sinners of their unrighteousness by their inability to keep it. Although not seeing the Law as meritorious, “the majority of Puritans spoke freely of obedience to the Law as the way of salvation.”⁷¹ The statement comes from someone who favors the Puritans.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 450.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 456.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 464.

⁷¹ Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1976).

In addition to this, the Puritans saw the convicting aspect of the law practiced through the civil laws of a nation. Their general perspective was that the law convicts sin, it should therefore follow that the enacting of Christian laws helps to convict the unregenerate man of his sin. Kendall accurately observed, “while the law might stir men to seek salvation, for Calvin this ‘is but an accidental effect.’”⁷² Even Calvin, who established a theocracy in Geneva, did not see the Law functioning in this way. To understand the Law in this way does not properly distinguish between the Mosaic Law and civil laws in general. Civil laws do not necessarily convict sinners of their own unrighteousness. For example, it is sinful to have an abortion but it is legal. In this instance, civil law has the opposite effect, breeding licentiousness.

Government has been instituted by God to restrain sin in the world, not to convict the world of sin. The error has led to an undue emphasis on social reform, and this remains prominent in many reformed churches, which equate social action with evangelism. The error led, in part, to the demise of Puritanism. Where did the Puritans go? They were replaced by politics, and this still remains a danger today in new Calvinism. All too often today, people equate being Christian with certain political stances.⁷³

Union

One of the biggest areas of continuity between modern new Calvinism and the theology of the Puritans involves their understanding of the believer’s union with Christ. Union is the key to Puritan soteriology; it may also be the key to the theology of many new Calvinists. Instead of seeing the union of the believer with Christ as a result of the believer’s regeneration, they understand it as (at least logically) prior to it. The Puritan *ordo salutis* was Union, Regeneration, Faith, then Justification, which completely minimizes the important role justification has in salvation and replaces it with union. The doctrine is such a departure from the Reformation that Luther would have hardly recognized it. One consequence of this is that the union, which brings about regeneration, also contains “a righteousness imparted.”⁷⁴ Beeke and Jones asserted, “in the judgment of several significant Puritan theologians, union with Christ, not justification by faith, is the chief

⁷² Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 452.

⁷³ Some of this may be with good reason, but (at times) this becomes a new twist on liberation theology or the prosperity gospel applied to nations. For example, if America does X, then God will do Y (usually some form of blessing).

⁷⁴ Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 218.

blessing a Christian receives from God.”⁷⁵ Union is the key to the theology of some new Calvinists as well, and justification either becomes a vehicle for this union or, more properly, a consequence of it. Owens confirms the latter. He is said to claim, by his admirers, “union with Christ is the cause of all other graces a believer receives.”⁷⁶ Accordingly, Acts 16:31 must be altered to say, “be united with the Lord and you will be saved.” Furthermore, the conclusion is forced in their *ordo salutis* that the unregenerate man is capable of being united with Christ, which all but abandons the doctrine of total depravity. Additionally, the Puritans took the concept of election to its extreme of supralapsarianism, which understands the decrees of God as so pivotal. The union of the believer with Christ has been decided by God’s dual decrees of election and reprobation. Owen and Ames even went to the extreme of saying that God hates the reprobate.

Holiness

Perhaps more than anyone else, the Puritans are remembered for their earnest striving for holiness. Charnock especially understood regeneration as not just new life, but a holy life, confusing the capacity for holiness with the actuality of holiness. He said that regeneration involves the whole of man and “produce(s) moral reformation.”⁷⁷ His perspective underestimates the sinfulness of sin. While there is a new capacity within the regenerate man whereby he can willingly choose to serve God in his actions, he does not truly live a holy life. Although the believer is commanded to be perfect, by any measure, a believer’s sin will exceed his holiness. One can say that there is more sin than righteousness even in the saint’s best prayer.

Puritan John Preston believed, “Christ will take away not only the guilt but also the power of sin in those to whom He is united.”⁷⁸ The statement is close to the truth. Regeneration removes the enslavement to sin but does not completely eliminate sin’s power; instead, sin’s power is broken, and its power is no longer absolute, which is why Paul said (in Rom 7) that he did the very things that he desired not to do.

The Puritans desired a pure church in much the same manner as the new Calvinists. Unfortunately, the former have been known by

⁷⁵ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 483.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 485.

⁷⁷ Stephen Charnock as quoted in *Puritan Theology*, 468.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 486.

posterity to have “often spent time pointing out false signs of regeneration;”⁷⁹ it is only the “holy” who are regenerate. In defending this idea, Owens said:

for there is faith whereby we are justified, which he who has shall be assuredly saved; which purifies the heart and works by love. And there is a faith or believing, which does none of this.⁸⁰

Owens described two types of faith, which is something carried forward in many different forms of lordship theology. In abandoning the principles of the Reformation, the Puritans were in some ways a theological return to Romanism. Justification is being made righteous and not simply being declared righteous. Kevan observed, “their general view was that, if it be true that the Gospel is rightly preached without any conditions, then neither Jesus nor the apostles ever preached the Gospel.”⁸¹ Charnock’s straight lines analogy is perhaps the best way to see the folly of this thinking. He described the regenerate man as a short straight line while God is an infinitely straight line. The difference in holiness is a matter of degree. The present author would assert that even at man’s most righteous point, his line is crooked in comparison to God’s, which is not meant to undermine the work of the Spirit in the life of a believer. A believer can look back at his former way of life and say, “praise God for the change He has brought about in me.” When this same man looks at the holiness in his life from God’s perspective, he will never be able to say that his line is a small straight line.

Jonathan Edwards

Perhaps more than any other, except Calvin, new Calvinism identifies itself with the theology of Jonathan Edwards.⁸² Edwards is arguably the greatest English speaking Calvinistic theologian, and he is likely admired partly

⁷⁹ Ibid. 479.

⁸⁰ John Owen, *Justification*, in *Works*, 5:71, as quoted in Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 493.

⁸¹ Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 89.

⁸² Jeremy Walker makes an interesting assertion in this regard (cf. Jeremy Edwards, *New Calvinism Considered: A Personal and Pastoral Assessment* [Darlington, UK: EP Books, 2013]). He claimed that the new Calvinists, especially Piper, read Edwards in light of their own theology rather than truly allowing Edwards to speak for himself. An evaluation of the merits of this thesis is beyond the scope of this work.

because other modern theologians have been found wanting. Despite this, Edwards fought against the cold orthodoxy of the Old Calvinists of his day, paralleling the present day agenda of new Calvinism. One writer has asserted:

Edwards's complaint was that Old Calvinism had gone stale . . . (his) sympathies lay in the direction of the new Pietism, whose best known English-speaking apostles were John Wesley and George Whitfield.⁸³

Wesley and Edwards are unlikely bedfellows to modern theologians because their current followers are perpetually at odds with one another, but Edwards and Wesley were probably allies because of their support for the Great Awakening and their shared passion for a holy church. Theologically, they both answered that unholy people were not a part of the true church. They simply differed over whether these backsliding persons were originally saved. Edwards specifically was "allied to the assumption that the church must be reserved solely for the pure . . . [not] 'half-way commitments.'"⁸⁴ In pastoral ministry, this led him to support closed communion as well as lean towards including only revived persons into church membership. Edwards, Wesley, and new Calvinism all have a desire for experimental piety determine their theology and in so doing stray from the biblical concept of grace.

Overall, much of Edwards' theology is influenced by philosophical determinism. By this, it is meant that he regarded events as occurring by necessity and thereby being able to determine the presence of a cause by viewing its results. Edwards also differentiated his understanding of the sovereignty of God by looking at the will of man. He perceived man's will as having the natural ability to repent but not the moral ability. Conversion then becomes a surrendering of the will to the Lord. There are several notable areas where Edwards' soteriology can be seen to influence the new Calvinists:

to an unusual degree, Edwards brought together penetrating insight into religious experience, sophistication in the use of current philosophy, and firm commitment to Calvinistic convictions. . . . The major emphases of Edwards' theology were the

⁸³ Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 70

greatness of God, total dependence upon God for salvation, and the intrinsic value of the holy life.⁸⁵

Salvation is wholly dependent upon God and man has no part. Now, it is necessary to examine the specifics of Edwards' soteriology in greater detail.

Justification as Union

One of the most subtle and gravest of the errors that have gone mostly unnoticed in new Calvinism is its misunderstanding of a believer's union with Christ. The believer does have a union with Christ, but Paul never states that believers are united with Christ in his life. He stated, "for if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom 6:5, NASB). According to Romans 6, the believer is said to be united with Christ in His death, and this gives assurance that the believer will be raised with Him in the life hereafter.

The reformers understood the believer's union with Christ as being an essential part of the act of substitution, but Edwards saw the union of Christ as being identified with Christ in his death as well as his life, which is an error that foresees experiential righteousness resulting from the union with Christ in his life. For Calvin, there is a communion with Christ whereby fellowship can be broken, but the relationship does not change;⁸⁶ it is more accurate to say that a believer is identified with Jesus in his death alone,⁸⁷ which is how the sacrifice works. The sacrifice is never the righteousness, signified by the unblemished perfection of the animal that is infused into the one offering the sacrifice, which is not how Christ's sacrifice should be understood.

There is a union between the believer and Christ in his death and resurrection. There remains a union after conversion. The union though is not with his life, but the identification through adoption. After conversion believers are related to Him as his children. Believers are not experientially righteous because He was experientially righteous. Instead, God sees his righteousness judicially in the believer's place on account of his vicarious

⁸⁵ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, elec. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000) 458.

⁸⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 4, XV:12.

⁸⁷ A believer is said to be "in Christ," a part of the body, but at conversion it is only Christ's death which is a propitiation.

sacrifice; it is through union with Him in Christ's sacrifice that the believer has had his sins paid. Calvin stated:

we must specially remember this substitution in order that we may not be all our lives in trepidation and anxiety, as if the just vengeance which the Son of God transferred to himself, were still impending over us.⁸⁸

Unfortunately, he did not hold to this consistently and said in his commentary that the believer is united with Christ in "a secret union, by which we are joined to him; so that he, reviving us by His Spirit, transfers his own virtue to us."⁸⁹ He also explained:

both of these we obtain by union with Christ. For if we have true fellowship in his death, our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin becomes dead, so that the corruption of our original nature is never again in full vigor (Rom. 6:5, 6). If we are partakers in his resurrection, we are raised up by means of it to newness of life, which conforms us to the righteousness of God.⁹⁰

For Calvin (here) and Edwards, it is the union with Christ that results in conformity to Christ that makes the believer holy in deed. One could almost say that what Edwards asserts is "the person who is holy in deed is holy indeed." The assertion is the unfortunate doctrine of vicarious law keeping that many reformed theologians have chosen to follow, and one that Edwards expands upon in his soteriology. Gerstner said:

in line with Calvin and Puritanism (Edwards) saw union with Christ as the ground of justification. And going beyond his own tradition as he develops "fitness," or natural congruity, as the corollary of union with Christ, sharply contrasting it with any "moral fitness" in faith or obedience. More sharply than any he saw the sense in which justification by faith alone rested ultimately on justification by works — the works of Christ.⁹¹

While it may seem like an insignificant "ivory tower" discussion, it is one that has important consequences for practical Christian living.

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, XVI:5.

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Romans*, elec. ed., Rom 6:5.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, book 3, III:9.

⁹¹ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1983) 83.

Edwards would make the point that if one is truly united with Christ, he or she will have practical holiness as a byproduct or as a result of this union. The outworking of this is seen in Sproul's commenting:

Christ's mission of redemption was not limited to the cross. To save us he had to live a life of perfect righteousness. His perfect, active obedience was necessary for his and our salvation. He earned the merit of perfect righteousness, not only for his own humanity, but for all those whom he redeems. Christ perfectly fulfilled all demands of the law, meriting by his active obedience the blessing promised in the old covenant.⁹²

Sweeney explained that for Edwards "justification is always connected with holiness in the person justified."⁹³ He was after all a Puritan. The view is based (in part) upon a misunderstanding of Paul's statement: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21, NASB). The righteousness is seen as experiential and not just positional. The union is one of nature and is more than judicial. Consequently, it is said, in reference to Edwards, "what is real in union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal."⁹⁴ Moreover,

for Edwards, the question is not, "how can I become righteous and therefore justified?" but is instead, "how can I become united to Christ, where righteousness and justification reside?"⁹⁵

The believer is not truly justified by faith but through his or her union with Christ. The union is not being united with Him through his substitutionary atonement but through personal identification with Christ; it is not surprising then that some of Edwards' followers abandoned the substitutionary atonement in favor of the governmental theory, and people like MacArthur understand faith as submission to (i.e. union with) Christ. For Edwards, faith is defined as a union. He even said that salvation is accomplished through "the very act of faith and union;"⁹⁶ it is claimed by admirers of Edwards that what he taught was "the reason God accepts

⁹² R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, elec. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 104.

⁹³ Douglas A. Sweeney et al, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, Kindle ed., ed. Josh Moody (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) loc 1505.

⁹⁴ Sweeney et al, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, loc 301.

⁹⁵ Ibid. loc 911.

⁹⁶ Ibid. loc 1006.

people who believe is because they are united with Christ. This is not merely legal but real, for the basis of their acceptance (or the foundation) is Christ."⁹⁷ What he desired is to see justification as not being a judicial act declaring the one with faith to be positionally righteous, which is the true Reformation doctrine, but is a relational, practical righteousness inevitably resulting in holiness. When one truly examines his holiness in comparison to his sinfulness, man will see that, by any measure, his righteousness is nothing but filthy rags (cf. Isa 64:6).

Many since the Reformation have carried the banner of justification as a both active and passive union with Christ,⁹⁸ which is a surprisingly diverse group and includes reformed theologians like Michael Horton and John Piper, and also Charles Finney (cf. *Principles of Union with Christ*) as well as the neoorthodox (esp. Schleiermacher). One theologian has recently stated:

hav(ing) posited that in Calvin's soteriology – as elucidated in book III of the Institutes—the justification and sanctification of the Christian follow from her union with Christ. And if this interpretation is correct, then Schleiermacher's theology, far from betraying the heritage of the Reformers, both logically and structurally locates the doctrine of justification in exactly the same place as Calvin"⁹⁹

Apparently, reformed theology and neoorthodoxy share essential soteriological elements. The same writer asserted:

far from abandoning the soteriological concepts of the Reformation, it seems more likely that Schleiermacher was seeking to translate their meaning and significance into a more contemporary idiom for his own generation.¹⁰⁰

The desire is the same thing that new Calvinism wishes to accomplish. Few reading this would argue that Schleiermacher's view represents either the Reformation or orthodox Christianity. One should be suspicious when the theology of Calvin, Edwards, Finney and Schleiermacher all share union with Christ as the central element of their soteriology.

⁹⁷ Ibid. loc 333.

⁹⁸ This is the more commonly used terminology in reformed theology.

⁹⁹ Paul T. Nimmo, "Schleiermacher on Justification: A Departure From the Reformation?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66 (February 2013): 71.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 72.

In a world and a church characterized by moral decay, Edwards chose to emphasize the results of justification as an inevitable result of the believer's union with Christ. If one is truly united with Christ, then he will live like Christ, which is not how depravity truly works. Edwards, in his relentless fight against sin, did not see the true joy of *sola gratia* and grace as the rule of life. Paul said, "you are not under law but under grace" (Rom 6:14ff.). In his opposition to sin, Edwards attempted to place believers under the law, making their final justification contingent upon their obedience to the moral law. Consequently, it is said that Edwards "even went so far as to say that only holy people are saved, that final justification is granted only to those who persevere in the faith and love that they profess."¹⁰¹ Edwards is quoted as saying directly "perseverance in holiness is absolutely necessary to salvation."¹⁰² What an unfortunate perversion of the gospel of grace and one that is directly reflected in new Calvinism. The distortion is not something new to Edwards, but is an ancient misunderstanding of the doctrine of rewards. Tertullian said:

For all, the righteous and the unrighteous alike, shall be brought before God the Word. For the Father hath committed all judgment to Him; and in fulfillment of the Father's counsel, He cometh as Judge whom we call Christ. For it is not Minos and Rhadamanthys that are to judge (the world), as ye fancy, O Greeks, but He whom God the Father hath glorified, of whom we have spoken elsewhere more in particular, for the profit of those who seek the truth. He, in administering the righteous judgment of the Father to all, assigns to each what is righteous according to his works. And being present at His judicial decision, all, both men and angels and demons, shall utter one voice, saying, "Righteous is Thy judgment." Of which voice the justification will be seen in the awarding to each that which is just; since to those who have done well shall be assigned righteously eternal bliss, and to the lovers of iniquity shall be given eternal punishment. And the fire which is unquenchable and without end awaits these latter.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Sweeney et al, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, loc 2779.

¹⁰² Jonathan Edwards, as quoted in *ibid.* loc 2840.

¹⁰³ Hippolytus of Rome, "Against Plato, on the Cause of the Universe," trans. S. D. F. Salmond in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume V: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886) 222.

Misunderstanding the judgment of rewards, accompanied with man's natural desire and inclination to judge other's actions, is the reason that the future judgment of believers is falsely understood to be one of rewards and justification.

Final justification is one thing that has been all too frequently overlooked in the soteriology of many who claim the name of Calvinist. Sweeney said of Edwards:

in his "Miscellanies" notebooks, and in the *Blank Bible*, he suggested that the error of those who misinterpret James on the doctrine of justification-particularly the words of James 2:24, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"- was that they failed to "distinguish . . . first and second justification. The first justification, which is at conversion, is a man's becoming righteous, or his coming to have a righteousness belonging to him, or imputed to him. This is by faith alone. The second is at judgment, which is that by which a man is proved and declared righteous. This is by works, and not by faith alone."¹⁰⁴

Such an understanding is a return (in part, at the very least) to Romanism. Sanctification becomes an automatic result of justification, which is why one theologian of note has said that the soteriology of Protestantism and Romanism can be brought together by their commonality found in Edwards.¹⁰⁵

Sproul commented, "Edwards could preach that a pretense of trusting Christ is in vain as long as men live wicked lives."¹⁰⁶ However, believers live wicked lives. How ironic that in Sproul's effort to taken sin seriously, he has, in fact, taken sin much too lightly. Even the smallest of sins is such a great violation that it necessitated Christ's death on the cross to accomplish reconciliation with God. In an effort to take sin seriously, Edwards and new Calvinism have hardened their doctrine of works (if there is such a doctrine), but taking sin seriously means rejoicing in grace and living in light of already present grace, not by saying that those without works are not saved. He even told people "we can't be saved without being good."¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, Jesus explained, "no one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18). He was speaking to those who had faith

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. loc 2913.

¹⁰⁵ Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁶ Sproul, *Faith Alone*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Sweeney et al, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, loc 2970.

when He explained this to them. Obviously, even the regenerate man is not good unless you are looking at him positionally instead of practically.

Edwards' Social Gospel

The passion that motivated the ministry of Jonathan Edwards was not too much different from that which gave rise to new Calvinism. Both share a common desire to purge or cleanse the church of professing Christians. Nothing disgusts people in the postmodern world more than hypocrisy. The hypocrisy of carnal Christians is a target of this theology. One person observed that Edwards was "chronically frustrated by glib moral laxity in those the Lord has placed under his care, easy-believism and hypocrisy."¹⁰⁸ One could just as easily hear this refrain come from a modern new Calvinist as from the mouth of Edwards centuries prior. Although they would never admit it, it is a desire to rid the church of all those sinners (i.e. professing believers who live in a worldly manner).

The result of this thinking is an eschatologically based soteriology, which may sound confusing, but what is intended here is to say that the eschatological beliefs of Edwards, and later new Calvinists, compel their soteriological understanding. Essentially, the gospel is not just about personal salvation; it has eschatological features, as well. Personal salvation is one part of a larger gospel, which is why new Calvinists focus so much upon the gospel. The "whole" gospel includes not only personal transformation, but also societal transformation, as evident in the following quotation:

the doctrine of justification is for Edwards of singular importance not only for individual salvation but also for the New England project in terms of its theological priority and its social ramifications . . . justification came to be associated with a divine social strategy as much as divine and saving balm.¹⁰⁹

The notion is mirrored clearly in the Gospel Coalition's statement: "men and women . . . are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life."¹¹⁰ Although not explicitly postmillennial in outlook, Edwards believed that religious revival resulting in societal transformation would help to inaugurate the kingdom of God. Especially noteworthy is that

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. loc 2775.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. loc 1511, 1708.

¹¹⁰ *Foundation Documents* (The Gospel Coalition, 2008).

“international alliances with other churches were (one) of the ways Edwards labored to knit the churches and bring forth the kingdom,”¹¹¹ which is something that is shared in new Calvinism’s usage of Together for the Gospel, the Gospel Coalition, Acts 29, and the World Evangelical Alliance. Churches are partnering together to bring the gospel (both personal and social) to the world.

Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter has been called “the essence of Puritanism.”¹¹² He is of particular importance to this study because he fought ardently against anything he saw as antinomian, which is something the new Calvinists continually charge against those who espouse free grace theology, and may also be a reason for their stances against dispensationalism.¹¹³ The spirit of Baxter continues to this day in new Calvinism. He saw himself as fighting against the surge of antinomianism and would fellowship with almost anyone in opposition to those he saw as antinomian. New Calvinism is doing the same in its willingness to fellowship with many people (e.g. Rick Warren and T. D. Jakes), and is also one of the reasons why they are willing to fellowship with almost anyone except with dispensationalists.

Like a good Puritan, Baxter believed that you cannot just be saved. Instead, “man has to do something,”¹¹⁴ which is why he fought against free grace theology. In formulating his theology, he echoed Edward’s view of future justification that is to occur at the last judgment. Baxter, not unlike some new Calvinists, viewed there to be two justifications whereby “the first happens when a man believes, but the final justification takes place at the Day of Judgment.”¹¹⁵ In this final justification, the believer has to demonstrate his own obedience to be justified, which violates truly reformed theology. Beougher asserted, “Calvinists consistently have emphasized that there is only one justification . . . what takes place at the final judgment is simply a ratification of what took place long before.”¹¹⁶ With regards to Baxter, “the primary reason for good works seems to be because God has ordered us to do them as necessary to our final

¹¹¹ Sweeney et al, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, loc 1714.

¹¹² Timothy Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian* (Fearn: Mentor, 2008) 11.

¹¹³ Dispensationalists are frequently, and falsely, charged with teaching antinomianism.

¹¹⁴ Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion*, 82

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 61.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 63.

justification.”¹¹⁷ One wonders why there are not more within reformed theology crying against this resurgent false teaching, whereas this is said to currently be only a disputed point within reformed theology.¹¹⁸

Many of the reformed applaud the work of the new Calvinists, but in terms of justification, free grace theology, and dispensationalism share more in common with reformed theology than reformed theology shares with new Calvinism. Indeed, new Calvinism here is more like neoorthodoxy than reformed theology. Hannah said that in neoorthodoxy,

fundamentalist literalism, filtered into the Genesis account of creationism, was questioned; an openness to Pentecostal views embraced; a willingness to decentralize eschatological speculation approved; a rejection of the extremes of dispensationalism assumed; a renewal of a social consciousness proposed; a desire to rethink the meaning of biblical infallibility allowed; and a warmth toward ecumenical dialogue engaged.¹¹⁹

Hannah’s description could just as easily be a statement concerning new Calvinism as it is about neoorthodoxy.

MODERN CALVINISM

The purpose of this section is to chronicle the immediate influences upon new Calvinism; it will not attempt to define the many shades of modern Calvinism but will look instead at the prominent persons, institutions, and trends that laid the path new Calvinism has followed. The present segment will specifically be limited in time to the events of the past century.

Fuller Theological Seminary

Although Ladd’s influence upon new Calvinism is extensive, it is necessary to examine the influence of Fuller Theological Seminary, where Ladd taught and Piper was a student, more broadly. Fuller Seminary’s abandonment of its fundamental heritage and its denial of the doctrine of inerrancy is surprisingly well documented. In one generation, the school abandoned the fundamental foundation laid by Charles Fuller and followed

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 72.

¹¹⁸ Carl Trueman, phone conversation, 18 June 2013.

¹¹⁹ John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) Loc. 3318-21.

the path towards neoorthodoxy set forth by his son, Daniel Fuller. Marsden documented well the influence the younger Fuller had upon the seminary's doctrinal stance following his studies under the prominent neoorthodox theologian Karl Barth.¹²⁰

Marsden, a supporter of Fuller Seminary, affirms the reforming efforts of Daniel Fuller and the direction the school headed under his deanship. While Marsden does not ascribe the doctrinal change to Daniel Fuller primarily, he does believe him to be the linchpin in the progressive change, culminating in the school's decisive "Black Saturday" meeting; it is here that the school's drift towards liberalism became entrenched. The founders sought to create a remade Princeton that was "ecclesiastically positive."¹²¹ Fuller, a prominent fundamentalist, wanted his namesake school to be independent and to abandon the separatism, consciously choosing instead to court the favor of mainline denominations. One must remember that, at Charles Fuller's time, the mainline denominations were just moving into liberalism. Fuller Seminary today has continued to court the favor of the mainline denominations, even when they are outrightly apostate.

Ladd himself reflected Fuller Seminary's attempt at integrating fundamentalism with parts of modern liberalism. The former focused upon the future aspects of the kingdom while the latter only cared about the present aspects of the kingdom. Ladd's proposal then can be seen now as a compromise between fundamentalism and modern liberalism; it has been observed that Ladd was "torn between his presuppositional critique of modern scholarship and his eagerness to find modern critical scholarship on his side."¹²² He wanted to be respected by and contribute to both camps. Compromise in the name of cooperation is a fundamental tenant of Fuller Seminary's theology.

Fuller Seminary's doctrinal understandings are currently reflected in new Calvinism. Their ecclesiology is "a direct repudiation of the dispensationalist view of the church as a refuge in a ruined culture and a consequent affirmation of the Calvinist-Puritan view that the church must play a central civilization-building role."¹²³ In their understanding,

¹²⁰ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

¹²¹ Ibid. 64.

¹²² Ibid. 250.

¹²³ Ibid. 63.

modern culture, in (the Reformed theological tradition's) view, is not beyond hope, and Christians have the task of transforming culture to bring it more in conformity with God's Law and will.¹²⁴

the broadly Calvinistic vision that the Christian's mission involves not only evangelism but also a cultural task, both remaking the mind of an era and transforming society.¹²⁵

As Marsden observed, the desire to stay current with secular academic innovation led the school to pursue certain "innovations including moving away from dispensationalism, taking more positive views of science, scholarship, and social concern, reconsidering the role of the Holy Spirit (in regards to holiness and Pentecostal groups), and reopening discussions about the inspiration of Scripture."¹²⁶ Fuller's influence upon the trend towards openness, especially concerning continuationism, results from their commitment to avoid the dogmatic elements of fundamentalism. To some extent these are all carried forth by present day new Calvinists.

The importance of Fuller is evident in the fact that it was the theological training ground of John Piper. On the Desiring God website, Piper unabashedly states, "Piper attended Fuller Theological Seminary, where he was greatly influenced by Daniel Fuller, a man whose teaching opened new insights into Scripture for Piper."¹²⁷ The following survey results indicate how far Fuller Seminary drifted by 1982. The results indicate the views of Fuller's student populous:

- only 15% believed in inerrancy
- barely half believed that the only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus
- 43% speak in tongues
- 21% do not always believe premarital sex is wrong
- only 10% believe that the husband is primarily responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the family

¹²⁴ Ibid. 76.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 79.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 162.

¹²⁷ Tim Ellsworth, "John Piper: God's Glory His Passion" [article online] (*The Southern Seminary* magazine, at Desiring God Ministries, accessed 15 July 2013) available from <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/gods-glory-his-passion>.

- 80% favor female ordination
- 37% social reform is just as important as evangelism.¹²⁸

Fuller Theological has drifted so far that recently “the nation’s first LGBT student club (was) sanctioned by a major evangelical seminary” at the Seminary.¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

New Calvinists claim to follow the doctrines of grace. Despite this, their errors could be overcome by following a biblical understanding of the gospel of grace, which would eliminate additions to the biblical gospel as well as correct their understanding of the grace of God. The biblical concept of grace eliminates any contingency upon works. Focusing upon the true nature of man, the aim of the doctrine of total depravity understands that there is no hope to be found in the will of man. Man desires neither to be saved nor to submit to the lordship of Christ. Even regenerate man is incapable of producing sufficient evidence to confirm his salvation. Nor is mankind commanded to transform society because the unregenerate man’s will is in bondage. God saves man for his own glory.

In summary, within the context of the Reformation, the reformed doctrine of justification had a tendency to wrongly emphasize that while faith alone justifies, it is not alone in those who are justified. The confusion was due to the nature of the charges brought upon the reformers by the Roman church, yet does not mean that any of the reformers themselves saw the conversion of a believer being based in their submission to Christ as Lord (master) in addition to Savior. Granted, they may have drawn an improper distinction between faith and works: they did not assert that it was necessary for a believer to justify (to prove or show) their justification (declared righteous) in order to be justified; however, this is what those who build upon the reformer’s theology have done. In building upon the doctrines of the reformers, many new Calvinists have forsaken the reformed doctrine of justification. Not only this, they have departed from the free grace espoused in the Westminster Confession and replaced it with a costly grace. Grace has ceased to be grace. The dangerous teaching is pervading the next generation of young pastors and theologians.

¹²⁸ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 302-10.

¹²⁹ Sarah Parvini, “Fuller Theological Seminary’s Acceptance of LGBT Group, OneTable, Creates Ripples” [article online] (*Huffington Post*, 2013, accessed 5 September 2013) available from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/13/fuller-theological-seminary-lgbt-onetable_n_3593237.html.

EXCURSUS: THE NORMAN SHEPHERD CONTROVERSY

The connection needs to be shown between the theology of John Piper and the Norman Shepherd controversy. For those not familiar with this, it is a dispute that arose at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) concerning the views of then Professor Norman Shepherd with regard to the issue of justification. The dispute was a highly contentious debate. What is worth noting here is the influence it had upon the views of Daniel Fuller, and this influence then extended to the students of Fuller Theological Seminary (like Piper and John Frame). Shepherd, Daniel Fuller, and Piper are in a line of thinking with regard to justification that is aptly referenced as “neo-legalism.”¹³⁰ Holding nothing back, Robbins viewed their understanding of justification as a “rediscovery of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation,”¹³¹ which is due to their understanding of the relationship between faith and works. As VanDrunen summarized, “Shepherd repeatedly stresses that justifying faith is an active, living, obedient faith.”¹³²

The controversy began in the seventies. During that decade, it was Shepherd, the heir apparent to John Murray, who

set himself to the task of formulating the doctrine of justification in a way that would accommodate the language of James so that the church’s presentation of the gospel could just as easily begin with James as with Paul.¹³³

As opposed to making James be interpreted in light of Paul, he made Paul be interpreted in light of James.¹³⁴ One will not find it too difficult to see how this could quickly result in a return to Romanism. Some within Reformed theology objected to this reformulation of justification. Reid stated that Shepherd’s position “seems to link works so closely to faith, not just as the result of faith but as part of faith itself, that he tends to obscure,

¹³⁰ The specific origin of this term is uncertain, but John W. Robbins was its most vocal proponent.

¹³¹ John W. Robbins, “Pied Piper,” *Trinity Review* (June—July 2002): 1a.

¹³² David VanDrunen, in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007) 49.

¹³³ Ian A. Hewitson, *Trust and Obey: Norman Shepherd & The Justification Controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary* (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2011) 22-23.

¹³⁴ The proposition is not that different than N. T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul approach.

if not destroy the biblical Reformed doctrine of faith.”¹³⁵ Shepherd’s perspective is not too different from new Calvinism; it is not just that works come from faith but that they are a part of faith.

Evans explained, “there is an expansive view of faith as including works of evangelical obedience. Shepherd never tires of declaring that the faith that saves is living, active and obedient.”¹³⁶ Waldron said, “Shepherd is perfectly willing to assert that a kind of works is necessary unto (or a condition of) being justified.”¹³⁷ The motives of Shepherd as with the new Calvinists arise from a desire to avoid “cheap grace” and salvation without genuine and deep transformation of life. The motivation, in itself, is not a wrong motive. In an attempt to correct, they have overcorrected; it is simply not appropriate to see works as a condition for salvation or making it in any way applicable to a discussion of justification. With the passing of time, it unfortunately appears, mild consent to this position has ruled the day within reformed theology.

One of the greatest areas of theological confusion conveyed to new Calvinism from the views of Shepherd is a misunderstanding of the substitutionary atonement. There is a tendency to view the atonement as not truly substitutionary; it is more of an exchange atonement. In their view, the believer at conversion is united with Christ, which is not just positional but experiential, as well. Frame stated that at conversion “regeneration describes the change God works in us to become like Christ.”¹³⁸ Having this divine nature, they must act obediently. How much obedience is required is never answered. Another article in this series, will examine Piper’s response to this question. For sake of brevity here, the response is that somehow the thief on the cross had enough evangelical obedience or practical righteousness to be confirmed as justified. Apparently, the thief immediately began to live righteously albeit only for a brief period of time. As Shepherd said, God “does not leave the ungodly in their ungodliness.”¹³⁹ Although this charge is denied, it is Christian perfectionism.

¹³⁵ W. Stanford Reid as quoted in Hewitson, *Trust and Obey*, 46.

¹³⁶ William B. Evans, “Deja Vu All Over Again? The Contemporary Reformed Soteriological Controversy in Historical Perspective.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (Spring 2010): 142.

¹³⁷ Samuel E. Waldron, “John Calvin Versus Norman Shepherd on Sola Fide,” *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2 (July 2005): 174.

¹³⁸ John M. Frame. *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Kindle ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006) loc. 2732-33.

¹³⁹ Hewitson, *Trust and Obey*, 154.

What is exchanged then in their theology is the unregenerate sinful life for a new divine life in Christ. In this, he changes how the righteousness of Christ is appropriated. The truly reformed understanding of the substitutionary atonement is that Christ died in the sinner's place as a substitute; it is not the exchange of one life for the Lord's own that is substituted, which totally redefines the atonement. Imputed righteousness becomes the cause of justification not the result of it. While Shepherd (and Piper) claimed to subscribe to the substitutionary atonement, he redefined it. He also redefined faith to mean not one act of faith but a lifetime of faithfulness. Works must play a role in justification for Shepherd. As one supporter states, "according to Shepherd, neither are sinners justified irrespective of anything in them."¹⁴⁰

If one doubts the connection between Piper and Shepherd, their commonality is seen in Shepherd's quote "they (believers) are not simply forensically just, but are covenantally loyal."¹⁴¹ The assertion could have just as readily come from the mouth of Piper. There is an attempt made to overcome this understanding's obvious deficiency. Consequently, it is claimed, "the threat of legalism is avoided . . . because the fulfillment of these covenant obligations is not meritorious."¹⁴² Covenantal obedience is necessary for salvation but not meritorious; it is no wonder that this created a controversy, which is well worth it when someone denies the strictly forensic nature of justification. How sad that this controversy ceased with no apparent condemnation.

John Frame

In his introduction to theology, Frame synthesized his understanding of justification in a way that is simple for the lay reader to understand. One should not be surprised that someone, who is writing a series entitled *A Theology of Lordship*, misunderstands the relationship between works and faith. While maintaining that works have no contributing factor to salvation, Frame believes that they are a necessary condition for salvation. His legalism can be seen in the fact that he exhorts his readers to be fruit inspectors saying, "if you want to know whether someone knows God, look at his or her life."¹⁴³

Like so many others he claimed to say that complete sinfulness is not possible but still nevertheless desires to claim that a true believer must

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 130.

¹⁴¹ Norman Shepherd, "The Relation of Good Works," as quoted in *ibid.* 152.

¹⁴² Evans, "Déjà Vu," 144.

¹⁴³ Frame. *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, loc. 951.

be characterized by righteousness. He stated, “if we see ourselves dominated by sinful patterns, we should ask whether we have really trusted Christ as *Lord* and Savior.”¹⁴⁴ One is left wondering how it could be that a person truly recognizes the divinity of Christ and his offer of salvation without realizing his sovereign lordship. He said that the trusting (*fiducia*) element of belief is to “allow (the believer’s) knowledge of God’s word to govern his thoughts, actions, and behavior.”¹⁴⁵ The problem is that no one does this perfectly. He has forgotten the free aspect of grace. How much of one’s life must be governed then? His answer is that it is simply a “willingness to obey.”¹⁴⁶ His *ordo salutis* is wrong and his attempt to reconcile this issue returns to costly grace. Shockingly, he asserts plainly:

some people have taught that anyone who makes a minimal commitment to Christianity—for example, by coming forward, professing faith, and being baptized—will certainly be saved in the end, even if they renounce Christ and live sinful lives. That, of course, is not biblical teaching.¹⁴⁷

The church cannot consider those sinful people Christians. How sad this is.

The result of his theology will always be to legalism (due to its perfectionist leanings) and Romanism (due to its misunderstanding of justification). One can clearly see this when Frame asserted, “in regeneration and sanctification, God takes away our sinful, disobedient hearts and gives us new hearts, new dispositions, new lives, new desires to obey him.”¹⁴⁸ One can also see his connection with Piper in terms of future justification, which results from his understanding of lordship. He stated:

justification is ours already, but one day we will be pronounced righteous before the Father’s throne. So, there is a past justification and a future justification.

The eschatological understating is the Laddian concept of an “already/not yet” applied to justification. At its core, “saving faith and good works are closely related.”¹⁴⁹ One major issue with this is the Gospel of John, written so that his readers may believe, and who never mentioned works or even repentance.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. loc. 2703-04.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. loc. 2329.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. loc. 2335.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. loc. 2802-03.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. loc. 2455-56.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. loc 2346.

THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED: A Refutation of Evangelical Universalism

JOEL STANLEY DAVIS

What happens when death occurs? If one were to derive the answer to this question from a survey of American funeral attendants, the answer would almost unanimously be that everyone goes to heaven when they die. One would hope that those closest to the issue of death would have the clearest understanding of the afterlife, yet one would scarcely ever hear the admission that a friend or loved one may have been consigned to eternal punishment, fire and brimstone, weeping and gnashing of teeth, etc. Without question, it would be unfair to expect to hear such sobering thoughts expressed at any graveside memorial.

Nevertheless, anyone studying the doctrine of hell must (at some point) come face-to-face with recognition that some, or perhaps many, loved ones may be destined to such a place of total damnation. Consequently, study of the doctrine is nearly impossible to undertake without some degree of presuppositional bias. However, this does nothing to the actual existence of hell; it only gives great burden to the discussion of the eternal nature of God's wrath against the unsaved. As the saying goes, "One should never preach on hell as if he were glad people were going there. If you don't preach hell with a tear in your eye, at least preach with a tear in your heart."¹ Therefore, it is with a heavy heart that one must assert that Scripture supports the existence of a literal, eternal hell through a variety of different word usages and concepts; this biblical truth most accurately affirms the glory of God through his hatred of sin.

MODERN-DAY OPPOSITIONS TO HELL

A Word on Secularism

Not surprisingly, it is the goal of virtually all secular scholars to debunk the very existence of hell. Under this argument, hell is seen as an invention of

* Joel Stanley Davis, Bible instructor, Houston Christian High School, Houston, Texas

¹ Original attribution is unknown.

the religious community from Scriptural inference in order to frighten nonbelievers into conversion. Laurant Paine argued:

Whatever the origin, Hell came into the Christian theology, not in an original form, but already fashioned and sustained by thousands of years of ceaseless forming, and, like much else in Christian theology, was pagan in its origin yet suitable in both theory in practice.²

Paine's type of argument betrays a secular view of history as originally polytheistic and Christianity as an evolution of those beliefs. While this sort of denial of original monotheism needs to be answered by the Christian community, it is not the purpose of this investigation and must be abandoned for another time. One must include, however, the need to demonstrate that an abandonment of any acknowledgement of the depravity of man is a unifying factor in the increased skepticism regarding the doctrine of the existence or eternity of hell. As postmodern man continues to deny the objective nature of truth and think blasphemously too highly of his own nature and abilities, he will invariably continue to diminish the gravity of his own sin and eventually deny any concept of judgment whatsoever.

Evangelical Universalism

In 2011, Rob Bell brought the question of the eternity of hell and evangelical universalism to the forefront of Christian culture with his book, *Love Wins*. In that work, he stated, "given enough time, everybody will turn to God and find themselves in the joy and peace of God's presence. The love of God will melt every hard heart and even the most 'depraved sinners' will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God."³ Bell's statement captures the essence of the definition of evangelical universalism: that God's willingness for all men to be saved and his power to accomplish such a feat assures all humanity of salvation at some point in the course of eternity future. To have this teaching of a postmortem salvation endorsed by such a prominent pastor ignited a firestorm of controversy that reached national news media within days and prompted numerous blog responses from opponents. Reformed pastor Kevin DeYoung responded that Bell was

² Laurant Paine, *The Hierarchy of Hell* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1995) 11.

³ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (Nashville: HarperOne, 2011) 107.

guilty of creating “two irreconcilable views of God”⁴ and “blaspheming”⁵ God, establishing another god of his own making in the process. Why was there such venomous opposition? Would it be so destructive to Christian theology if God, in his mercy, chose to eventually save all mankind? What are the dangers of adopting such teaching?

Rob Bell’s views concerning hell were hardly revolutionary. The repackaged description of evangelical universalism has its origins in the teachings of Origen, who was posthumously anathematized at the Synod of Constantinople, AD 543.⁶ Although Bell publicly denied that he is an evangelical universalist, he cited Origen’s teachings in the formulation of his own doctrine and included him in the “deep, wide, diverse stream [of] historic, orthodox Christian faith.”⁷ Origen (and Bell) regarded hell as corrective rather than retributive, not willing to accept the possibility that God would allow anyone to suffer for all eternity. Sharon Baker, professor of theology at Messiah College and author of *Razing Hell*, articulated this view with the question, “Is eternal punishment for temporal sins just?”⁸ The questions herein and others posed by universalism should be examined to determine if they have any foundation whatsoever in Scripture or if they are merely inventions of the human mind.

Objections to Universalism

Part of the difficulty in making a critique of evangelical universalism is the hesitance of its adherents to agree upon a unifying definition or even publicly identify themselves by this title. Dr. Robin Parry, author of *The Evangelical Universalist* and champion of the EU contingent, even wrote under the pen name Gregory MacDonald and only recently revealed his true identity. As a consequence of this reluctance from universalists, one can find a very wide span of opinions ranging from the smooth-tongued,

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, “God is Still Holy and What You Learned in Sunday School is Still True: A Review of ‘Love Wins’” [article online] (The Gospel Coalition, 14 March 2011, accessed 3 December 2012) available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/03/14/rob-bell-love-wins-review>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rowin A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979) 30.

⁷ Bell, *Love Wins*, ix.

⁸ Sharon L. Baker, *Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You’ve Been Taught about God’s Wrath and Judgment* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) 148.

slight-of-hand concoctions of Rob Bell to the more thorough, biblically conscientious Dr. Parry. Nevertheless, there are a few common themes.

First, universalists depend heavily upon obscure lexical arguments, such as tangential meanings of the Greek word *aion* (αἰών). Universalists argue that this word should strictly mean “lasting or enduring,” but should never be interpreted as strictly “eternal.” Therefore, reconsideration of biblical texts is necessary, such as Matthew 25:46, which reads “And these [the wicked] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (ESV). Jesus’ audience would have understood Him to be saying, “and these will go away into *lasting* punishment, but the righteous into *lasting* life,” which blatantly violates the perspicuity of the Scriptures and puts understanding not in the hands of laymen, but exclusively in the hands of textual critics and linguistic experts. Further discussion will be given to this issue later in the present article.

Second, universalists rely upon a very narrow understanding of the Valley of Hinnom, as understood by the people of Israel. While a discussion of Gehenna is still forthcoming, it must be noted here that like *aion* (αἰών), this discussion denies the interpreter’s ability to simply read the text for what it says. While one may argue that it is now one’s responsibility to understand this ancient culture and their word pictures and cultural icons, the burden of proof is upon the universalist to demonstrate that God has made his Word virtually inaccessible to thousands of years of potential followers simply because they had no context through which to understand the Valley of Hinnom.

Finally, universalism is based upon laden questions and philosophical arguments which “force the hand” of their biblical interpretation and terminate in remarkably presumptuous claims that cannot possibly be substantiated from the text. For example, in the opening chapter of *The Evangelical Universalist*, Robin Parry asked the question, “Could I love a God who could rescue everyone but chose not to?”⁹ The question is meaningless since it could just as easily be posed, “How could I not believe in a God who is under no obligation to save any, but graciously extends the offer of salvation to all through his Son?” and achieve the opposite effect. Parry repeatedly used the phrase “this is preferable”¹⁰ to describe his views in comparison to the traditional view of hell. With all due respect, it does not matter in the least what Dr. Parry prefers. He believes, “It could be argued that an all-loving God will try all that he can to

⁹ Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006) 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 14.

elicit freely a positive response to the gospel; but, if all else fails, he would be justified in not leaving people free in a libertarian sense with respect to their salvation.”¹¹ However, this notion is found nowhere in Scripture and is nothing but a figment of Parry’s own imagination.

If universalism were to receive a grade on its scriptural hermeneutic, it would fail on multiple counts of interpretive injustice to the text. The system’s treatment of Old Testament covenant promises, Jesus and Paul’s teachings with regard to hell, and prophesy of final judgment fall far short of anything that could be considered exegesis. Instead, universalist arguments look myopically at God’s love, ignoring passages concerning his judgment or wrath, which results in a complete reconstruction of the theme of Scripture by overemphasizing God’s redemptive purpose for mankind and ignoring his justice and righteous hatred of sin. To demonstrate this, one must investigate Scripture to determine what exactly the Bible has to say regarding hell.

SCRIPTURAL INVESTIGATION OF HELL

Sheol and Hades

The Hebrew word *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) is the most common appellation in the exploration of the Bible’s teachings with regard to hell.¹² The term occurs 66 times in the Old Testament, with a fairly wide variety of meanings. *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) is synonymous with natural death (Gen 42:38), the fate for both the wicked (Ps 31:17) and righteous alike (Ezek 32:17-32), and a place of great sadness (Job 10:21-22) from which there is no escape (Job 7:9) apart from divine intervention (Ps 49:15).¹³ *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) seems to also be used as a figure of speech at times. For example, after being expelled from the belly of the fish, Jonah proclaimed, “out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice” (Jon 2:2, ESV). Whether Jonah thought himself to be dead

¹¹ Ibid. 23.

¹² In fact, most instances of the word “hell” in the Bible have been updated in favor of transliterating the original Greek and Hebrew words. The ESV, HCSB, NASB, NIV, and NKJV all use *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) and *hades* (ᾗδης) rather than hell, while the NIV replaces hell with a variety of words and the KJV retains “hell.” Although transliteration is generally a noble effort in allowing the text to speak for itself, this author fears that it is also a conciliatory move on the part of the translators towards the opponents of the traditional view of hell.

¹³ Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 939.

or not is unclear from a cursory reading. Although these are dismal references and certainly not a residence to be desired, “the Old Testament nowhere suggests that [*sheol*] is a place of torment for the wicked. Rather, it is the general abode of all the dead.”¹⁴ Consequently, it does not appear that “Hades came to be regarded as a place where the deceased awaited judgment (1 En. 22:3–4, 9–13)”¹⁵ until the intertestamental period, either.

The Greek word *hades* (ᾍδης), like the Hebrew *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל), refers to a place of the dead following this life and is translated as “Hades, underworld, death.”¹⁶ The term is only used ten times in the New Testament, yet the expansion of information concerning its nature is substantial. The Septuagint bridges the gap by using *hades* (ᾍδης) for *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) in “every instance except 2 Sam. 22:6.”¹⁷ The link is useful as the New Testament continues to build upon the concept of the place of the dead.

In Matthew 11, Jesus condemned the City of Capernaum for their “prideful confidence in an exceptional degree of eschatological blessing”¹⁸ despite their denial of the Messiah, which is quite an incisive condemnation to compare their fate to that of Sodom (11:24). Luke 16 also contains a very interesting story concerning a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus.

This passage gives far more information about Hades than any other in the NT, but to what extent the language is parabolic and to what extent it is to be taken literally is a question upon which commentators are not agreed. Hades is described here as a place of “torment” in which the wicked dwell in flames, a condition that produces “agony” and specifically a desire to have one’s tongue cooled by water. Furthermore, . . . conversation is possible between the inhabitants of Abraham’s bosom and of Hades, although no one can cross from one realm to the other.¹⁹

Although the story appears parabolic, it is important to note that it was not introduced by Jesus as a parable as He did elsewhere; and, if it is a parable, it becomes the only one where any character is given a proper name. While

¹⁴ Ibid. 479.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Warren C. Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 149.

¹⁷ Harry Buis, “Hades,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-76) 3:7

¹⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 314.

¹⁹ Buis, “Hades,” 3:8.

it is not necessary to espouse the two-compartment doctrine of *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) and paradise prior to resurrection, there is some cause to consider Luke 16 as a possible eschatological teaching.

Still, the primary usage of *hades* (ᾗδης) in the New Testament is too broad to fully develop an understanding of eternal punishment. In Revelation, *hades* (ᾗδης) is coupled with “Death” as the regions of the underworld (1:18; 20:13) and the rider of the pale horse and his inseparable companion (6:8), while in Acts, “Hades denotes the place of all souls during the intermediate state.”²⁰ Other references to punishment must be examined to develop a full-orbed doctrine.

The Valley of Hinnom and Gehenna

In the Old Testament, the Valley of (Ben) Hinnom was located outside Jerusalem. While not all scholars agree concerning its location, it is known to be a “boundary between the inheritance of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 15:8; 18:16).”²¹ The Valley was a place of child sacrifice to the gods Molech and Baal, practiced even by the Judaic kings Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6). Jeremiah prophesied that it will one day be called the Valley of Slaughter (7:32; 19:6). Moreover, while these passages do not mention an eschatological suffering, there are allusions to a similar location that does envision an eternal judgment (Isa 30:33; 66:24). Though some preliminary assertions can be made, this study will require further investigation into New Testament references to the Valley.

The Greek word *gehenna* (γέεννα) functions as both a proper and common noun, meaning “Gehenna, Valley of the sons of Hinnom, hell.”²² With the exception of one occurrence in James, *gehenna* is used exclusively by Jesus in his teaching to the Jewish people. In Matthew, He taught that certain sins are punishable by the fire of *gehenna* (γέεννα) (5:22, 29, 30), called the Pharisees children of *gehenna* (23:15) and warned them of their possible future in the fires of *gehenna* (10:28; 23:33). The usages would undoubtedly have conveyed significant historical and cultural connotations for the Jews; however, what the significance actually was is the crux of the interpretive issue. Bradley Jersak asked this:

²⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 377.

²¹ Ronald E. Davies, “Gehenna,” in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 2:671.

²² Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide*, 146.

Seeing as Jesus consciously reenacted Jeremiah's ministry, is it reasonable to identify his use of Gehenna as a reference to Jeremiah's warnings of Jerusalem's imminent destruction featuring the Valley of Hinnom? Whenever Jesus mentions Gehenna, could he be referring to the judgements associated with Jer 7, 9, and 31 (e.g., Matt. 24:28)?²³

Such an interpretation relies heavily upon a *sitz im leben* for Jeremiah, thus denying Christ Himself the freedom to further develop the understanding of punishment for unbelief. Jersak's argument ultimately terminates in finding "no reference to the 'second coming' in the synoptic apocalypse."²⁴ Although an understanding of genre falls well within the boundaries of a historical-grammatical reading, Jersak extended far beyond this and attempted to "shoehorn" new revelation concerning *gehenna* (γέεννα) into an old context that is no longer adequate to contain it. His view must therefore be seen as an abandonment of the plain reading of Scripture and thus rejected, along with any such attempts to diminish *gehenna* (γέεννα) to temporal punishment or purifying fire.

Outer Darkness, Weeping, and Gnashing of Teeth

Also common to the teachings of Jesus is the discussion of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some variation of this phrase is found six times in Matthew's Gospel with one parallel reference in Luke's Gospel. Without exception, all passages in question speak of some eschatological judgment. Disturbing references to sons of the kingdom (8:12) or servants of the Master (22:13) being thrown into outer darkness have caused many attempts to reconsider the meaning of these passages. However, a simple understanding of context is all that is required.

While the Jews have and always will be the people of God, it is inaccurate to assume that all Jewish people will experience eternity in the presence of the Lord. Salvation has and will always be through the mechanism of faith (Eph 2:8; Heb 12). As such, it is consistent to assert that some servants of the Master (members of the Jewish nation) will be found not wearing the proper garments (viz. salvation; cf. Matt 22:1-13) and cast into outer darkness. Opponents to this view attempt to symbolize these passages, suggesting that "the tragic twists of our lives and the gnashing

²³ Bradley Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never be Shut: Hell, Hope, and the New Jerusalem* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005) 58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

sorrow in our hearts”²⁵ are the here-and-now judgments of not following Christ. Such attempts are depending upon futile and useless reasonings.

The Abyss, Tartarus, and the Lake of Fire

The Greek *abussos* (ἄβυσσος), which most English translations transliterate as “abyss” or “depth, underworld”²⁶ is found nine times in the New Testament; its Old Testament counterpart, *tehom* (תְּהוֹם), is used 36 times with the typical use being a reference to the depths of the sea or inside the earth (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:7; 106:9; 107:26; Isa 63:13). As with *sheol* (שְׁאוֹל) and *hades* (Ἅδης), the New Testament develops this Old Testament concept of the depths of the earth and reveals that it is “inhabited by the ‘scorpion centaurs’ of chapter 9, their demonic prince (9:11), and the beast of the Abyss (11:7; 17:8). It is also the place of Satan’s imprisonment during the thousand-year period following the return of Christ (20:1-3).”²⁷ Luke 8:31, one of the 2 instances of *abussos* (ἄβυσσος) outside Revelation, also demonstrates that demons are loathe to be sent there.

One curious passage concerns the location of Christ in death. Paul commanded the Romans not to ask themselves, “Who will descend in the Abyss?” (10:7) and appeared to claim that Christ spent time in the abyss. Upon closer inspection, however, this is nothing more than a rhetorical usage in which Paul was condemning the “denial of the resurrection.”²⁸ Although this passage is unlikely to be confused with any Greco-Roman imagery of the underworld, there is one such instance of Hellenistic imagery in 2 Peter 2:4. There, the Greek word *tartaroō* (ταρταρώω) is employed, which is its only usage in the New Testament.²⁹ Peter was not adapting to pagan mythologies, rather demonstrating the “limitation on sphere of influence that God imposed on the angels who fell.”³⁰

The Lake of Fire is described in Revelation as the final destination of the beast and the false prophet (19:20), the devil (20:10), death and hades (20:14), and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life (20:15; 21:8). Some scholars take as authoritative the *Targum* to Isaiah 65:5-6, which “explicitly identifies ‘the second death’ with the

²⁵ Ibid. 62.

²⁶ Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide*, 22.

²⁷ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 185.

²⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 53.

²⁹ Tartarus is also used three times in the Septuagint (Job 40:20, 41:24; Prov 30:16).

³⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 103.

constant fire of Gehenna.”³¹ The fact that God did not design this fire for human beings is important to note. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23); rather, this fire was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). There is, however, no exegetical reason to suggest a hope beyond the fiery lake or a purifying element of the judgment. In light of this investigation, it must be concluded that the Scriptures affirm the existence of judgment for those who reject the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ (holistically across all commonly accepted designations of hell).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Aiōnios (Αἰώνιος): The Question of Eternality

What remains to be investigated is the question of whether or not this punishment is *eternal* in nature. The word “eternal” in Scripture comes from the Greek *aion* (αἰών) (n.) or *aionios* (αἰώνιος) (adj.), which means “very long time, eternity, age, world, eternal.”³² For evangelical universalism to be true, it must first find a way to redefine what is meant by the “eternal punishment” referenced in Scripture (Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Jude 7). Balthasar made this attempt, saying, “the former [eternal life] is the highest-possible development of all duration within the absolute vitality of God; the latter [eternal punishment] is complete withdrawal to the point of shriveling into a disconsolate immovable now.”³³ More simply, not only hell, but even heaven, is simply a present reality that humans create for themselves. However, for eternity to be translated as such in the sheep and goats passage of Matthew 25, one would also have to interpret the parallel phrase “but the righteous into eternal life” as only denoting lasting of qualitative life in the present sense. Furthermore, it has even been suggested that the original readers would understand the punishment to be of a temporal sort, but the life to be of an infinite sort (such hermeneutical gymnastics are completely irresponsible to the text).

³¹ William White Jr., “Death, Second,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, rev. ed. Moises Silva, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) ePub ed., vol. 2.

³² Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide*, 10.

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope: “That All Men Be Saved?”* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) 133.

Other attempts to argue for the use of *aion* (αἰών) and *aionios* (αἰώνιος) as merely lasting or enduring, rather than eternal, use verses where the thing that is called “eternal” is obviously not so. For instance, Jonah referred to his imprisonment in the fish as being in “the land whose bars closed me in forever” (Jon 2:6, ESV). The Jonahesque passage has caused great discussion, as “Jonah may have been expressing his feeling that he was virtually dead. Even beyond the deepest sea, he felt that he had passed into the underworld from which he would never escape.”³⁴ The type of hyperbolic language gives pause, since it is certainly not a statement of his actual duration in the depths of the sea. The same can be said of the “everlasting” or “age-old” hills of Genesis 49:26 and Deuteronomy 33:15. However, there is no reason to suggest that such figure of speech or hyperbole is being suggested in Matthew 25 or similar passages. Therefore, these passages concerning the eternality of something should be read in their historical-grammatical context. Following this reading, all uses of *aion* (αἰών) or *aionios* (αἰώνιος) outside obvious hyperbolic language are to be understood as literally eternal.³⁵

***Apokatastasis* (Ἐποκατάστασις): The Restoration of All Things**

Evangelical universalists find a philosophical contradiction in the idea that not all God’s creation will one day be redeemed. Thomas Talbott posed the following two propositions:

- 1) Because God is perfectly loving, it is in his redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore his will) to redeem all sinners and to reconcile all of them to himself.
- 2) Because God is almighty and sovereignly controls the final destiny of created persons, it is within his power to achieve his redemptive purpose for the world.³⁶

³⁴ Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 249.

³⁵ In one other interesting instance of the Greek *aion*, Paul told Timothy that Demas loved the present *aion* (2 Tim 4:10). Here, *aion* is accompanied by the modifying word “present,” thus giving an exegetical reason to view this as the present “age” or even the present “world,” another possibility.

³⁶ Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004) 280.

Talbott's conclusion follows that God will eventually redeem all sinners and reconcile them to himself. The propositions and their subsequent conclusions require evaluation.

Although a fully exhaustive examination of God's will goes beyond the scope of this article, it will suffice to say that God's will is multifaceted, to say the very least. Paul wrote that it is God's will that Christians avoid sexual immorality, control themselves in a holy manner, and not take advantage of his brother (1 Thess 4:3-6). Christians do this on a daily basis, however. No universalist would be willing to argue that God is not omnipotent simply on the accusation that some of his people practice unrighteousness from time to time. Therefore, one must recognize the difference between the desires of God and decrees of God. In other words, "some things may be a part of God's desire for the world, and yet these desires can be resisted. God doesn't desire that people sin, but He allows it to happen because humans are moral agents who often make evil choices."³⁷

The phrase "and reconcile all things to Himself" also requires analysis. The expression refers to Peter's sermon to the early church in which he foretold of God "restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago" (Acts 3:21, ESV). The word "restore" comes from the Greek word *apokatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις), which only appears here in Scripture. Although restoration is a fitting translation, one must ask what is being restored. Peter did not have in view a restoration of all human beings ever created; rather, he envisioned the "restoring by benefactors to normal conditions and stability"³⁸ of the kingdom of God referenced in Acts 1:6. The word is extremely close to *apokatallassō* (ἀποκατάλλασσω), which occurs in Colossians 1:20 where Paul wrote that Christ will "reconcile to Himself all things." The similarity answers the question of the scope of restoration. In summary, the concept of restoration is generally speaking of a reestablishment of the Davidic throne foretold by the prophets, which Christ will fulfill at his second coming.

³⁷ Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity and the Things We Made Up* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011) 31.

³⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000) 112.

CONCLUSION

The present author agrees with the sentiment of one universalist insofar that “the love of God obligates us to . . . hope and pray that God’s mercy would finally triumph over judgment”³⁹ in a universal sense. Some would be tempted to think that it would enhance the glory of the grace of God if one could receive salvation after the grave. O, his mercy to perhaps open his arms again to even Lucifer himself! However, Scripture gives one little to no cause to expect the realization of such hope. Furthermore, if evangelical universalism would have been a tribute to the grace of God, He would have decreed it. Instead, Isaiah prophesied the people of Israel worshipping God by gazing at the bodies of his vanquished foes (66:24). While one goes too far if he anxiously anticipates the consignment of anyone to this damnable fate, it must be concluded that their worm will not die and the fire will never be quenched.

³⁹ Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never be Shut*, 10.

BOOK REVIEWS

God in Eclipse: God Has Not Always Been Silent by John B. Metzger. Keller, TX: J House Publishing, 2013. 227 pp., paper, \$9.99.

John Metzger, missionary and educator with Ariel Ministries, has written *God in Eclipse* directly to Jewish people “to put into simple language a debunking of the issues surrounding God’s nature” (p. 5). Most Jews have abandoned even Judaism (pp. 13, 19) and rejected Christianity partly due to mistreatment by Christians throughout the ages. Therefore, Metzger distinguished true believers and biblical Christianity from the corrupt forms that have too often emerged (p. 13). The bulk of the book deals with an analysis of Scripture to demonstrate that the Old Testament (the Jewish Bible) clearly teaches the same truths honored by authentic Christians and taught in the New Testament.

There are several highlights in the book. Metzger demonstrated that the use of Elohim (Elokim) for God demonstrates that the Lord exists in an oneness in plurality, thus allowing for the doctrine of the Trinity (pp. 20-23, 51-60, 69-76, 164-75). The Angel of the Lord, as found in the Old Testament, is God and yet distinguished from the Father. The Angel is thus a preincarnate appearance of the Son (pp. 38-48). The Rabbis attempted to build a “fence” around the Law, and this fence is what Jesus dismantled (pp. 62, 155, 213-14). The oral Law of Moses never existed; rather it was an invention of the Rabbis during the Second Temple Judaism era (450–70 BC). The credentials of *Yeshua* (Jesus) as being the Messiah (pp. 152-54) were given, along with proof that He is Messiah (pp. 187-89), and very helpful answers to common objections to his Messiahship (pp. 181-86). Metzger dealt well with some of the most complicated teachings and prophecies concerning Christ that are found in the Old Testament, such as the seed prophecies (pp. 78-95), the two messengers coming before Messiah taught in Malachi (pp. 131-35), and Messiah as the branch (pp. 159-68). Numerous important scriptural texts were well exegeted, such as Genesis 4:1; 6:1-5; 49:9-10; 1 Kings 12:28; and, Isaiah 7:14; 53.

Not everyone, even among premillennial dispensationalists, will agree that the birth pangs prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24:5-8 have already been fulfilled (pp. 192-93); nor that the battle described in Ezekiel 38–39 occurs prior to the Day of the Lord and is predominately against Muslims (pp. 192-94), but Metzger’s positions are well worth pondering.

God in Eclipse concludes with a call to Jewish people to be reconciled to their own God (pp. 201-05). The “Jerusalem Road,” modeled after the better-known Roman Road method of evangelism and drawn entirely from Old Testament Scripture, is provided as an excellent source for explaining the gospel to Jewish people (pp. 206-12). Whether given directly to Jewish people interested in knowing God or as a resource for those evangelizing Jews, *God in Eclipse* is a valuable tool.

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Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry by Gregory Alan Thornbury. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 223 pp., paper, \$7.99.

Gregory Thornbury, former professor of philosophy at Union University and current president of the King's College, believes that the era of classical evangelicalism represented by Francis Schaeffer, J. I. Packer, John R. W. Stott and most pronounced, Carl Henry, is quickly fading. He fears that "perhaps the evangelicalism I 'signed up for' is gone forever. Worse yet, perhaps it never even existed" (p. 32). In fact, many leading theologians today see classical evangelicalism and Henry, its main intellectual promoter, as relics of a bygone era (pp. 11, 21, 30). Thornbury hopes to reverse this view by reintroducing Henry to a generation that has marginalized him. His goal is necessary partly because even Henry's supporters find him almost incomprehensible. As Millard Erickson quipped with regard to Henry's work, "I hope someday that it is translated into English" (p. 24). The author attempts to do just that by, in essence, paraphrasing his second and fourth volumes of *God, Revelation and Authority* and *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Even Thornbury's attempt at explaining Henry's work is difficult to understand at times, requiring the reader to have a substantial knowledge of theological issues and past movements and a good grasp of the debate(s) at hand. However, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism* offers much insight.

Henry was a stalwart of the faith, especially, as his six volume *Magnum Opus* suggests, concerning the doctrines of God and revelation. He was instrumental in starting the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Seminary, *Christianity Today*, Lausanne Congress, World Vision and Prison Fellowship (p. 27). However, his legacy lies in the fact that he was the leading Christian thinker of his time (p. 37). He was constantly engaged with epistemology. How does one know truth (pp. 37-38)? His response was to turn to the reliability and authority of Scripture (p. 40). Henry championed propositional revelation. He wrote, "The Christian ontological axiom is the living, self-revealed God. The Christian epistemological axiom is the intelligible divine revelation. All the essential doctrines of the Christian world-life view flow from these axioms" (p. 53).

Henry's position with regard to propositional truth is under attack today. The question remains, "Is there truth and does God reveal truth in intelligible words?" Henry staked his ministry upon an affirmative answer. Today, he is criticized as being "slavish to Enlightenment rationalism" (p. 56). Henry knew, despite rhetoric to the contrary, that truth demands an

authoritative structure. Postmodern epistemology may deny all truth claims, but in order to do so, it must rest upon a philosophical position of authority itself. Henry believed that God has revealed Himself in words, and those words are found in Scripture (p. 61). Henry also had the knowledge and foresight to see what happens when the Christian community questions propositional truth. He knew Albrecht Ritschl's influence did not take effect until a generation after his death (p. 21), and when Friedrich Schleiermacher separated truth from revelation, he merely shifted his authority to experience (p. 73). Henry, therefore, warned that softening Christian views regarding propositional revelation, or seeking to find new understandings of justification (as the New Perspective on Paul does) could undo the evangelical project (p. 28).

In modern times, Henry's views have been replaced by numerous "postconservative evangelicals" who claim that polemical theology is outdated and other approaches are better (p. 97). While Henry would say that God gets to interpret Himself (p. 100), and He does so propositionally in divine revelation, postconservatives have taken several different approaches. Literary or narrative hermeneutics teach that all interpretation of the Bible flows from the narrative alone. The reader should not be concerned with objective truth. The Bible is therefore literally but not historically true (pp. 84-97).

Speech-act theory, promoted by Kevin Vanhoozer, claims the truth or falsity of an utterance matters significantly less than the question of whether the utterance "gets the job done." Genesis 1, for example, need not be literally true; it may merely be a poetic way of describing creation but not giving a true or literal account of how creation occurred (pp. 102-07). Postmodern thinkers reject Henry's understanding that God spoke in intelligent words which fundamentally determines how one approaches theology (p. 109). Such views have completely changed the theological sphere and Thornbury believes there is no going back (p. 109).

Most evangelicals are verbal adherents to scriptural authority, but when the details are examined, they are allowing for human error, myths, and inaccuracies in the biblical texts (pp. 118-25). In response to Karl Barth, who believed the canon was prone to error, Henry taught inerrancy (pp. 136-49). Thornbury concluded, "that a recovery of confidence in propositional revelation and an inerrant Bible is, despite now decades of neglect and/or disdain, the last stand between the evangelical community and a new error of radical hermeneutics" (p. 158).

With this emphasis upon propositional truth, one should firmly agree with Henry. However, one may argue with much of his social agenda. Henry "was willing to collaborate with anyone who was deeply committed

to the Great Tradition of the church” (p. 117). Thornbury is in agreement with this sentiment (p. 192). Henry’s collaboration was based upon his view that our greatest witness is found in a “loving, gospel-motivated church engaged with the concerns, ails, joys, and sorrows of the planet around them” (p. 151). While there is truth in this statement, it is easily abused, as Henry himself was guilty of doing. He wrote, “Social justice is not, moreover, simply an appendage to the evangelical message; it is an intrinsic part of the whole, without which the preaching of the gospel itself is truncated” (p. 152). Therefore, Henry comingled the biblical gospel with the social gospel and set the agenda for the recent “social-gospel” movement, which will have the same result as the social gospel movement of the last century (pp. 151-76).

Henry was rightly concerned that evangelicals in his day were exchanging their heritage for a mess of postmodern doctrine and wondered which “drummer” might be leading the parade next (pp. 204-05). Thornbury has done an excellent job of interpreting Henry and calling evangelicals back to Henry’s passion — a firm conviction in the authoritative, propositional, inerrant revelation of God. He has also exposed Henry’s greatest weaknesses: willingness to compromise and not applying his own understanding of biblical authority to the cultural issues around him. In his attempt to engage the culture, he led evangelism to adopt the culture rather than reveal it as godless.

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Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies by Boyd Seevers. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013. 328 pp., cloth, \$34.99.

Boyd Seevers is professor of Old Testament Studies at the University of Northwestern St. Paul. Seevers wrote his dissertation on the comparison of Ancient Near Eastern warfare with the biblical accounts from the conquest of Canaan to the end of Solomon's reign. In this book, Seevers addresses the same subject, arguing that an understanding of the Ancient Near Eastern background of Israel and the Bible sheds light upon the biblical texts and aids in understanding those texts. Seevers also noted that both Near Eastern texts and the biblical accounts abound in stories of military campaigns, and these campaigns contribute to understanding the Bible.

Seevers determined to describe the military practices of Israel, especially the practices of Joshua and David. He included the practices of other primary civilizations in the ancient world to broaden the context. Believing the cultural context, including those military practices can shed light upon biblical passages, Seevers decided to learn and to share how practices of warfare fit into the biblical record of Israel's history. There is a need to see events in their historical context as well as their literary context. Seevers noted, for example, "The great distance in location, time, culture, and language separating us from the original events often causes problems" (p. 21). Placing the biblical text in its historical context, Seevers believes, can often solve these problems.

Seevers developed a unique approach for presenting his case. First, using standard research methods, he examined historical documents of the various civilizations. In addition to textual evidence, he examined physical evidence unearthed by archaeologists. Seevers himself has participated in a number of archaeological excavations to gain some expertise in obtaining, examining, and interpreting the physical evidence. His approach is rather standard for scholars. Seevers's unique approach appears in his presentation of the material. He began the treatment of each ancient nation with "some historical fiction." He described a fictional soldier's role "in one of the [respective] nation's battles." After a paragraph or two of the "fictional" treatment (which contains considerable historical facts), Seevers followed with detailed descriptions of the historical background of each of the nations treated, as well as discussion of its military organization, weapons, and tactics. The fictional treatment is a rhetorical device for gaining interest and attention to the subject but does not affect the integrity of the scholarship which is well presented.

The first two chapters focus upon Israel from Joshua through the monarchy. The first chapter discusses historical background exclusively. The second chapter, considerably longer, discusses the military organization including the “Role of Israel's God,” weapons of all kinds used by Israel, strategy and tactics in general and specific, and the care and treatment of their enemies. The next two chapters address the Egyptian empire. With the Egyptians, we have the first extensive record of the use of chariots by the army, introduced about the time of the Hyksos. The Egyptians developed great skill in chariot warfare, making the chariot a symbol of might and royalty as pharaohs went to war.

Following the study of Egypt, Seevers devoted one chapter to the Philistines, two to Assyria, and one each to Babylon and Persia, rounding out the main powerful civilizations of the Ancient Near East. The smaller groups encountered by Israel – Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, etc. – are mentioned briefly in the discussions of these greater civilizations, but Seevers treated only Israel and the world empires she encountered in her development. Philistia, although not a major world empire, may be an exception because it was so militant against Israel and engaged in many offensives against her.

In this book, Seevers has provided a thorough, comprehensive study of ancient warfare and the militaries that practiced them. He has gone behind the battles to describe the military structure of the ancient civilizations of the Near East that forged them and imposed their power on others. Numerous drawings and maps to supplement and illuminate the text enhance his book. He has included indices to enhance the use of the book in research. He has also provided a comprehensive list of further readings for each of the chapters, ranging from early twentieth century works to contemporary scholarship.

The present reviewer was disappointed to find the Hittite empire left out of the discussion since they played a significant role in Israel's battles, particularly in the days of the Judges. There was also no mention of Peter Craigie's definitive study, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* or Chaim Herzog's and Mordechai Gichon's *Battles of the Bible: A Military History of Ancient Israel*. The omissions notwithstanding, the student of the Old Testament will find a wealth of information and insight into the world of the Old Testament through Seevers' keen research, and this book is heartily recommended to all inquiring students.

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Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus awakening the Muslim World? by Tom Doyle with Greg Webster. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012. 270 pp., paper, \$15.99.

Tom Doyle is a missionary in the Middle East and Central Asia and attended both the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and Dallas Theological Seminary (p. 133). *Dreams and Visions* is endorsed by Anne Graham Lotz, Charles Dyer, and Janet Parshall among others. The argument of the book is that Jesus is presenting Himself, via dreams and visions, to Muslims throughout the globe (including America, pp. 238-39) in order to draw them to Himself. Doyle believes this is the most important movement of God in our time (p. 8). The author suggests a number of possible reasons for the use of dreams.

The Muslim religion was started by a dream to Muhammad, and dreams are part of the culture in Middle Eastern countries. They were used, supposedly, by the gods in the region to reveal their wills. Dreams are an accepted form of communication by the Muslims (p. 130). Muslims have believed in the visits of *jinnns* or “genies,” who are considered “foot soldiers of Satan” (pp. 52-53), for centuries. Dreams of Jesus express love and protection that lead to joy and peace, thus opening the hearts of the recipient to the gospel (p. 132); it is like Jesus to reach out to the hated and despised of society, as the Muslims are at this time (p. 132).

Doyle believes that dreams of Jesus break down barriers, but it is up to Christians to present the gospel. He is convinced that one-third of all Muslims come to Christ as a result of dreams (p. 127). Still, Doyle thinks that the number one reason Muslims come to salvation is because of Christians showing them love not dreams (p. 181). He apparently sees dreams as necessary, however, using stories of dreams in his witnessing and asking his readers to pray that Muslims will have dreams (pp. 198-99). Whether or not this dream phenomenon is of God is an important issue at this time in the church’s effort to fulfill the Great Commission. Sadly, Doyle makes no real attempt to support his view through Scripture.

The fact that dreams and visions happened occasionally in biblical times is without question, but nothing remotely resembling what is being reported by Muslims ever took place in the Bible. Doyle acknowledges this by claiming that biblical dreams gave revelation, while today’s give insight (p. 255). How he came to this conclusion is a mystery. When the Lord appears or speaks at any time, it is always with divine authority and inspired (God-breathed) revelation. The distinction between God-breathed revelation and insight cannot be supported scripturally. In addition, Doyle

bases his views on experience rather than the Word of God. His foundation is shaky, at best, which is evident when one realizes that virtually every religion and cult contains its own set of experiences, visions, and dreams.

What distinguishes evangelical Christianity from all other beliefs is that it rests upon propositional revelation, found exclusively in Scripture, not upon the unreliable experiences claimed by people. The dreams and visions movement undermines this objective pillar of truth and replaces it with subjectivism (pp. 126-27). How is one to accept Muslim dreams and visions but reject those of the Mormons, Christian Scientists, or extreme Pentecostals? Who decides we are to do this? If it is accepted that what we believe as Christians is shaped more by experience than the biblical text, where will that lead? Church history provides a clue. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern liberalism, purposely shifted the basis for truth from Scripture to experience. The end result was a mutilation of Christianity to the point that liberalism is another gospel altogether. The liberal approach should be kept in mind when evaluating any movement based on experience rather than objective biblical truth.

Regarding church history, the first appendix of *Dreams and Visions* documents other important points in time in which the Lord broke through and did something amazing and unusual, which include the Reformation, the Great Awakening, and the Modern Missionary Movement. However, it should be noted that none of these were characterized by a visit from Jesus but by a return to taking the Scriptures and its commands seriously. The examples actually undermine Doyle's thesis.

In summary, Tom Doyle made no attempt to support his views biblically. His source of authority is experience that is highly subjective and unreliable; it is also pragmatic. Muslims seem to be coming to Christ as a result of dreams and visions; therefore, this phenomenon must be of God. The flaw in his reasoning is that nothing like this ever happened in either the Bible or church history. The notion that thousands are supposedly having dreams of Jesus, and often multiple dreams, simply does not align with the scriptural accounts in which the vast majority of God's people never experience such things. Even the most important did so only once or twice in a lifetime; rather, in Scripture, the burden of spreading the gospel was given to Jesus' disciples who were to "go and tell" (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 10:14-15). Furthermore, the statement given by Paul that he was the last to see the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:8) needs to be seriously considered but is not in this volume.

Doyle believes that the dreams and visions now being given to Muslims will be short lived. Once evangelized sufficiently, Jesus will move to another religious group such as the Hindus or Buddhists or even atheists

(p. 245). How Doyle knows this, or why Jesus cannot appear to more than one religious group at a time, is not explained. Christians should rejoice when people are saved. To be part of bringing the gospel to the lost is one of the greatest privileges of a Christian. However, every method used in evangelism must be thoroughly grounded in and evaluated by Scripture. The dreams and visions movement, which initially seems effective, undercuts the authority of Scripture and rests upon subjective experience. Accordingly, this reviewer does not believe it is a movement of God.

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Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics by Jeannine K. Brown. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007. 320 pp., paper, \$18.00.

A book addressing the Bible as communication would do well to communicate to its readers. Jeannine Brown's *Scripture as Communication* does it simply by using words that are common and defining those that are not. Her work was published by Baker Academic in 2007, but the book itself is not well-known, even to those involved in the area of biblical studies. Regardless, it is popular enough that it continues to be easily available. The book contains a nice style, flow of content, and is easily read. However, the reviewer is hesitant to recommend the book to many. The book maintains a strong, biblical perspective on the way the Bible should be read and interpreted, but it dwells too much upon areas that are confusing to those who are not discerning. Furthermore, if one is seeking to understand a sound set of hermeneutics, there are other books that offer better help, walking that person through a process of understanding, interpreting, and applying the Bible accurately. Nevertheless, this does not mean the book should be completely disregarded.

Jeannine Brown stated, "Scripture's meaning can be understood at the communicative act of the author that has been inscribed in the text and addressed to the intended audience for purposes of engagement" (p. 14). In explaining the Bible as an act of communication, her goal was to connect readers to the audience of the text. Her intention, therefore, is to explain this act to the readers, guiding them through a process of both why it is important to biblical hermeneutics and how to use it. There is no denying that her adeptness with language achieves this goal quite easily.

As the author works her way through developing her thesis, she follows a logical flow that can be divided into two parts. Part one of the book is what she called, "Theoretical Perspectives on Scripture as Communication." In these first six chapters of the book, the emphasis is upon explaining the history of hermeneutics, which sets the foundation for the remainder of the book, identifying not only the beginning of the discipline of hermeneutics, but also the changes that have taken place over the course of several centuries. Part two, "Practical Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture as Communication," comes to the heart of the author's thesis, the meaning and process for understanding the Bible as a communicative act.

The book begins with definitions. In order to ensure that the reader is on the same level of understanding as the author, seven words or phrases are defined: hermeneutics, meaning, exegesis, genre, literary context, social setting, and contextualization. The definitions are necessary

to clearly understand the history and foundation that the author sets throughout the rest of the book. While these are important and indeed provide understanding, in many ways, they oversimplify what it means to interpret and understand the Bible; it is important to note that the author defined other words as needed so she is not limited to these.

Oversimplifying is also found in chapter two as the author embarked upon a brief overview of various theories of interpretation. While there, she pointed to Ernst-August Gutt as a basic definition for theory. The definition indicates that theory is simply what one believes about reality, which lends itself to subjectivity by implying that something does not need to be grounded in truth, but rather in one's own opinion. While the mention is made that the Bible should be the primary authority on itself, because it will communicate with regard to itself, the rest of the chapter gives greater emphasis to the various theories for interpreting Scripture. However, she did an accurate job explaining these theories and their connection to interpretation, making them easy to understand for people of all levels.

Moving from theories, the author constructed the historical aspect of hermeneutics, beginning with a discussion of Frederich Schleiermacher. In this discussion, she rightly outlined the three primary emphases that people tend to take when interpreting Scripture: the intent of the author, the understanding of the reader, or the text stands alone. In outlining these different stances, the author also rightly indicated that there are extremes in which either the historical context or author's point of view can be focused upon too heavily or too little. Instead, there should be a balance between the two in which the intention is derived from the historical view of the author, with the main point setting the foundation for theological implications of living today, which suggests that the literary context is also important. Therefore, each writing should be understood based upon the genre of literature that it encompasses (such as poetry, wisdom, letter, or narrative).

Having established the history, the author spent chapters four through six covering various points that use the historical foundation of hermeneutics as evidence to support her theory. The basis of this is that the author defines the meaning of a text, but that in its complexities, readers are imperfect in determining the meaning that was being communicated. Within this setting, the author explained how meaning is derived from both author intent and the reader, but that things such as ambiguity, contextualization, and implication often help define or determine the meaning. In discussing the impact of implication on understanding the text, Brown pointed to Hirsch in explaining that there

may have been implications in the text that the author did not intend, but nevertheless are there and affect interpretation (p. 39). The issue with this is that not only does it ignore the fact that God is the ultimate author, it *implies* that the meaning of the text is once again subjective to the reader's interpretation more so than the author's intentions. Whether one agrees or disagrees, she offered two principles in order to validate that an implication may also be a correct interpretation. The first is the principle of coherence which means that the implication in the text must be coherent with the entirety of the text. The second is the principle of purpose in which the implication can be understood when the purpose of the text is understood. Each of these principles gives checks and balances so that a person does not waver too far from the text when interpreting implications.

Finally, the author closed part one by inviting the reader to be actively involved with the text. One can greatly appreciate that Jeannine Brown used this section to make the reader aware of potential biases. She recognizes that many readers have preconceived notions, understandings, and upbringings that may enter affect interpretation. She attempted to guide people through a process of minimizing such factors and focusing solely on the text.

Section two purposed to identify the process and application of her communication hermeneutic; it begins with a necessary part of interpretation, which is understanding the different genres found within the Bible. Brown outlined those genres and spent time going through the characteristics and literary devices of each. She did not go into great detail which would require much space but instead covered only some of the main points or the most commonly used devices. The information she did give is not only concise but also clear. She did an adequate job helping the reader gain a solid understanding of the basics of genres so they will be well informed when they move forward in their study of Scripture.

Interestingly, Brown next addressed the world of biblical languages. The topic itself is not so strange, but she gave it more prominence and discusses issues and views in greater detail than most authors. Often, the aspect of original language is underemphasized. Therefore, this discussion is one that is needed. She rightly indicated that language is identified within its culture and that the utterance may be flexible based upon that culture, which is important because individuals often immediately put language into their own context with no regard for the original intention. As a result of this, Brown gives four applicable pitfalls to avoid. Do not infer meaning from the etymology. Do not infer meaning from the word's usage in a later context. Do not read all the

possible meanings into one instance of usage. Do not overemphasize points of grammar.

Each of these is helpful when looking at the linguistic attributes of a given text. The remaining chapters establish the need to look at the social and literary contexts, before finally moving to contextualization of the points derived from the text. To identify social context, some helpful points are given, which involve using the Bible, extra biblical sources, and secondary sources. With regard to literary context, Brown provided skills that are important to develop, such as summarizing, outlining, identifying themes, and identifying the function to aid in proper understanding. She closed with the point of contextualization. First, she focuses upon contextualization as part of the process and then used the final chapter to make a case for the Bible being a representation of an incarnational work. She equated the Bible to Jesus by comparing Christ as fully God and fully human to the Bible, which was composed by men but written by God.

Brown's work makes it clear that the author knows how to communicate, and this is one of the greatest strengths of the book because she systematically walks the reader through the points. She does so with ease, making the reader comfortable in their understanding because of the clarity that she brings to her premises; however, this attention to detail and clarity can come at a price. Sometimes it may cause the reader to lose interest. However, in the case of this book, the detail seems to be well worth it, because it makes for an easier read and encourages one to think more deeply with regard to the information being presented.

The strength is accentuated by the definitions that are provided. The definitions help identify exactly what the author wants to convey throughout the entire book and aid the reader in understanding the text and their ability to be discerning. With that said, a number of the definitions that are mentioned seem to be outside the realm of normal usage, specifically with regards to defining exegesis and theory, and this can be confusing if the person is not accustomed it. However, one can train himself to get past this point fairly easily. The difficulty comes when the definitions offered do not coincide with what should be a biblical foundation for interpreting Scripture (once again, look back to the previous discussion regarding the definition of theory).

To add to the ease of reading, the author also included a series of appendices, which are helpful for quick points to following the authors hermeneutic, and clarifying one's understanding of the information presented. Therefore, they are a valuable resource to have as part of this already clear book. Of particular importance in this book is the emphasis upon preconceived ideas that one may bring when interpreting Scripture.

Objectivity is usually the goal but also often unrealistic. However, most people give little credence to the concept of preconceived ideas interfering with their ability to read a text objectively. Jeannine Brown did a great job at identifying areas which may be affected and forcing readers to think with regard to themselves in greater detail. The constant reminder is brought up at key steps of the process, and as a result, makes readers aware of how their preconceived ideas not only impact one step but the entire process.

After reading the book, there are a couple of areas which are concerning. The first is the emphasis upon reader interpretation versus authorial intent. While it is important to recognize that the author did spend some chapters emphasizing the need for a person to focus less upon self and more upon the author and text, nevertheless, there are underlying aspects throughout the text that give priority to the reader's personal interpretation. While it can be understood that the early parts of the book are simply giving a historical overview of the thinking of previous persons, the latter parts are the words of the author and her case for Scripture being viewed as an act of communication. Even after emphasizing the need for a person to not insert his or her own feelings into the text, this issue appears sporadically throughout the book.

One thing that is noteworthy in *Scripture as Communication* is the lack of emphasis upon God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's role in the believer's life, more often than not, is overemphasized; however, this is not the case in this book. In fact, there is no mention and the Holy Spirit's role is underemphasized in the process of Scripture interpretation. According to 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, the Holy Spirit has been given to guide believers in the truth. In other words, He provides illumination (different from new revelation which is frequently referenced) for the believer to understand and apply the text.

Of even greater concern is the lack of emphasis upon God's role in writing Scripture. Second Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 clearly identify the Lord God as the author of the Bible. However, He chose to use men as the resource for writing it, working through their style, personality, and knowledge to write the text. A large part of the book discusses the various authors and what they bring to the text. As a result, time is well spent upon how to work through the author's viewpoint in order to determine the meaning of the text. However, there is little regard for the fact that God worked through these men while they were writing.

If the Bible is to have the authority it needs to have in a person's life, it must begin with the right perspective, which is to recognize God as the author. While Jeannine Brown does occasionally indicate that God is

the author, most of the time this is done in minimal emphasis. The reader is left to wonder the significance of this understanding and the impact it has upon correct hermeneutics. While chapter 12 explains the Bible to be a representation of the incarnate God, in that the book itself is partly written by God and partly written by man, this does little to explain the importance of God as the author. Even in this chapter, the greater portion is more reflective of man's part in the writing process. While there are other reservations and weaknesses already noted, it is this point that causes one to be hesitant to recommend the book. Humans are fallible and limited in their understanding which should be stated in the book by emphasizing God's role in creating, writing, and protecting the Bible as his authoritative rule for life.

Overall, the book has some points and perspectives that are necessary to the process of interpreting and understanding Scripture. Therefore, if one has time, it may be a book worth reading. However, reading the book should be limited to people who are well-grounded and discerning; it is those readers who can identify the best information and leave aside the other points.

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