

# Journal *for* BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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## The Gospel & Evangelism



# Journal *for* BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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## Editorial Introduction



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**T**his issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is comprised of six articles and thirteen book reviews, all of which are dedicated to the twin topics of the gospel or evangelism. In the first article, Blake Newsom, Dean of Chapel and Assistant Professor of Expository Preaching at NOBTS, dispels misconceptions then identifies the message of the gospel in the person and work of Christ. In the second article, Adam Harwood, Associate Professor of Theology at NOBTS, suggests that the answer to the question of whether the gospel is for all people or only some people depends on whether one affirms that God loves all or only some people salvifically, whether Christ died for all or only some people, and whether God desires to save all or only some people. In the third article, David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Preaching at SWBTS, provides a comprehensive biblical-theological case against the view that regeneration precedes faith. In the fourth article, Emir Caner, President and Professor of History and Christian Studies at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, surveys the historical landscape to clarify the soteriological and evangelistic perspectives of early Southern Baptists. In the fifth article, Timothy W. Mims, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Winona, Mississippi, advocates for and describes a model of ministry called ministry evangelism. In the sixth article, Gary Dennis, Pastor of Old Zion Hill Baptist Church in Independence, Louisiana, explores the reality of spiritual warfare when believers share the message of the gospel. The articles by Mims and Dennis draw upon their doctoral work at NOBTS in the area of evangelism. The six articles are followed by thirteen reviews, all written by NOBTS faculty or Ph.D. students.

It is our desire that these articles and reviews will strengthen your understanding of the message of the gospel of Christ and motivate you to be a faithful witness for Jesus Christ.

# What is the Gospel?



**Blake Newsom, Ph.D.**

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## Introduction

“**W**hat is the gospel?” The question seemed simple enough, so without hesitation I responded in a relatively straightforward and unguarded manner by quoting 1 Cor 15:1–5,

Now, brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you—unless you believed to no purpose. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins  
according to the Scriptures,  
that He was buried,  
that He was raised on the third day  
according to the Scriptures,  
and that He appeared to Cephas,  
then to the Twelve.<sup>1</sup>

I followed up the quotation by highlighting the central message located within those verses: the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, for the sins of the world. After answering, I looked up, surveyed the pastor search committee that had lobbed the softball of a question (or so I thought), felt confident about my response to their opening question, and nonverbally communicated, “Next question, please.”

“That’s not the gospel!” To say that I was stunned to hear those words rifling in response from one of the pastor search committee members would be a dramatic understatement. My bewilderment derived from two sources. First, to my knowledge, search committees do not typically start arguments with prospective staff members, though differing views might exist. So,

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<sup>1</sup>Scripture quotations are from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* unless otherwise noted. The formatting of these verses follows the English translation.

I was somewhat surprised to have the answer to my first question so passionately challenged by a member of the search team. Second, and most alarming, was the reason for the glaring indictment leveled at me. I do not think that I am above having one of my statements challenged. But in this instance, I could not understand the reason for such a protest. Because I had completed two master's degrees and a Ph.D. from a respected seminary, having my understanding of the gospel challenged was a bit confusing. Did I not understand the gospel? Was I confused as to the most basic and fundamental of Christian teachings? My mind raced to understand how I could have answered incorrectly. To complicate matters further, the demurring committee member proceeded to enlighten me with the correct definition of the gospel. As the minutes and points of his explanation ticked away, I rehashed my original answer to determine the source of our disagreement over such a critical matter.

Interestingly, my uncomfortable conversation in a pastor search committee interview is symptomatic of a more widespread issue within evangelical Christianity. We are having conversations and disagreements as to the message and content of the gospel, and these divergent views seem to be leading to contentious discussions about the foundation of our belief system. Far worse, confusion on the message and content of the gospel will cause significant issues among our churches, including creating ministers and congregations who are apathetic toward evangelism.

Numerous voices have engaged recently in discussing this crucial doctrine. This article is my attempt to contribute to the discussion. I am not joining the conversation because I think I can articulate a better, deeper, or more unifying position than has been put forward. Rather, I am engaging simply to highlight a different approach. My intention in this article is to present a simple approach to understanding the core content of the gospel. We will begin by addressing some common misconceptions concerning the nature and content of the gospel.

### **Three Misconceptions about the Gospel**

As a seminary professor, I have been exposed to several trendy views on the gospel from written and oral sources, some of which seem to be inadequate views that come with some serious problems. In identifying these views, my goal is not to stoke the fires of contentiousness, but to highlight some errant ideas about the gospel. To be clear, the views critiqued are all located within the realm of the broad, Christian tradition. My aim is to spotlight views of the gospel that are insufficient and problematic. I will begin by stating my response to three inadequate views.

#### **Formal Evangelism Presentations are not the Gospel**

First, formal evangelism presentations are not the gospel. In recent decades, a number of excellent (and some lower-quality) resources have been published for the purpose of helping believers present the gospel so that the lost might be saved. I am grateful for formal evangelism presentations because they encourage, inspire, and instruct people in evangelism, a practice that

is lacking among the vast majority of believers. We should applaud efforts to motivate and mobilize believers to engage in evangelism, and I have used and taught several formal evangelism presentations. Most of the methods that have been published through the years are based on and organized around the Scripture, and God has saved countless individuals through formal evangelism presentations. However, an evangelism presentation, regardless of its high quality, should not be mistaken for the gospel. One does not find “EE,” “Way of the Master,” “The Four Spiritual Laws,” “FAITH,” “The Net,” “PRAY,” or other similar outlines explicitly stated in the Bible. I have used, taught, and affirm all of those presentations as based on and faithful to Scripture. The problem is not that they are unbiblical; the problem is they are not in and of themselves the gospel. Stated another way, evangelism presentations should not be considered synonymous with the gospel. Rather, they are merely tools to help a person explain the message of the gospel to someone who is lost. Those who have developed and produced the presentations would affirm that they have published a method of presenting the gospel. It is inaccurate to consider any evangelism presentation to be the gospel.

### Important Christian Doctrines are not the Gospel

Second, important Christian doctrines are not the gospel. Do not misinterpret this statement to say that the gospel is not an important Christian doctrine. The gospel is critically important and foundational. However, none of the important Christian doctrines should be regarded as synonymous with the gospel. N. T. Wright appropriately states,

I am perfectly comfortable with what people normally mean when they say ‘the gospel’. I just don’t think it is what Paul means. In other words, I am not denying that the usual meanings are things that people ought to say, to preach about, to believe. I simply wouldn’t use the word ‘gospel’ to denote those things.<sup>2</sup>

While this writer and Wright would not agree completely as to the nature and extent of the core content of the gospel, I agree that many people are conflating important Christian doctrines with the gospel.

Of concern to this writer is that the gospel has become a buzzword in Evangelicalism. As is often the case with buzzwords, they lose their core identity and meaning due to their overuse in books, conversations, and retweets of pithy statements. The word gospel has become a catch-all term that captures attention. Since every Christian theme or doctrine seems related and attached to the gospel, every Christian theme or doctrine is mistakenly regarded as synonymous with the gospel. Consequently, all of the important doctrines in Christianity become the gospel, including (but not limited to) creation, theology proper, Scripture, the Trinity, prayer, angels and demons, anthropology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Again, do not misunderstand my claim. The gospel is inextricably linked to all elements, themes, and doctrines

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<sup>2</sup>N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 41.

of Christianity; however, all elements, themes, and doctrines of Christianity are not the gospel and should not be posited as synonymous with the gospel. Holding such a view complicates a legitimate understanding of the gospel. If everything is the gospel, then nothing is the gospel.

If Scripture, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, or any other doctrine is synonymous with the gospel, then why the need to delineate the categories at all? Why is there any need to nuance the various doctrines if they are equivalent? Clearly, the terms and categories are not the same. While Scripture contains the gospel, Scripture is not the gospel. While soteriology includes and is connected to the gospel, soteriology is not concerned only with the gospel but also with other issues pertaining to salvation.

Moreover, a certain soteriological position is not the gospel. Put another way, the gospel is not synonymous with one soteriological perspective over another. For that reason, Evangelicals need to be careful as to how they use the term gospel. The gospel should not be confused with nor championed as only one theological viewpoint of soteriology; to do so would be irresponsible and divisive. Unity will be minimized when differences regarding certain soteriological perspectives spill over into doubts regarding gospel faithfulness.

Borrowing from Tim Keller, J. D. Greear explains, “The gospel . . . is more like the hub of God’s wheel of truth. All other Christian virtues flow out of it.”<sup>3</sup> One would never assume that the hub of a wheel is of the same essence and nature as the component parts. Rather, the hub is connected with all other subsequent parts in such a way as to compose the whole of the wheel. In a similar way, the subsequent Christian virtues—and Christian doctrines—are not the gospel, but are connected to and flow from the gospel. Consequently, the essential doctrines of the Christian faith should not be posited as synonymous terms for the gospel.

### Implications of the Gospel are not the Gospel

Third, implications of the gospel are not the gospel. Reading recent and popular material on the gospel can lead to confusion concerning the nature and content of the gospel. Oddly, much of the material is not so much about the gospel as it is about the implications of the gospel, meaning the effects that the gospel can and does have on believers. Numerous books and sermons dangerously equate the effects of the gospel with the gospel itself.<sup>4</sup>

Effects of the gospel should not be interpreted as the gospel. Cause and effect is commonly misunderstood, even though the principle is discernible in everyday life. An effect is inextricably bound to the cause, but that effect is inescapably separate from the cause; otherwise there would be no need to discuss the two components. Rather, one would simply recognize a process with

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<sup>3</sup>J. D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 21.

<sup>4</sup>Since I do not want the examples to overshadow the point, and I want to avoid causing division, I will not cite examples. Even so, material of this nature is abundant.



no independent parts. Theologically, the doctrines of salvation and sanctification are recognized as inextricably connected but also individually nuanced.

## Miscommunication of the Gospel

An outsider would assume that Evangelicals most assuredly are busy evangelists, given all of the current discussions on the gospel. However, the bulk of the talk about the gospel tends to remain isolated within Christian circles, a characteristic that should create suspicion about the nature and worth of the voluminous conversations. In a recent chapel message at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), Johnny Hunt stated, “I’ve never known a generation that has so defined the gospel but has done so little to declare it.”<sup>5</sup> While discussing the gospel from a theological standpoint among fellow believers might convince some as to the extent of one’s passion concerning the gospel, the depth of one’s commitment to the gospel should be viewed in light of the person’s commitment to living out the effects of the gospel by spreading the message of the gospel to the lost. One of the sayings on our campus is: “At NOBTS, we are passionate about proclaiming the gospel.” Commitment to the gospel implies and necessitates communication of the gospel.

As is the case in many discussions among Christians, the bulk of the conversation concerning the gospel occurs in the halls and classrooms of theological institutions, meaning that professors and academicians are driving and energizing the conversation. (The irony is not lost on me that I am a professor writing this statement from his seminary office.) Problems can arise, however, when the conversation remains in the academic halls and does not extend to the church halls and general public among practitioners and laypeople.

One of the major problems with the conversation concerning the content of the gospel stems from approaching the issue from only a theological viewpoint. Quarantining the conversation to the zone of doctrine and theology, a field which is not necessarily unhealthy but sometimes promotes and even celebrates complexity and division, can complicate the discussion. By necessity, doctrinal discussions become more nuanced as individuals focus on all points—not only major points—and magnify the minutia of issues. Moreover, discussions concerning doctrinal matters often spotlight areas of disagreement rather than agreement. Theological conversations tend to be more exciting when divergent viewpoints are proposed or exposed. For better results in discussions concerning the gospel, practitioners need to be included. The gospel should never be approached only from an intellectual or academic perspective, but from a holistic perspective that includes those proclaimers, or gospelers. The most effective and enlightening discussions on the gospel would be those that oscillate between the professors and the practitioners, addressing the academic and the practical while providing depth and breadth to the subject matter.

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<sup>5</sup>Johnny Hunt, NOBTS Chapel Message [sermon on-line], available at <http://media.nobts.edu/chapel/2014/2014.03.13.message.m4v>.

## The Nature and Content of the Gospel

What I propose is a straightforward, simple, and unifying approach to the gospel that recognizes a core content and allows for nuanced discussions. Some of those engaged in conversations on the gospel have cautioned against the “irreducible minimum” approach, which has the potential to result in an oversimplified understanding of the gospel. Truly, a reductionist approach to the gospel could precipitate a diluted version of the gospel that is impotent or unimportant. A weak or insufficient gospel is no gospel at all, and a false gospel should be opposed, in keeping with Paul’s stern caution in Gal 1:8. However, simplicity does not necessarily entail an incorrect or insufficient view. Simplicity can result in a truth being more intelligible, applicable, and easily replicated.

The most appropriate path to discovering the nature and content of the gospel starts with and follows the course charted in Scripture, beginning with the biblical word for gospel. The *euangelion*, or gospel, and its various cognates sprinkled throughout the New Testament denote “the proclamation of good news” in the most basic sense. The word came to be associated with the proclamation of a victory in battle, at times indicating defeat of the enemy and salvation of the city. Gospel also inherits meaning from Old Testament (Septuagint) usage, in which the notion of the word as “proclaiming good news” was related to proclamations after victorious battles, birth announcements, and other events of noteworthy nature. However, the word’s use in Isaiah and Psalms becomes loaded with significance for the New Testament understanding of gospel. In various passages, the word becomes associated with the proclamation that “Yahweh is King,” and that the “King is coming.” Therefore, the people are to behold their King and to proclaim to those within Israel and without of the victory and salvation procured by the arrival of the King.<sup>6</sup>

While the Greek and Old Testament usage of the terms provides a starting point for an accurate rendering of the word gospel, it falls dramatically short in presenting the comprehensive picture portrayed in the New Testament. According to Robert Mounce, the gospel’s “true significance is therefore found, not by probing its linguistic background, but by observing its specific Christian usage.”<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the New Testament with the preaching of Jesus, gospel becomes synonymous with the message about Jesus himself. Friedrich notes, “In the New Testament Jesus Himself is the [gospel]. He Himself is the content of His message.”<sup>8</sup> The Gospel of Mark certainly corresponds to this view of the gospel as being synonymous with the work of Jesus, beginning as follows: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” While the Gospel of John does not incorporate gospel, the Synoptics certainly utilize the term, and John certainly contains the essence of the term, albeit using alternative verbiage.

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<sup>6</sup>Gerhard Friedrich, “εὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγέλιον, προεὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγελιστής,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 707–10.

<sup>7</sup>Robert H. Mounce, “Gospel,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 513.

<sup>8</sup>Friedrich, “εὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγέλιον, προεὐαγγελίζομαι, εὐαγγελιστής,” 712.

Paul's New Testament writings provide the treasure trove of insight for the term gospel. Paul, whose ministry concentrated on the gospel, states in 1 Cor 9:16, "and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" He also declares in 1 Cor 9:22–23, "To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, that I may become a partner in its benefits." Clearly, Paul was passionate about the nature and essence of the gospel as he invested his life endeavoring to spread the gospel among all peoples. In his zeal to spread the gospel, Paul certainly understood the nature and content of the gospel, which he aptly describes in 1 Cor 15:1–5. From the Holy Spirit through Paul's writings came perhaps the most helpful passage concerning a proper understanding of the gospel. Scot McKnight recognizes 1 Cor 15:1–5 as the primary passage for determining the essence of the gospel. He writes, "The best place to begin is the *one place in the entire New Testament where someone actually comes close to defining the word gospel.*"<sup>9</sup>

In the Corinthian passage, Paul delineates the essence of the gospel, which was the message he preached to introduce Christianity to the Corinthians, and the message to which the Corinthian believers could hold firm. Paul's passion for the gospel—the message he preached—explodes from the passage as he notes *to euangelion ho euangelisamen humin*, which includes the root word from which we get "gospel" twice within the phrase. The passage in English is translated, "the gospel I proclaimed to you," but one notices in the original language the literal sense of "the gospel I gosspeled to you."<sup>10</sup>

Based on additional statements from Paul, one could certainly connect Paul's message to the Corinthians to Paul's message to believers in other locations. Paul was adamant in the content of his preaching, noting his being sent "to preach the gospel" (1 Cor 1:17), and that the power of his preaching rested in the content, which was the gospel (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 1 Thess 1:5). Consequently, one finds in 1 Cor 15:1–5 the nature and core content of Paul's message, which he termed the gospel.

Concerning the 1 Corinthians 15 passage, Mounce observes that Paul's statement "sets forth with crystal clarity the message of primitive Christianity."<sup>11</sup> Mounce's statement profoundly links the passage with the prevailing message being proclaimed within the circles of first-century Christianity. Based on Mounce's statement, the 1 Corinthians 15 passage dually provides the gospel message of Paul specifically and primitive Christianity generally. McKnight agrees, "First Corinthians 15 is nothing less than a lifting up of the curtains in the earliest days of the church; it tells us what everyone believed and what everyone preached. This passage is the *apostolic gospel tradition.*"<sup>12</sup> McKnight explains,

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<sup>9</sup>Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 46. Emphasis his.

<sup>10</sup>I am indebted to McKnight's work for this concept that seems clear in the Greek text.

<sup>11</sup>Mounce, "Gospel," 514.

<sup>12</sup>McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 46. Italics his.

To emphasize just how important this appeal to the apostolic gospel tradition by Paul, we should recall that Paul had had a one-of-a-kind experience of God's saving grace in his Damascus Road encounter with the exalted Lord, Jesus the Messiah. So overwhelming was this experience that Paul will later say his gospel was a personal revelation from God himself (Gal 1:13–16). So clear was that revelation from God that he bluntly declares that he didn't even need confirmation from the apostles themselves. All of this emphasis by Paul is on his own uniqueness and the special revelation he had from God . . . but when it comes to defining the gospel, Paul is a square conservative. Instead of expressing the gospel in his own terms, he simply recites the tried and true gospel of the church's tradition.<sup>13</sup>

Other New Testament scholars agree that Paul's gospel was a retelling of the gospel message of the primitive church. As indicated in 1 Cor 15:3, this is the message that Paul "received" and "passed on," signifying that he had absorbed the gospel tradition delivered to him and was consequently delivering the identical message. Gordon Fee points out, "For several reasons it is generally agreed that in vv. 3–5 Paul is repeating a very early creedal formulation that was common to the entire church, to which he adds other traditions about several resurrection appearances."<sup>14</sup> Fee adds, "For all the shaping that Christian theology underwent in his [Paul's] hands, the basic elements were there before and after him."<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner state,

On balance, it seems likely that Paul has constructed this particular summary out of traditional pre-Pauline creedal material that would have been familiar to the Corinthians and other early Christians. Even if the expressions are not common expressions for Paul and if the material is constructed from previously existing traditional material, there is not even the slightest reason to suggest that it is anything other than what Paul himself takes to be a precise restatement of the key facts behind the gospel message.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, in 1 Cor 15:1–5, we see the gospel that was not only preached by Paul but also conveyed to Paul as the core and consistent message of the early church concerning the person and work of Jesus. In this, believers find a precedent from which the essence and content of the gospel preached by Paul and the early church can be extracted and extrapolated. Fee writes, "Among all the things he [Paul] proclaimed and taught while he was with them, these are the matters of 'first importance.' Here is the 'bare bones' content of the gospel that saves."<sup>17</sup> So, what was the essence and content of the gospel proclaimed by the primitive church that Paul learned and implemented as the message he recognized in Rom 1:16 as "God's power for salvation to everyone who believes"?

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 46–47.

<sup>14</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, of The New International Commentary of the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 718.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 722.

<sup>16</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, of The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 746.

<sup>17</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 722.

## The Core Message of the Gospel

Resources on the core content of the gospel have yielded both positive and negative dividends. Rather than repeat previous material, I will commend the work by Lewis Drummond that analyzes some of the important works arguing for a specific core gospel message.<sup>18</sup> The notion of a core within the New Testament gospel message is often referred to as the *kerygma*, a designation made popular by C. H. Dodd in his seminal work on the subject.<sup>19</sup> Taking a pass on the debates over the content of the *kerygma* and instead focusing on the content of 1 Cor. 15:1–5 seems more productive for the purposes of this particular discussion.

In 1 Cor 15: 3–5, Paul provides the core content of his message, which includes the following elements: 1) Christ died; 2) for our sins; 3) Christ was buried; 4) Christ resurrected and appeared; 5) according to the Scriptures. These five elements seem to dissolve into two basic categories: 1) the person and work of Christ as depicted in Scripture; 2) the application to humanity. These elements provide the structure of the gospel message delivered by Paul and other New Testament evangelists, or (to borrow from the wording of 1 Cor 15:1) gospelers.

## The Person and Work of Christ

Since the gospel is inconceivable without the person of Christ, the identity and nature of his work are paramount to a proper understanding of the gospel. The identity of Christ is inherent in Jesus' designation in 1 Cor 15:3–5 as the Christ. That title can be delivered in a succinct, simple, and straightforward manner; however, it is by no means simplistic. The term was heavily weighted with theological freight of the Old Testament and other Jewish writings. The primitive gospel identified Jesus in a specific way and also identified specific works appropriate to his title as the Christ.

Essential to an understanding of the identity of Christ is the nature of his work, i.e. his purpose and function. Mark 8:27–32 gives readers a sense of this when Jesus is identified as the Messiah, and he follows the designation with an explanation of the role of the Messiah: "Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, be killed, and rise after three days." Throughout his ministry, Jesus provided his job description, reminding all in Mark 10:45 that he came "to give His life—a ransom for many."

The cross was the altar on which the perfect Son of God, who was also the Messiah and the Lamb of God, was slain as the perfect ransom. His blood was poured out for the sins of the world. According to 1 Cor 15:3–5, the crucifixion of Jesus must be included in the core content

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<sup>18</sup>Lewis A. Drummond, *The Word of the Cross: A Contemporary Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1944).

of the gospel. Interestingly, the burial of Jesus is also included in the 1 Corinthians 15 core gospel content. While some might wonder as to the reasoning of such an inclusion, the simplest answer is the best and most appropriate. Ciampa and Rosner state, “Christ’s burial reinforces the fact that he truly died.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in noting the burial, one sets the stage for the next great movement in the story of Jesus. In the words of Leon Morris, “the burial of a dead body is the necessary prelude to the empty tomb.”<sup>21</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus permeates the messages of Acts and Pauline epistles as much as (if not more than) the crucifixion of Jesus. Thousands upon thousands of people—many of whom were Jews—were crucified on a Roman cross, subsequently dying from their torture. However, only one came back to life, which was the message that seems to be the climax of the sermons in Acts. Noted resurrection scholar Gary Habermas writes, “That Jesus Christ died and afterward rose from the dead is both the central doctrine of Christian theology and the major fact in a defense of its teachings.”<sup>22</sup> He continues, “It is the witness of the NT that the resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal point of Christian theology and apologetics. Paul reports an early creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7, which both includes the resurrection as an integral part of the gospel and reports several eyewitness appearances.”<sup>23</sup> One cannot be faithful to the gospel as it was preached in Scripture without presenting a resurrected Jesus as conqueror over sin and death and giver of new life.

### Application to Humanity

*Forgiveness of sins* is the connective tissue of the gospel presentation. I affirm the statement of Ciampa and Rosner: “Paul’s recounting of the gospel message reflects the fact that it is first and foremost a message about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us, rather than being a message primarily about us and how we can be saved.”<sup>24</sup> This statement prioritizes rightly the role of Jesus, focusing the listener’s attention first on the person and work of the Christ. However, the statement also connects the work of Jesus to the needs of people, which has been minimized or even disregarded at times in the desire to uphold God’s glory. Put another way, Jesus did not die in a vacuum, nor did Jesus die for himself. Jesus died for people. He died to forgive people of their sins and to make them right before and with God. One of the trendy sayings in modern pulpits and discourses is that Jesus died for the glory of God, a statement with which I cannot ultimately disagree. However, the saying is incomplete when one looks at the biblical account. A more biblically faithful statement would be that Jesus died for people to God’s glory. One cannot read Scripture without seeing Jesus’ atoning work being for people (e.g. Mark 10:45; John 3:16;

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<sup>20</sup>Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 746.

<sup>21</sup>Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, of The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 205.

<sup>22</sup>Gary R. Habermas, “Resurrection of Christ,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1014.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 745.



Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 John 3:16). Simply put, if it had not been for people, Jesus would not have come and died, since there would have been no need to glorify God through the death of Jesus without people. However, forgiveness of sins has been brought to humanity through the atoning work of Jesus. Faithful gospel proclamation necessitates the cross-section of God's work and man's need, which is found in the declaration of forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death and resurrection.

## The Simplicity of the Gospel

So, what is the core content of the gospel? What are we to preach and share? Simply put, the gospel is the story of Jesus. We need not complicate it. We can discuss it in great detail and have conversations that extend into debates. However, the conversations and debates should never veil the core essence and content of the message proclaimed by the early church, which first witnessed the world-changing power of the gospel.

From my perspective, the problem with clarity and simplicity concerning some discussions and presentations of the gospel is in the basic approach. The gospel, as noted in Scripture and defined in 1 Cor 15:1–5, is located in the person and work of Christ. Often, however, the gospel is presented as a series of theological statements, propositions, or points about the work of Christ. These might seem identical, but the seeming subtleties have a monumental effect. Approaching the proclamation of the gospel as presenting a set of propositions to someone is vastly different than presenting Jesus to someone. The New Testament church did not simply roll out a list of points about Jesus. They presented Jesus: who he is and what he has accomplished on behalf of people. As Michael Green notes concerning the early church, “So it is not surprising to find them more frequently preaching simply the person and achievement of Jesus as the good news.” He continues,

So we find them spreading the good news that Jesus is Messiah, or that through him the ancient promises have been fulfilled. We find them proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus, of the Lordship of Jesus, of the cross of Jesus, of the resurrection of Jesus or simply of Jesus himself. Nothing more was needed . . . Whatever other category of interpretation was employed, the early preacher of the good news had one subject and one only, Jesus. This was their supreme concern.<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing that the gospel is a person seems even more obvious when considering the first four books of the New Testament, which are called Gospels. The Gospels are clearly about the person and work of Jesus. When telling the good news, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell the story of Jesus simply and straightforwardly. They see the good news as the person of Jesus, good news incarnate.

Faithful gospel proclamation means telling someone about the person of Jesus and his significance for that person's life. We present Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, whose perfect

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<sup>25</sup>Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 80.

life fulfilled the righteous standards of a holy God, whose death on the cross was substitutionary for the sins of the world, and whose resurrection from the grave demonstrated his sovereign power over death and sin. Faithful gospeling can be accomplished in a brief or extended period of time. We need not put time constraints on gospel proclamation. We simply need to proclaim Jesus whenever, wherever, and however we can to as many people as we can in whatever amount of time we can. Context will determine the particular time allotment and approach to the gospel conversation. My approach is simple, although context determines the specifics of my approach. When sharing the gospel, I discuss the problem of man (sin), the solution found in Jesus (salvation), and how Jesus' work is appropriated (repentance and faith). My desire is to help the person understand who Jesus is and why he is important for them to know.

### Context Guides the Conversation

While the core content of the gospel message should not be altered to meet anyone's demands or needs, the manner and depth in which that core content is delivered most definitely should be altered to communicate to the specific audience. Simply put, context determines the specific approach. Green comments,

It would be a mistake to assume . . . that there was a crippling uniformity about the proclamation of Christian truth in antiquity. That there was a basic homogeneity in what was preached we may agree, but there was wide variety in the way it was presented. Nor was this variety always the result of the supposedly rigid and conflicting theologies which were prevalent in different sections of the ancient church. . . . But much of the variety will have been necessitated by the needs and understanding of the hearers. Evangelism is never proclamation in a vacuum; but always to people, and the message must be given in terms that make sense to them.<sup>26</sup>

As a seminary professor engaged in evangelism in New Orleans, I find myself regularly occupying and navigating two worlds that sometimes seem divergent: professor and practitioner. In the same day, I have been engaged in complex, theologically rich conversations about the gospel on campus, and then engaged in simple, practically-driven presentations of the gospel in the city. Of course, the gospel is discussed and communicated differently in the divergent contexts. Does the message of Jesus change given the context or audience? Of course not. What changes is the context and the audience, thereby altering the nature of the discussion concerning the message of Jesus. Within the theologically-driven conversations, the minutia of the gospel are dissected and examined at a microscopic and deeper level. However, the practical conversation demands a basic presentation of the person of Jesus and his life-changing work.

The person and work of Christ might be presented to an agnostic biology professor at a secular university within a conversation that includes apologetics about creationism, the relationship between faith and science, religion, the problem of suffering, and other intellectually-rich discussions. Jesus is presented in a different manner to the uneducated man who is sleeping

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<sup>26</sup>Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 115, quoted in Drummond, *The Word of the Cross*, 209.



alone on a filthy couch in a gutted house containing only bare essentials after Hurricane Katrina devastated his life. Moreover, this man is struggling with the problem of suffering due to the devastation of Katrina, abandonment by his wife, and the death of his daughter.<sup>27</sup> Contextually, the core content of the gospel is the same, but that core content is packaged and delivered differently. Conversations on the gospel need to be contextually-driven, an evangelistic activity certainly advocated in 1 Cor 9:19–23.

## Concluding Thoughts

Returning to the introductory story, the member of the pastor search committee continued his exceedingly long diatribe, painstakingly presenting the most theologically-packed gospel possible. Doubtless he had read much on the subject and wanted to ensure his faithfulness to and knowledge of all of the possible theological areas the gospel might impact. After his discourse, I simply responded, “There is a serious problem with your gospel if it can only be understood by a very small percentage of the world’s population.” I continued, “If our gospel cannot be proclaimed and understood in the jungles of Africa, the rainforests of South America, and in the rice fields of Asia, there is a problem with our gospel.” This man’s approach was to make the gospel complex rather than simple, academic rather than practical, elitist rather than accessible, and propositional rather than personal. Faithful gospeling communicates the person of Jesus to the person listening and does so without losing the core content of the gospel. Faithful gospeling presents the full gospel and does so with a desire to be theologically accurate, understanding that gospeling does not necessitate a discourse that feels more like a systematic theology class than a person telling another person about Jesus.

I fear that many people are complicating evangelism, presenting the message of Jesus as though they are answering questions for a theological examination rather than telling a lost person how to be saved from his or her sins. My fear extends to the issue of evangelistic activity because I wonder whether people are actually sharing the gospel with lost people or simply talking about the gospel with saved people. We are at a dangerous place as Christians when one’s faithfulness to the gospel is seen in the number of books one has read on the subject and in one’s ability to talk about the gospel with the theologically educated rather than seeing faithfulness to the gospel in one’s lifestyle and willingness to share the message of Jesus with those who are perishing in their sins.

The gospel preached in the New Testament that changed the world within a few hundred years was communicated by educated and uneducated people to educated and uneducated people, yet they presented the same gospel albeit in different ways with tremendous power and effectiveness. They simply went everywhere telling whomever would listen about Jesus any chance they were given. Michael Green reports about the early Christians,

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<sup>27</sup>The two people and encounters are real and occurred while engaging in door-to-door evangelism within a few blocks of the NOBTS seminary campus.

They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. It was the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God's own love, poured out on a needy world. They paid heed to Christ's Great Commission. They sought to interpenetrate society with the gospel which had had so profound an effect upon them. Christianity for them was no hour's slot on Sunday. It affected everything they did and everyone they met. . . . The ordinary Christians, the missionaries, the academics, the women, all seem to have shared in this same passionate commitment to the cause.<sup>28</sup>

Faithful gospel proclamation is necessary to change the world. Faithful gospelers maintain the core content of the gospel handed down in the New Testament while contextualizing that gospel for those with whom they come into contact. Faithful gospelers preach the gospel, which is the message of Jesus. Simple. Direct. Life-changing.

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<sup>28</sup>Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 19.

# Is the Gospel for All People or Only Some People?



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## Introduction

**T**he goal of this article is to address the question: “Is the gospel for all people or only some people?” The answer to this question undergirds one’s theology and practice of evangelism and missions. By the word “gospel,” I am referring to the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins (1 Cor 15:3–4). By asking whether the gospel is for all people, I am not asking whether it should be *announced* to all people, but whether it *concerns* all people. One’s view of whether the gospel is for all people or only some people is revealed by one’s answers to the following questions:

1. Who does God love salvifically, all people or only some people?
2. Did Christ die for the sins of all people or only some people?
3. Who does God desire to save, all people or only some people?

I assume the three questions above are valid for answering the main question. It seems legitimate to offer the possible answers of “all people” or “only some people” to the questions because there are no other reasonable answers. The reply of “no one” does not seem to be a viable answer for any of the questions. What Christian theologian argues that God loves no one salvifically, that Christ died for no one, or that God desires to save no one? The only possible answers to those questions seem to be “all people” and “only some people.”

Also, I assume that the answer to the three questions are related to and will assist in revealing one’s answer to the main question. For example, one who affirms that Christ died for only some people and God desires to save only some people seems to believe that the gospel is for only some people. It would seem inconsistent for one to answer “only some people” to two or three of the questions then affirm that the gospel is for “all people.” In what way would the gospel be for those people whom God does not desire to save and for whose sins Christ did not die?

The investigation can be illustrated as follows:

Is the Gospel for All People or Only Some People?		
	All People	Some People
1. Who does God love salvifically?		
2. For whom did Christ die?		
3. Who does God desire to save?		

### Discussing Doctrinal Differences

Some Christian pastors and leaders differ on some or all of these three questions. Doctrinal differences among followers of Christ have occurred since the time of Christ. Certain differences carry less significance and deserve less attention. Consider as an example the question of whether one affirms a premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial eschatology. All Christians should affirm the future, bodily return of Christ. However, many different interpretations of Scripture arise when describing the sequence and precise timing of events at the return of Christ. The three questions above, however, carry greater weight than the views on the precise timing of future events. These three questions undergird evangelism and missions because they identify the objects of God's salvific love, the extent of Christ's atoning work on the cross, and who God desires to save. These three questions center on the doctrines of God, man, atonement, and salvation. In short, these questions are worth addressing.

#### Who Does God Love Salvifically, All People or Only Some People?

The first question which should lead us to answer whether the gospel is for all people or only some people is: Who does God love salvifically, all people or only some people? A. W. Pink has written, "When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He loves whomever He chooses to love. God does not love everybody."<sup>1</sup>

According to John 3:16, "God so loved *the world*" (ESV, emphasis mine). Neither the subject nor the verb are in dispute. Instead, the object of the verb is in question: *ho kosmos* (Greek, "the world"). Who is the object of God's love, all people or only some people? In this context, *kosmos* does not refer to the physical universe (as in Acts 17:24) or to the system opposed to God (as in 1 John 2:15). Instead, the word refers in John 3:16 to people. Does the word refer to all people or only some people? Consider John's use of the word *kosmos* elsewhere in his Gospel:

<sup>1</sup>A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2008), 10.

- John the Baptist declares of Jesus, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *the world*” (John 1:29).
- Jesus is called “the Savior of *the world*” (John 4:42).
- Jesus says He is “the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to *the world*” (John 6:33).
- Jesus will give His flesh “for the life of *the world*” (John 6:51).

In all of these verses, it is possible to interpret “the world” as a reference either to “only some people” or to “all people.”

## Does God Love Only the Elect?

Consider some of the explanations that “the world” refers only to some people. Francis Turretin (1623–87) writes that John 3:16 “cannot be universal towards each and everyone, but special towards a few.” The love mentioned in that verse refers to “only those chosen out of this world.”<sup>2</sup> Turretin interprets John 3:16 to say that God so loved only *some* people.

Consider also John Owen’s interpretation of John 3:16. He explains that “it cannot be maintained that by the *world* here is meant all and every one of mankind, but only men in common scattered throughout the world, which are the elect.”<sup>3</sup> Like Turretin, Owen also interprets John 3:16 to say that God so loved only *some* people.

The interpretations of Turretin and Owen are problematic, because they set aside the plain-sense meaning of the verse for a view not found in this verse. Perhaps the view that “God so loved the world” means “God so loved the elect” can be established from other texts. But proper exegesis rules out this interpretation of Turretin and Owen. D. A. Carson also affirms that God calls out and loves the elect in a different sense than He loves other people. Even so, Carson disagrees with their interpretation of John 3:16. Carson writes, “I know that some try to take *kosmos* (world) here to refer to the elect. But that really will not do. All the evidence of the usage of the word in John’s gospel is against the suggestion.” Also, “God’s love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:405–08; in Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 49.

<sup>3</sup>John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647), 328, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/deathofdeath.i.x.ii.html>.

<sup>4</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 17. This citation of Carson is not intended to suggest that he interprets John to mean that God loves all people salvifically. Rather, the citation is only meant to establish that Carson rejects the interpretation of *kosmos* in John 3:16 offered by Turretin and Owen.

I do not accept the interpretation that “God so loved the world” means that God loved only *some* people. Instead, I affirm that God loved, and presently loves, *every person*. And to say He loves some whose salvation He does not desire seems to evacuate the plain understanding of the word “love.” First John 4:8 declares, “God is love.” Other biblical texts affirm God’s goodness and kindness toward His creation. The *Baptist Faith and Message* states in Article 2A, “God the Father,” “He is fatherly in His dealings toward all men.” It seems axiomatic to affirm that God loves salvifically all people. The implication of this view is that a faithful witness of Jesus can say to any person on the planet, “God loves you.” Those who affirm that God loves only some people or loves some in a non-salvific way can say only, “God loves sinners.” They wonder whether they should say to unbelievers, “God loves you.”<sup>5</sup> Limiting God’s salvific love to only some people results in a disjointed theology and practice of missions and evangelism in which the gospel is *announced* to all people but is not *for* all people.

## Does God Hate Sinners?

Recently, a best-selling Christian book included a statement that God hates sin and “in some sense, God also hates sinners.”<sup>6</sup> Certain texts in the poetic sections of the Bible contain those statements. Consider, as examples (these quotations from the NASB, emphasis in bold is mine):

**Psalms 5:5–6,**

“The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes;  
**You hate all who do iniquity.**  
You destroy those who speak falsehood;  
**The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.**”

**Proverbs 6:16–19,**

“There are **six things which the LORD hates**,  
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:  
Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
And hands that shed innocent blood,

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<sup>5</sup>D. A. Carson, “God’s Love and God’s Wrath,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (October–December 1999): 395, explains, “When I have preached or lectured in Reformed circles, I have often been asked the question, ‘Do you feel free to tell unbelievers that God loves them?’” He answers, “Obviously I have no hesitation in answering this question from Reformed preachers affirmatively: of course, I tell the unconverted God loves them.” Also, Albert Mohler, “The Power of the Articulated Gospel,” *The Underestimated Gospel*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 17, writes: “We don’t present the gospel with one hand behind our back, thinking about the person to whom we are speaking, ‘This *might* be for you . . . or it might not be for you.’ We don’t find refuge in the sovereignty of God in order to say that we don’t have to preach the gospel to all persons.” Emphasis his. Why would these theologians address questions regarding whether we should tell unbelievers God loves them or if the gospel is for unbelievers? Is it possible that Reformed theology leads some to conclude that God does not love all people salvifically and thus the gospel is not for all people?

<sup>6</sup>David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 29.

A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that run rapidly to evil,  
A false witness *who* utters lies,  
And one who spreads strife among brothers.”

**Hosea 9:15,**

“All their evil is at Gilgal;  
Indeed, **I came to hate them** there!  
Because of the wickedness of their deeds  
I will drive them out of My house!  
**I will love them no more;**  
All their princes are rebels.”

Consider also the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” Should we read Luke 14:26 as a command to hate our parents, wife, children, and ourselves? No. Instead, proper hermeneutical methods should lead us to an interpretation which is more faithful to the meaning intended by the original author. A command to hate our parents would contradict clear commands by God to honor our parents (Exod 20:12). Also, a husband who hates his wife would be contradicting clear commands to love her (Eph 5:25–33). Similar texts could be cited which contradict the notion of hating one’s children and yourself.

When seeking a faithful interpretation of any biblical text, it is necessary to recognize literary devices and types of literature. In this case, hating one’s family should be understood as a literary device which makes a statement of comparison—a call to be more devoted to God than to family. This is the view of Darrell Bock on Luke 14:26, “Here ‘hate’ is a rhetorical term. It means that a person’s loyalty to following Jesus has priority over family or acceptance by them.”<sup>7</sup> Bock affirms that the word “hate” is used in this verse as a literary device. If Luke 14:26, which states that we are to hate people, should be interpreted non-literally, then is it possible that the statements in the poetic material about God hating sinners should also be interpreted non-literally?

The poetic material in the Bible is a type of literature which is a gift from God because it accurately portrays human emotion. This gives us permission to be honest with God. In the poetic material, however, some statements occur which were not intended to be doctrinal affirmations or commands to obey. For example, David asks in Psa 13:1 how long God will forget him. Should we think David despaired because God had *literally* forgotten him? No. David closes Psalm 13 with praises to the God who saves him and has dealt bountifully with him (verses 5–6). Instead, we should interpret Psa 13:1 to be David’s declaration that he *felt as if* he had been forgotten by God.

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<sup>7</sup>Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 279.



Similarly, the Psalmist prays a blessing on the one who dashes Babylonian infants on the rocks (Psa 137:9, “How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock.”). Do we read this as a command to be followed? Do we regard this to be a proposition concerning the nature of God? In answer to both questions, no. The poetic material includes community laments or imprecatory psalms, of which Psalm 137 is an example. This material captures the community’s grief expressed to God, but this text would not justify killing our enemies’ infants because of the many New Testament commands to love and forgive our enemies.

These examples are not meant to imply that there are errors or that we cannot trust the Bible. Instead, these examples remind us that the Bible is comprised of a variety of literary devices and types of literature. We must recognize different types of literature and literary devices in the Bible and interpret them accordingly.

Rather than reading the statements of God’s hatred for sinners literally, they are better understood as instances of anthropopathism, a figure of speech denoting analogically a truth about God. A theological dictionary explains, “Anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms are figures of speech that transmit theological truths about God to humankind. Only when taken literally are they misconstrued.”<sup>8</sup> The statements that God hates sinners are *rare* in the Bible, occur only in the poetic sections, and are misunderstood when they are interpreted *literally*.

It is necessary, however, to take seriously God’s righteous indignation against sin and sinners. Millard Erickson writes, “Although God is not the enemy of sinners nor does he hate them, it is also quite clear that God is angered by sin.”<sup>9</sup> God’s wrath (Greek, *orge*) is “revealed from heaven against godlessness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18, ESV). Notice that His wrath in these verses is not revealed against godless and unrighteous *people*, but against their godlessness and unrighteousness. In this way, it would be accurate to say that God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.

One theologian has claimed that wrath is an attribute of God.<sup>10</sup> Such a claim, however, is not grounded in explicit claims of Scripture and seems to confuse wrath with holiness. Graham Cole explains that love and holiness are essential attributes of God, but notes, “Wrath is not. Wrath is an expression of holiness in certain contexts.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Rom 3:25–26, the cross of Christ demonstrates God’s righteousness. According to Rom 5:8, the cross of Christ demonstrates God’s love, not His hatred, for sinners. In John 3, we learn that God sent His Son to save the world, not to condemn the world (v. 17). God’s wrath is already on all people because of their sin; and only those who believe in the Son will have eternal life (v. 36). But God’s wrath should be distinguished from this idea that He hates sinners.

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<sup>8</sup>*Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s. v. “Anthropomorphism.”

<sup>9</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 552.

<sup>10</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 205–07.

<sup>11</sup>Graham Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 25, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 51.



Wrath is God's settled disposition against sin, which flows from His righteousness and holiness. In this way, our condemnation is already set because of our sin. But out of love for these objects of wrath, God acted to rescue those who were already perishing and under His condemnation. At the cross, God judged His only Son, one who had no sin. He did so out of love for sinful people. These are the actions of one who loves sinners, not one who hates them.

## Does God Love All People, But Some in a Non-Salvific Sense?

Some have suggested that God loves all people, but He loves them in different ways. God's love should be understood in five senses, including a "general" love for all people and a "particular" love for his own people "that moves him to save them."<sup>12</sup> An example of God's particular love for His people is found in the love of a husband for his wife. Bruce Ware writes, "Just as 'husbandly' love is destroyed altogether if a man were only capable of loving all women (including his wife!) equally and exactly in the same way, so here God's love for his own people is lost when the distinctiveness of this greatest of God's loves is denied."<sup>13</sup> This analogy accounts for a husband's love for his wife, but fails to describe the sense in which God loves unbelievers.

The Bible does *not* teach that God loves in five different senses. Instead, the Bible calls the cross of Christ an expression of God's love for "the world" (John 3:16) and for "mankind" (Titus 3:4). When asked, "Does God love the world?" this view teaches that God loves some people enough to bless them with rain, but does not love them in a saving way. But the Bible says much more about God's love for all people. If John 3:16 and Titus 3:4 mean that God loves all people, then in what sense could it be said that God loves people if He *does not* desire their salvation?

In this section, first I attempted to argue that the best way to interpret John 3:16 is that God's love for "the world" refers to "all people" rather than "only some people." Second, I addressed the objection that God hates sinners. Third, I answered the claim that God loves all people, but in different ways. If one affirms that God loves all people salvifically, then it seems that the gospel is for all people. If, however, one affirms there are some people God does not love salvifically, then it should be asked: In what sense could it be said God loves those individuals, and exactly how is the gospel for them?

## Did Christ Die for the Sins of All People or Only Some People?

The second question which should lead us to answer whether the gospel is for all people or only some people is: Did Christ die for the sins of all people or only some people? Certain

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<sup>12</sup>Bruce Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 29. Ware draws this view of five senses of God's love from Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 16–24.

<sup>13</sup>Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," 31.

Christians affirm that Jesus died for the sins of only some people. This view is known as definite atonement, limited atonement, or particular redemption. Consider, for example, this recent statement by a Southern Baptist leader: “The question of the extent of the atonement is one that I, as one committed to Reformed theology, would answer in terms of the fact that Christ died for those He has redeemed. And (I) would be very clear about that in terms of particular redemption.” The speaker clarified that he does not regard general atonement (that Christ died for the sins of the world) to be a heretical view. Also, he stated there is some benefit of the death of Christ for all people.<sup>14</sup> In this view, Christ died for the sins of only some people.

Recently, a book of essays was published which argues for limited atonement. The 700-page tome includes chapters written by twenty-one professors and pastors, including three professors who teach at a Southern Baptist seminary. The argument of the book is that Christ died for the sins of only the elect.<sup>15</sup>

In 2014, a Southern Baptist leader declared, “The atonement of Christ is graciously, globally, and gloriously particular.” He explained: “But it’s also a *globally* particular atonement. Christ has not just purchased you and me; he has purchased people for God from every tribe and every language and every people and every nation.” This statement reflects a confusion between those to whom the benefits of the atonement have been applied (in this case, those who are already in heaven) and those for whom Christ died (the world). The speaker focused his discussion of the atonement only on worshippers in heaven who had already believed in Jesus (Rev 5:1–14). Rather than affirming that Jesus died for the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2), the speaker explained that Jesus died for only some people from every people group rather than for all people. He clarified that people groups are “groups of people that share a similar language, a similar heritage, and certain cultural characteristics. And Jesus died to purchase men and women from every single one of them. His atonement is globally particular.”<sup>16</sup>

One important factor when considering for whom Christ died is that no Bible verse states that Jesus died only for the elect. It is true that several New Testament verses refer to Jesus’ death for some people. Consider these examples (emphasis mine):

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<sup>14</sup>Albert Mohler, “The Briefing” Daily Podcast, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/05/03/ask-anything-weekend-edition-05-03-14/>.

<sup>15</sup>See my review of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013) in the present issue of this journal.

<sup>16</sup>David Platt, “Divine Sovereignty: The Fuel of Death-Defying Missions,” *The Underestimated Gospel*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 69, 71. Emphasis his. Similarly, Platt writes, 71, that the Great Commission is “not just a general command to make disciples among as many people as possible; rather, it is a specific command to make disciples among every people group in the world. Make disciples of all the people groups.” One is left to wonder whether, in this view, the gospel is for all people or only for all people groups?

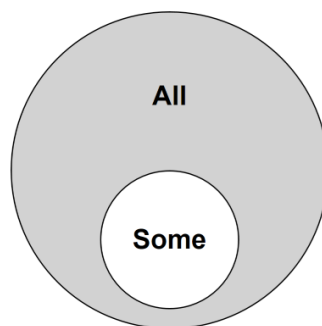
- Jesus came to “save *his people* from their sins” (Matt 1:21b).
- Jesus gave his life as “a ransom *for many*” (Matt 20:28).
- Jesus lays down his life “for *the sheep*” (John 10:11, 15).
- “*My sheep* hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10: 27).
- Paul describes “*the flock*” and “*church of God*” as that which Christ “obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- Paul explains that “Christ loved *the church* and gave himself up *for her*” (Eph 5:25b).

Notice that *none* of these verses say Jesus died *only* for some people. Also, none of these statements invalidate these other biblical texts which seem to state that Christ died for the sins of all people (emphasis mine):

- Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *the world*” (John 1:29b).
- God sent His Son “in order that *the world* might be saved through him” (John 3:17b).
- Paul declares that “in Christ God was reconciling *the world* to himself” (2 Cor 5:19).
- Jesus became flesh so “he might taste death *for everyone*” (Heb 2:9).
- “We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of *everyone*, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10b).
- Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of *the whole world*” (1 John 2:2).

Consider this picture. Christ died for the sin of the world (all), which includes a smaller group (some). This relationship between all and some is not contradictory. Christ died for *all*, which includes *some*.

**Christ died for:**



Affirming that Christ died for all is not a denial that Christ died for some (the sheep, the elect, and the church of God). Rather, affirming that Christ died for all is a denial that Christ died *only* for some. Those who teach that Christ died for all people can affirm the plain-sense interpretation of the Bible verses in both lists. However, those who teach that Christ died only for some people must read assumptions into their interpretations of both lists of texts. First, they insert the assumption that Christ died only for some, which the texts do not state. Second, they attempt to explain how phrases such as “all,” “the world,” and “everyone” mean only some people.<sup>17</sup>

In a recent article, David Allen writes, “Limited atonement is contrary to the Southern Baptist Convention’s statement of faith.” He then quotes Article 3 of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, which states: “The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.”

Allen continues, “The use of the word ‘man’ in context clearly indicates ‘mankind’ as a whole. The BFM does not limit the death of Christ to the elect but to the same group which is made in his image, man.”<sup>18</sup> Southern Baptists are free to believe whatever they want regarding the doctrine of atonement. But Southern Baptist seminary professors and entity leaders are bound to teach in accordance with, and not contrary to, the convention’s statement of faith. If David Allen is correct that limited atonement is contrary to the *Baptist Faith and Message*, then all Southern Baptist seminary professors and entity leaders who teach that Jesus died for the sins of only some people are advocating a view which is contrary to the convention’s statement of faith.

Those who affirm limited atonement might reply: The reason only some people are saved is because Jesus paid for the sins of only some people on the cross. In reply, this view is not stated in the Bible. Instead, this double payment argument was made famous by John Owen.<sup>19</sup> Recall

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<sup>17</sup>For an example of “all” becoming “all *kinds* of people,” see Jarvis J. Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul’s Theology*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2012), 219, who explains that “when Paul states that Jesus died as a ransom for ‘all’ (1 Tim 2:6), this inclusive statement pertains not to *everyone without exception* but to *everyone without distinction*” (emphasis his). See also Williams’ doctoral chairperson, Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 376, addressing the same passage: “Does ‘all people’ (*pantas anthrōpous*; v. 4) refer to every person without exception or to every person without distinction? The Reformed have traditionally defended the latter option.” Also, 377, “In sum, Paul reminds his readers of a fundamental truth of his gospel: God desires to save all kinds of people.” Hermeneutically, the student is like his teacher.

<sup>18</sup>David L. Allen, “Commentary on Article 3: The Atonement of Christ,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9.2 (Fall 2012): 48, [http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM\\_9-2\\_Fall\\_2012.pdf](http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_9-2_Fall_2012.pdf).

<sup>19</sup>For a reply to Owen’s double payment argument, see *Ibid.*, 46, “Turning to theological issues, the key argument used by Calvinists for limited atonement is the double payment argument. In essence, it argues that justice does not allow the same sin to be punished twice. There are at least four strong arguments against this: 1) it is never found in Scripture; 2) it confuses a commercial understanding of sin as debt with a penal satisfaction for sin (the latter is the biblical view); 3) even the elect are still under the wrath of God

that he interpreted John 3:16 to say that God loves the elect. The double payment argument was used more recently by a systematic theologian who wrote: “Did Christ pay for the sins of all unbelievers who will be eternally condemned, and did he pay for their sins fully and completely on the cross? It seems that we have to answer no to that question.”<sup>20</sup> In reply, the Bible states that Christ “takes away” (John 1:29) or “is the propitiation for” (1 John 2:2) the sins of the world. The claim is not that Christ’s death paid for the sins of unbelievers. At this point, the theologian has confused the *extent* of the atonement with its *application*. All Christians should affirm that only those who place faith in Jesus will be saved (application), which is consistent with the view that Christ died for the sins of the world (extent).

Those who affirm limited atonement emphasize the actual payment of sin and believe that salvation and payment of sins is available to only some people, but other Christians believe that “salvation is available for everyone and that payment of sins is available for everyone.”<sup>21</sup> If Christ died for the sins of all people, then it is easy to understand how the gospel is for all people. However, if Christ died for the sins of only some people, then how is the gospel for those people for whom Christ did not die?

### Who Does God Desire to Save, All People or Only Some People?

The third question which should lead us to answer whether the gospel is for all people or only some people is: Who does God desire to save, all people or only some people?

After calling believers to pray for those in authority, Paul writes in 1 Tim 2:3–4: “This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” When warning about the future day of judgment, Peter writes, “The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). In these texts, Paul and Peter clearly state that God “wants everyone to be saved” and “all to come to repentance.”

Certain Christians teach, however, that God does not desire to save all people. Rather, God wants to save *all kinds* of people. A Southern Baptist professor advocates this view when he addresses what he terms “problematic texts,” such as 1 Tim 2:4, 4:10, and 2 Peter 3:9. These texts seem to state that God desires to save all people. The professor argues, though, that the verses provide stronger support for the view that God desires to save “all kinds of people.” Concerning

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until they believe (Eph 2:1–3); and 4) it negates the principle of grace in the application of the atonement since nobody is owed the application.” For a review of the critique of limited atonement made by Calvinist theologians, see David L. Allen, “The Atonement: Limited or Unlimited?” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 61–107.

<sup>20</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 601.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 602.

1 Tim 2:4, he writes, “Does ‘all people’ (*pantas anthrōpous*; v. 4) refer to every person without exception or to every person without distinction? The Reformed have traditionally defended the latter option.” He then cites for support the writings of John Calvin, John Owen, and George Knight. Attempting to argue for this unusual reading of 1 Tim 2:4 from the context of the verse, he asserts: “In sum, Paul reminds his readers of a fundamental truth of his gospel: God desires to save all kinds of people.” Also, “God desires to save individuals from every people group.” And, “Paul wants to make it clear: Christ died for all kinds of people, not just some elite group.”<sup>22</sup> First Timothy 2:3–4 states, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (ESV). The plain reading of this text is apparently problematic for the professor’s theological presupposition that God does *not* desire to save all people. He states explicitly that he is defending the Reformed position.<sup>23</sup> Is it possible that his desire to defend the Reformed position has resulted in a failure to affirm the plain meaning of the text, which is that God wants all people, not only all *kinds* of people, to be saved?

Similarly, certain Christians teach that people who will spend eternity apart from God will do so because God did not choose them to be saved. They teach that God chooses only some people to be saved; it is not possible for anyone who hears the gospel to be saved.<sup>24</sup> Reformed confessions of faith affirm the view.<sup>25</sup> Space constraints do not allow a full exploration of the doctrine of election in this article. However, it should be noted that it is possible to affirm a robust doctrine of election while rejecting the view that election entails God selecting individuals from eternity for salvation apart from their libertarian free response to the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 375–97. Quotations from 376, 377, and 379.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 376, 378.

<sup>24</sup>In his chapter titled “Reprobation,” James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 358, mentions “the decree to reject some.” Boyce clarifies, “This is involved in the doctrine of election. The choice of some and not of the whole, involves the non-election and thus the rejection of others.” Similarly, Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 267, writes: “In short, the doctrine of election states that—before the foundation of the world—God chose certain individuals to salvation and ordained the means by which they are saved.” And John Piper, *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 47, writes, “God deemed it wise and good to elect unconditionally some to salvation and not others.” According to Boyce, Nettles, and Piper, those who will spend eternity apart from God will do so because God did not choose for them to be saved.

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, Synod of Dort, “Election and Reprobation,” Article 15: “. . . not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree.”

<sup>26</sup>For examples of non-Reformed interpretations of biblical texts on election, see William Lane Craig, “Calvinism vs. Molinism: Paul Helm & William Lane Craig,” *Journal of Baptist Theology & Ministry* 11.1 (Spring 2014): 74, who says, “The primary sense of election is corporate. God has called out a people to Himself and then, if you want to be a member of that elect body, you need to freely choose.” [http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM\\_11-1\\_Spring\\_2014.pdf](http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_11-1_Spring_2014.pdf). See also William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 267, who writes, “God has chosen a people in Christ, but individuals must decide whether or not to accept God’s salvation and so enter that body



It is not clear how those who affirm that God desires to save only some people could also affirm that the gospel is for all people. In what way is the gospel for those people God does not desire to save?

## Does God Have Two Wills About the Salvation of All People?

Certain theologians teach that God has two wills regarding the salvation of all people.

Why would they affirm such a view? After arguing from the Scriptures that an individual can reject God's will for his life, Forster and Marston offer this explanation for the two wills scheme: "Some Christian writers seem to have been unable to accept this (that an individual can reject God's will for his life), and have therefore found themselves facing a difficult problem. If, as they believe, everything that happens is God's will, then the unrepentance and perishing of the wicked must also be God's will. Yet God himself says it is *not* his will—so how can they reconcile this?"<sup>27</sup> Thus, the two wills view is born.

Some teach that God's revealed will is revealed in the Scriptures, but His secret (or decretive) will is hidden from us. Calvin's commentary on Romans refers to the two wills of God as the signified will and the effectual will.<sup>28</sup> The Synod of Dort (1618–19) distinguished between the revealed will of God and secret will of God.<sup>29</sup> Those who affirm this view teach that God desires all people to be saved, but His greater desire (or secret will) is to be glorified.<sup>30</sup> A Southern Baptist

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(Rom 10:13)." See also Herschel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word, 1977), 113, who explains, "Paul's great passage on election is found in Ephesians 1:3–14. Simply stated, before the foundation of the world God elected a plan of salvation and a people to propagate that plan." Also, see his *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 66–67, where Hobbs calls Eph 1:3–13 "Paul's most complete treatment of election." He explains: "'Predestinated' translates a verb meaning to mark out the boundaries beforehand (see v. 11). But note also that God has chosen 'in him.' Thus God's election was in Christ. And he marked out the boundaries of salvation in love, not by an arbitrary choice." Hobbs notes the prominence of the phrase "in Christ" in the passage and concludes, "He elected that all who are 'in Christ' shall be saved. 'In Christ' is the boundary that God marked out beforehand, like building a fence around a field." Also, "Man is free to choose whether or not he will be in Christ."

<sup>27</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1974), 32, emphasis in the original.

<sup>28</sup>Footnote identified as "Bishop Sanderson's Sermons" in John Calvin, *Commentary of the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Francis Sibon (London: Seeley and Sons, 1834), 389, emphasis in the original: "It is true, God would not man should perish, as touching his *signified will*, for he offered unto man a law, promises, threatenings, and counsels, which things, if he had embraced, he had surely lived. But, if we have respect unto that *mighty and effectual will*, doubtless we cannot deny, but God would have men to perish."

<sup>29</sup>Lee Gatiss, "The Synod of Dort and Definite Atonement," *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 162.

<sup>30</sup>John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Schreiner and Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 107–24.

professor presupposes the two wills scheme while exegeting certain biblical texts. He writes, “We have seen in this chapter that we must distinguish between God’s desired will (his desire for all to be saved) and his decretive will (his determination that only some will be saved).”<sup>31</sup>

A Southern Baptist leader explains,

Does God will for all people to be saved? I believe Scripture speaks to His will in that way in different ways. So, what I mean by that is when we see Scripture talk about God’s will, we see at least two senses: what He declares in His Word and what He decrees in the world.

He cites examples of the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers and the crucifixion of Christ, then continues,

Does God will for all people to be saved? Yes and no. Yes, absolutely in the sense that 2 Peter 3:9 (says) He desires the salvation of all people. There is no question God loves the whole world. John 3:16 (says) He loves the whole world. He desires all would come to repentance. He is patient toward that end. At the same time, not everybody is saved—which we all agree on. No one is a Universalist here. What He decrees in the world is not out of His control.<sup>32</sup>

These theologians claim that God has two wills regarding the salvation of all people. One will is to save all people and the other will—whether it is called secret or decretive—is to save only some people.

## Concerns About the Secret and Revealed Wills View

This view that God has both a *secret* will and a *revealed* will is flawed in two ways. First, these wills affirm contradictory claims. Second, there is no explicit biblical basis for affirming the existence of a will of God which is *not revealed* in the Bible.<sup>33</sup> The implications for the present topic are: God says He wants to save all people, but secretly He wants to save only some people.

Also, this secret/revealed will view undermines any confidence we can have in the truthfulness and authority of the Bible. What if we applied this method of dividing God’s will to other teachings of the Bible? Consider, for example, the return of Christ. Would we say that God’s

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<sup>31</sup>Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” 397.

<sup>32</sup>David Platt, “Salvation and the Mission of God: A Panel Discussion with Ed Stetzer, Frank Page, Trevin Wax, and David Platt,” <http://s3.amazonaws.com/TheExchange/SBC+calvinism+panel.mp3>.

<sup>33</sup>Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 33, ask: “But is there, in fact, the slightest basis in Scriptural language for distinguishing in this manner between a signified and an effectual will? We can discover nothing in Scripture which shows that God has an effectual or any other kind of will that men should stay unrepentant and so perish. If one is prepared to abandon any presupposition that God’s will is always done, and accept the simple Bible teaching that a man perishes because he rejects God’s plan for him and does not do the Father’s will, then the whole elaborate apparatus of signified and effectual wills becomes unnecessary.”



revealed will is that Christ will return but His secret will is that Christ will not return? We would consider a simultaneous affirmation of these contradictory claims to be absurd, because we can only know about God's will on a matter what He has revealed in the Bible. Nevertheless, some affirm this secret (or decretive) will, which contradicts clear statements in Scripture that God desires all people to be saved.

Ken Keathley raises six concerns about this revealed/secret distinction. Below are three of them:<sup>34</sup>

"Christ manifests the revealed will of God, but the revealed will is not always done because it is supplanted by God's secret will which lies hidden in the Father. This leads to the disturbing conclusion that Jesus does not present God as He really is."

"It seems to make the preacher appear to be hypocritical . . . who preaches the revealed will while quietly adhering to a hidden will."

"The question is not, 'Why are the lost lost?' but 'Why aren't the lost saved?' The nasty, awful, 'deep-dark-dirty-little secret' of Calvinism is that it teaches there is one and only one answer to the second question, and it is that God does not want them to be saved."<sup>35</sup>

## Does God Extend a Special Call to be Saved to Only Some People?

Some Christians affirm that God extends by His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel two types of calls. One is known as a general, or outward, call. The other is known as an inward, effectual, or special call. Some teach that in order for a person to be saved, it is not enough for that person to hear the gospel. All people who hear the gospel receive the outward call of God. In this view, a person can be saved only if God also extends a special call—and God does not offer that special call to all people.

Consider this affirmation of two calls by a Southern Baptist leader: "Faith comes by hearing; it doesn't come by any other means. Now, just to clarify, we are not talking about merely the auditory experience of hearing the gospel—the outward call. We know that salvation comes to those who also receive the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit—the inward call."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, as a

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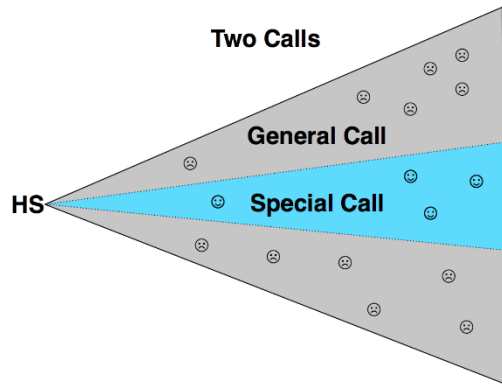
<sup>34</sup>Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 54–58.

<sup>35</sup>As an aside: It is possible to affirm two wills in God without those wills being these contradictory, hidden/revealed wills. Ken Keathley and Tom Oden, building on Aquinas, suggest that the will of God is antecedent and consequent. See Tom Oden, *The Transforming Power of God's Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993). God antecedently (lit., "going before") wills all people to be saved; God consequently (following as a result) wills that all people who do not repent and believe in Jesus will be condemned. So, the problem is not an affirmation of two wills, but an affirmation of two wills that are contradictory, such as the supposed revealed and secret wills of God.

<sup>36</sup>Mohler, "The Power of the Articulated Gospel," 23–24.

Southern Baptist professor explains, “the calling of God to be saved here is extended to only some and not to all.”<sup>37</sup>

Their view could be illustrated like this:



In this view, it is not enough to hear the gospel to be saved. The logic is that since not all people will be saved and the Bible refers to believers as “called,” only some people are saved because only some people receive a special call.<sup>37</sup> The people represented in the gray spectrum hear the gospel, but God does not desire to save them.

Some answer the question of whether God desires to save all or some people by teaching that God has two wills on the matter. In one will, which is revealed in Scripture, He desires to save all people. In another will, which is hidden and not revealed in Scripture, God does not desire to save all people. Many who affirm two wills in God also affirm that the gospel is for all people. But, in what way is the gospel for those people God does not, according to His secret will or decree, desire to save? Also, in what way could it be affirmed that the gospel is for those to whom God extends only a general call, by which they will hear the gospel but cannot and will not be saved? If only *some* people will receive an effectual call by God’s Spirit, then are believers supposed to take the message of the gospel to *all* people? The same person quoted above saying that salvation comes only to those who receive the effectual call also says, “We believe that we are to preach the gospel to all persons everywhere, in the firm and unshakable conviction that if they believe and confess, then they will be saved.”<sup>38</sup> So, the gospel is to be preached to all people,

<sup>37</sup>Ware supports this view by quoting 1 Tim 2:4, which states that God desires all to be saved, but he cites a verse from the next Bible book to make a contrary claim. Second Timothy 2:25, he explains, indicates that unless God grants a person repentance, the person cannot be saved. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 13, clarifies, “God wills that all be saved, but unless God wills to grant repentance they cannot be saved.” In reply to Ware’s interpretation, 2 Tim 2:25 refers to God granting “repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” But the people referenced in the verse are known only as those who opposed Christian instruction; it is not clear from the text whether they are unbelievers or believers.

<sup>38</sup>Mohler, “The Power of the Articulated Gospel,” 16.

although only *some* people will receive a special call from God by which they will be able to believe in Jesus.

A better explanation can be found in the view that God has one will regarding all people: that none should perish but all would come to repentance. One who affirms that God desires all people to be saved can also affirm—without inserting a secret will—that the gospel is for all people. Likewise, one who affirms that God desires all to be saved can affirm—without inserting a two calls view—that the gospel is for all people. According to this view, anyone who hears the gospel can be saved.

## Conclusion

A question might be raised at this point: If God loves all people, Christ died for all people, and God desires all people to be saved, then why are all people not saved? The Bible is clear that only some people will be saved (Matt 7:13–14; 23:33; John 5:24). Either those people will never hear the saving message of the gospel (Rom 10:14, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”) or they will hear the gospel but never repent and believe in Jesus. A commentator explains: “Undoubtedly God’s desire is that all might be saved (e.g., Acts 17:30–31; 22:15–16; 1 Tim 2:6), but because of human freedom or choice (‘whosoever,’ 3:16), all of humanity does not respond in believing acceptance of the Son (e.g., John 1:11–13; Rom 1:5; 10:16; 1 Tim 4:10).”<sup>39</sup>

The tragic reasons that some people die in their sin and are separated eternally from God is either they *never hear* the gospel or they *hear and reject* the gospel. It is not the case that some people are not saved because God, from eternity, did not love them and select them to be saved and because Christ did not die for them. Neither the Bible nor the *Baptist Faith and Message* teach such a view. Instead, God loves all people salvifically, and Christ died for all people, and God desires to save all people. Whether or not a person is born again is not decided by whether or not God desires that person to be saved. God desires all to be saved. The reason a person is born again is because that person has repented of his or her sin and believed in Jesus. Any person who hears the gospel can repent and believe in Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

A recent denominational consensus statement rules out a decretal interpretation of the doctrine of election. In 2013, nineteen Southern Baptist leaders released a non-binding report titled “Truth, Trust, and Testimony in a Time of Tension” (also called T5). The document provides a unifying statement. One of the points of agreement, according to the document, is: “We agree that God loves everyone and desires to save everyone, but we differ as to why only some are

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<sup>39</sup>Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, Vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 184.

<sup>40</sup>See Eric Hankins, “Savability: Southern Baptists’ Core Soteriological Conviction and Contribution,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9.2 (Fall 2012): 9–13, [http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM\\_9-2\\_Fall\\_2012.pdf](http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_9-2_Fall_2012.pdf).

ultimately saved.”<sup>41</sup> This statement is consistent with the answer “all people” to questions one and three of the present article. The T5 statement affirms that God loves all people and desires all people to be saved, which is consistent with the view that the gospel is for all people.

Theological systems undergird either the view that the gospel is for all people or that the gospel is only for some people. Any system which fails to affirm God’s salvific love for all people, Christ’s death for all people, and God’s desire to save all people is not an antinomy or a paradox or a mystery, but a conclusion that the gospel is for only some people rather than for all people. Instead, may God empower us to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ to all people because the gospel is for all people.

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<sup>41</sup>“Truth, Trust, and Testimony in a Time of Tension,” *SBCLife*, <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2013/06/sla5>.

# Does Regeneration Precede Faith?



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## Introduction

**M**ost Calvinists believe that regeneration precedes faith. Consider the following statements:

“A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved.”<sup>1</sup>

“A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated.”<sup>2</sup>

“We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again that we may believe.”<sup>3</sup>

“Faith is the evidence of the new birth, not the cause of it.”<sup>4</sup>

“. . . regeneration is the necessary precondition and efficient cause of faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

“the revived [regenerated] heart repents and trusts Christ in saving faith as the only source of justification.”<sup>6</sup>

Some Calvinists believe that regeneration can occur in infancy and remain inactive until faith years later.<sup>7</sup> Other Calvinists reject the notion that regeneration precedes faith.<sup>8</sup>

Why do most Calvinists believe regeneration precedes faith? There are two reasons. First, most Calvinists define total depravity to mean total inability in the sense that a person cannot

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<sup>1</sup>Lorraine Boettner, *Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 55.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 73.

<sup>4</sup>John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 63.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Reymond, *New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 708.

<sup>6</sup>*ESV Study Bible*, 2531.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, J. P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville, KY: Charles Dearing, 1882), 381; and with reference to Abraham Kuyper, see E. Smilde, *Een Eeuw van Strijd over Verbond en Doop* (Kampen: Kok, 1946), 105–6.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 264–65; and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 944–59.

exercise faith unless regenerated. Second, appeal is made to key Scripture passages such as John 1:12–13; 3:1–16; Eph. 2:1–10; and 1 John 5:1. We shall consider these reasons in a moment.

The phrase “regeneration precedes faith” is fraught with ambiguity. What does one mean by “regeneration”? What does one mean by “faith”? What does one mean by “precede” (logically or temporally)? Are we talking about mediate regeneration (by means of the Word of God) or immediate regeneration (no use of means, but the Holy Spirit acts directly and immediately on the person to effect regeneration)? Part of the confusion over this issue is a failure to carefully define terms and draw careful distinctions.

### Key Distinctions Concerning Regeneration and Faith

Most Calvinists say there are three things that must be distinguished when it comes to the issue of regeneration preceding faith. The first distinction is between temporal and logical order. A majority of Calvinists argue that temporally, regeneration and conversion are simultaneous events. But they often see a necessary logical order. For example, Sproul says:

“... when Reformed theology says regeneration precedes faith, it is speaking in terms of logical priority, not temporal priority. We cannot exercise saving faith until we have been regenerated, so we say faith is dependent on regeneration, not regeneration on faith.”<sup>9</sup>

John MacArthur states: “From the standpoint of reason, regeneration logically must initiate faith and repentance. But the saving transaction is a single, instantaneous event.”<sup>10</sup> I agree with the later part of this statement, but why must the former be the case? Notice MacArthur’s use of the terms “reason” and “logically.”

Concerning the phrase “when we were dead” in Eph 2:5, Sproul remarks: “Dead men do not cooperate with grace. Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith.”<sup>11</sup> But this only adds to the confusion. How can an effect be logically prior to its cause? How can an effect be temporally simultaneous with its cause? It would appear Sproul’s use of the word “first” indicates temporal priority. What sense does it make to say that something is “logically” prior but not “temporally” prior? Sproul is assuming his definition of what it means to be “dead.” Wayne Grudem states: “Yet there are several passages that tell us that this secret, hidden work of God in our spirits does in fact come before we respond to God in saving faith (though often it may be only seconds before we respond).”<sup>12</sup> If regeneration occurs “seconds before we respond in saving faith,” then there is both a logical and a temporal precedence for regeneration. Notice the contradiction between what MacArthur says and what Grudem says about the temporal aspects: things cannot be “instantaneous” and yet be separated even by “only seconds.”

<sup>9</sup>R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology: Understanding the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 195.

<sup>10</sup>John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 255.

<sup>11</sup>R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 105.

<sup>12</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 702.

A second distinction made by most Calvinists is between regeneration and conversion. Some suggest conversion follows regeneration. Salvation is by faith, but not regeneration, according to some Calvinists. Others argue that regeneration and conversion occur simultaneously, but causally regeneration is “prior” to conversion. For the Calvinist, one can only respond in repentance and faith after God has given new life. But again, it makes no sense to speak of a logical priority if one can only speak of faith as occurring after God gives new life.

For example, Hoekema states: “When Nicodemus and the jailer believed the gospel message, they came to realize that God had given them new life in regeneration. They became aware of their regeneration through its results.”<sup>13</sup> But at this point one must ask how this is not both temporal as well as causal? Hoekema attempts to explain the problem by using an illustration of a water faucet. The turning of the faucet handle immediately releases the flow of water. The two events are simultaneous but the turning of the handle was causally prior to the flow of water. But imagine for a moment that we have a see-through glass faucet. Can the water get past that internal mechanism which releases the water without the knob being turned? If the water cannot run first or simultaneously, then there is an actual chronology to the event and not just a logical order. As we will see below, salvation and regeneration appear to be inseparable in Scripture.

Millard Erickson points out how Calvinist John Murray, who strongly affirms regeneration precedes faith, appears to entangle himself in contradiction when he stated: “The faith of which we are now speaking is not the belief that we have been saved, but trust in Christ in order that we may be saved.”<sup>14</sup> If “trust in Christ” is necessary “in order that” one may be saved, how can it not be a logical necessity, if not also a temporal necessity? Salvation by faith cannot be reduced to mean only “justification by faith” because biblically salvation by faith entails more than justification.

Moderate Calvinist Bruce Demarest feels this pinch when he says:

Faith does not appear to be an effect of regeneration. Clear biblical texts suggest that the act of faith logically precedes regeneration. John 1:12–13—receiving Christ in faith results in the new birth. John 7:37–39—faith precedes the gift of the Spirit in regenerating power. 1 John 5:1. The notion that God regenerates prior to the sinner’s response of penitent faith (chronologically or logically) appears to be biblically unwarranted.<sup>15</sup>

A third distinction made by most Calvinists is that of initial regeneration and final or complete regeneration. In early Reformed theology, regeneration was viewed in a wider sense than it is often viewed by Calvinists today. Calvin himself used the term “regeneration” to describe one’s total renewal, including conversion. Thus for Calvin, there is no distinction between regeneration and

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<sup>13</sup>Anthony Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 111.

<sup>14</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 136. See M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 945.

<sup>15</sup>Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 264–65.



conversion. Later Reformed theologians began to distinguish between regeneration in a narrower sense and a broader sense. When they do this, there is usually no Scriptural evidence cited for this distinction. Where is the Scriptural justification for this distinction?<sup>16</sup>

Those who affirm such a distinction expand the definition of regeneration to include any work of God in the sinner's life before he believes the gospel. In initial regeneration, humans are totally passive. This would be "initial" regeneration.<sup>17</sup> Complete regeneration is said to occur at conversion where the first evidences of the implanted new life appears. But where is the Scriptural evidence for this distinction? This is an assertion Calvinists make based on theological deduction rather than Scripture.

Most Calvinists seem to argue that regeneration in the narrow, initial sense is brought about by the immediate act of the Holy Spirit, but regeneration in the broad sense is brought about mediately by the Word of God. By the "immediate" act of the Holy Spirit is meant the notion that God acts monergistically to bring about the new birth and hence man's faith cannot enter into the picture at this point.

It might be helpful to note the differing interpretations of the relationship between regeneration and effectual calling among Calvinists themselves. Here there are three distinct views. Some, such as Berkhof, distinguish the two and place calling after regeneration.<sup>18</sup> Others, such as John Murray, distinguish the two and place calling before regeneration.<sup>19</sup> Still others, like Hoekema, combine the two.<sup>20</sup> This illustrates once again the fact that Calvinism as a system is not monolithic and the fact that the Scripture cannot be sifted and shaken to yield a clear *ordo salutis*.

Demarest demarcates two broad approaches to the subject of regeneration among the Reformed. He speaks of "Presumptive and Promissory Regeneration" as advocated by those in Covenant Reformed theology, and "Regeneration a Work of God in Response to Faith" as advocated by those he calls "Reformed Evangelicals." In the system of Covenant Reformed theology, infants of believing parents are baptized not to become regenerated but because in some important sense they already possess the seeds of faith and regeneration. Baptism is a sign of the promise that the

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<sup>16</sup>Grudem informs us that there are "several" passages that indicate regeneration precedes saving faith, but only lists John 3:5 (a passage we will address below). He then proceeds to list other passages to support the notion that "our inability to come to Christ on our own, without an initial work of God within us. . .," is not possible, a point all non-Calvinists agree with. But these verses he cites don't teach that regeneration precedes faith. That is Grudem's deduction. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 702.

<sup>17</sup>See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 465–69; and Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 93–94.

<sup>18</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 470–72.

<sup>19</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 104; 119–20.

<sup>20</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 106.



covenantal grace of God is working in the elect, including infants. Virtually all reformed covenant theologians affirm the logical priority of regeneration preceding faith.<sup>21</sup>

There is more diversity on the issue among Reformed Evangelicals. Some view regeneration as logically prior to conversion while others place conversion as logically prior to regeneration. For example, A. H. Strong understood regeneration and conversion to be chronologically simultaneous, but logically, regeneration precedes conversion.<sup>22</sup> Millard Erickson views faith as preceding regeneration. According to him, temporally, conversion and regeneration occur simultaneously. Logically, faith is the condition of regeneration.<sup>23</sup> This is also Demarest's view:

In order to safeguard the truth that holistically depraved sinners come to Christ only by the divine initiative, many Reformed theologians place regeneration before conversion in the *ordo salutis*. The preceding Scripture texts indicate that effectual calling is conceptually distinct from regeneration. The power that brings sinners to Christ inheres in the Spirit's effectual call rather than in the new birth itself. That is, the Spirit's effectual call is a movement preliminary to regeneration; it stops short of effecting in believers a radical re-creation, whereby the latter participate in the divine nature. Logically speaking, the called according to God's purpose convert, and so are regenerated. Not only is this position biblical, but we avoid the difficulty of positing, logically at least, that regeneration precedes personal belief in the Gospel, repentance from sin, and wholehearted trust in Christ.<sup>24</sup>

From a Southern Baptist perspective, it is interesting to note that the *Baptist Faith and Message* treats regeneration neither as prior to or subsequent from conversion. Rather, it treats regeneration and conversion as concomitant realities of the beginning of salvation. Separating the broad biblical concept of salvation into the four categories of regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification, Article 4 treats regeneration and conversion as part of one event. Regeneration is "a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." What is the antecedent of "which"? Most likely it is "conviction of sin," the nearest phrase. Regeneration does not precede conversion and vice versa.

The Scripture itself does not set forth a clear *ordo salutis* ("order of salvation") with respect to all of the terms that are used to describe salvation. Thus, speculating an *ordo salutis* is always problematic and should be avoided. The first generation of reformers refused to speculate in this area and even warned about such speculation. Later generations of the Reformed showed a willingness to seek, in the name of systematic theology, to pull back the curtain on that which God has not chosen to reveal in Scripture. As Malcolm Yarnell once said to me, "If one deigns to speak of a logical order from eternity apart from divine revelation, then one speaks with both ignorance and arrogance."

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<sup>21</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 285–87; 289–91.

<sup>22</sup>A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1889), 793.

<sup>23</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 944–47.

<sup>24</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 227.

## Key Scripture Passages on the Relationship Between Regeneration and Faith

Exegesis must always precede systematic theology . . . logically and temporally! Can the notion of regeneration prior to faith be demonstrated exegetically?

### John 1:12–13

In John 1:12–13, the use of the aorist tense verb translated “were born” indicates a past event, and often the inference is drawn that the act of the new birth precedes the act of believing. However, nothing in the grammar or syntax mandates such an interpretation. The verb is passive in voice, indicating that the act of being “born of God” was initiated by God and the one being “born” is the recipient of God’s act. However, one should not conclude that this excludes any participation by man. Nothing in the Greek of the text permits us to draw that inference. Finally, nothing is said that would indicate that being born of God was an act of man’s self-determination or man’s independent free will. None of us believes that “man’s self-determination” has anything to do with our salvation. None of us believes in any free will that is “independent” of God’s sovereignty. Free will does not vitiate God’s sovereignty nor does it eliminate the absolute necessity of God’s grace acting first on man before man can respond to God in faith. Why were the people in John 1:11 not given the right to be adopted? Was it because they weren’t regenerated? No, it was because they had not received Christ. Verse 12 gives the conditions for adoption: receiving Christ and believing on his name.<sup>25</sup>

As even many Calvinist commentators point out with respect to John 1:12–13, there is nothing in this passage that speaks to a Calvinist *ordo salutis*.<sup>26</sup> It is not exegetically possible to find “regeneration before faith” in John 1:12–13, temporally or logically.<sup>27</sup>

### John 3:1–16

Appeal is often made to this passage to argue the case for regeneration preceding faith. All Christians agree that regeneration is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as verses 5–8 indicate. This sovereign work is required for salvation to occur, as verse 3 indicates. Every person is depen-

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<sup>25</sup>See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 164. Barrett states with respect to verse 13: “This birth is conditional upon receiving Christ and believing on his name.”

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 126; Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 39.

<sup>27</sup>See Brian J. Abasciano, “Does Regeneration Precede Faith? The Use of 1 John 5:1 as a Proof Text,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 84.4 (2012): 318–20.

dent upon God for salvation. Salvation is truly a divine work of grace, from beginning to end. Without regeneration, there is no salvation.

Nicodemus was confused by this and queried Jesus for further information. Jesus proceeded to speak to him about faith. Faith is required for salvation. No one is saved apart from faith. John 3:16–18 states that the only way to escape final judgment is to believe in Christ. Without faith, there is no salvation.

Notice that the phrase “see life” in verse 3 is equivalent to “enter the kingdom” in verse 5. This sense of “see” is evident also in John 3:36 and 8:51. The point is one must be born again to participate in the life of the kingdom, not that the new birth must precede faith. Salvation requires a response of people known as faith and a work of God known as regeneration. In John 3, Jesus did not treat these as part of an order of salvation, but as descriptive of a single event in a person’s life.<sup>28</sup>

Regeneration and conversion (which includes faith and repentance) are two different ways to speak of what is required for salvation. One emphasizes divine action; the other emphasizes human action. This passage does not indicate that regeneration is prior to faith, temporally or logically.

## 1 John 5:1

First John 5:1 states: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . .”<sup>29</sup> “Whoever believes” is a present tense participle. “Born” is a perfect tense verb. Some Calvinists suggest the perfect tense indicates completed past action with continuing results and draw the conclusion that faith is the result of being born again. The argument is that the verb “born” is in the perfect tense denoting an action that precedes the faith in the participle “whoever believes.”

This is an unwarranted and erroneous interpretation. Consider two examples. John 3:18 states: “He who believes is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already . . .” “He who believes” is a present participle. “Not condemned” is a perfect tense verb. Yet, here it is clear that the “believing” precedes “not being condemned.” Consider 1 John 5:10, “he who does not believe God has made Him a liar . . .” “He who does not believe” translates a present participle. “Has made” translates a perfect tense verb. Here again, the perfect tense verb, “making God a liar,” is a result of the present participle, “not believing,” not its cause.

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<sup>28</sup>As with John 1:12–13, many Calvinist commentators refrain from arguing that this passage teaches regeneration precedes faith—see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 185–206; Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, 117–28.

<sup>29</sup>For this section, I have relied heavily upon the excellent work of Brian Abasciano, “Does Regeneration Precede Faith? The Use of 1 John 5:21 as a Proof Text,” 307–22. Abasciano provides the best and most substantive Greek grammatical analysis of the issue with respect to 1 John 5:21 I have seen anywhere.

Many Calvinists argue that the use of “born” in the perfect tense produces a range of results expressed by present participles, and faith is one of them. However, exegesis always trumps systematic theology. Likewise, context and sentence structure trumps theology. Let’s compare John 3:18 with 1 John 5:1 to see if the use of “born” in the perfect tense produces the result of faith. Notice the order of events in John 3:18 is A then B. In 1 John 5:1 the order is B then A. Both make use of the perfect tense. The same grammatical structure that places being born of God before faith can also be used to describe justification as occurring after faith. See Rom 5:1. The grammar of the verses does not address an *ordo salutis*. The use of the perfect tense in Greek provides no support for the notion of regeneration preceding faith.<sup>30</sup> To suggest otherwise is to fail to distinguish between tense and aspect in Greek verbs and verbals.

Furthermore, with respect to 1 John 5:1, contextually the simple initial act of believing is not under consideration by John. John is talking about the ongoing life of faith as a believer. Obviously, the new birth precedes the ongoing life of faith. But that is something altogether different from saying the new birth precedes the initial act of faith. John’s use of “born” nowhere precludes the possibility of faith preceding regeneration. One may argue for regeneration preceding faith, but one cannot argue against faith preceding regeneration. The most that can be said from the Greek present participle and perfect tense verb combination is that the actions are contemporaneous.

The broader context of John’s writings indicate he would not teach that regeneration precedes faith and elsewhere teach that faith is a condition for life as he does in John 20:31. This precludes the possibility of regeneration preceding faith.

## Ephesians 2:1–10

Part of what is driving the “regeneration precedes faith” issue is a flawed anthropology drawn partly from Ephesians 2. With respect to Eph 2:1–10, when Paul speaks of the unregenerate as being “dead in sins” there is no question that “dead” is being used metaphorically. In Scripture, “death” is often used metaphorically to express alienation from God and “life” is used to express union with God via salvation.<sup>31</sup> This death is “on account of” or “with respect to” our sins (notice the nouns are in the dative and there is no preposition in the Greek text). Many Calvinists suggest that this passage either 1) *overtly* teaches human inability (usually moral inability) in the sense of “one cannot because they will not,” affirming the Edwardsian distinction between natural and moral inability of sinners to respond to the gospel; or 2) *implies* human inability to respond to the gospel.<sup>32</sup> There are other biblical figures of speech used to connote depravity which do not

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<sup>30</sup>A point well-made by Dan Musick in his post on this subject at <http://danmusicktheology.com/faith-precedes-regeneration/>. Musick examines several texts to which Calvinists appeal in an effort to support the notion of regeneration preceding faith.

<sup>31</sup>See Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 85. Aquinas’ *Commentary on Ephesians* is available at <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/Eph2.htm#1>. See also Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 155–63.

<sup>32</sup>John Eadie, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 121, argues that “dead” implies moral in-

indicate or imply total inability. Calvinists assume their definition of spiritual death is correct and then superimpose it on the word “dead” in Ephesians 2. Notice the separation motif in Eph 2:12, 13, 19, 4:18. Col 2:12–13 indicates even though unbelievers are spiritually dead, they can still exercise faith in God. Spiritual death means separation from God, not a total destruction of all ability to hear and respond to God.<sup>33</sup>

Consider Romans 6:1–11. The phrase “died to sin” occurs three times (vv. 2, 10, 11). Twice it refers to the condition of believers (vv. 2, 11), but in verse 10 the phrase refers to Jesus. Paul personifies sin as a tyrant, a dictator, who attempts to rule over believers. This phrase is Pauline shorthand for “died to sin’s authority.” The two usual interpretations given to Rom 6:6 specifically and the entire passage generally follow an errant trajectory that leads to the debate between the eradicationists (who argue that our sin nature is eradicated at conversion) and the counteractionists (who argue that our sin nature must be counteracted with the divine nature indwelling believers). In the context of Rom 6, to be “dead to sin” does not have anything to do with one’s sin nature. Both the eradicationists and the counteractionists are wrong. What has been changed at conversion that causes believers to be “dead to sin” is not their sin nature, but their *relationship* to sin. Sin no longer has authority over the Christian. Because of what Christ has done on the cross and our union with Him, we are now dead to sin’s authority. But our “deadness” does not preclude our ability to choose to sin as believers, as Rom 6:12–14 makes perfectly clear.

Now the point is this: the metaphorical concept of “dead” in Romans 6 simply cannot be understood to mean total inability. To counter that the context of Romans 6 is about the life of the believer while the context of Eph 2:1 is the state of the unbeliever changes nothing. The point still remains: the metaphorical use of “dead” in Scripture simply does not inculcate all the nuances that a literal use of “dead” conveys.

Part of what it means to be “dead” is to be unbelieving. How can one have a new heart (regeneration) apart from faith? To be “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) need not be understood that the unsaved are so depraved that they have no capacity to understand and/or respond to God. After all, Eph 2:8–9 does state that their salvation is “through faith.” One might argue, as many Calvinists do, that the faith in Eph 2:8–9 is given by God prior to or concomitant with salvation understood as conversion, but here also this exegetical approach runs into problems. It faces a grammatical problem because “faith” is a feminine noun in Greek and “this” is neuter. This makes it next to impossible that “faith” is the antecedent of “this.” It also faces a syntactical problem because three compliments follow the “this”: 1) not of yourselves, 2) God’s gift, and 3) not of works. As some have pointed out, to connect faith with the first two in some sense is perhaps possible, but not with the third. Otherwise, one winds up with redundancy and tautology (the gift which God gave is a gift) since faith and works are already contrasted.

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ability, not natural inability, following the trajectory of Jonathan Edwards.

<sup>33</sup>See Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), 63.

Better, as most exegetes take Eph 2:8–9, is to construe “this” with the entire preceding clause or sentence (2:1–7).

Some Calvinists argue that regeneration logically precedes faith and that faith is a part of conversion, but not a part of the initial act of regeneration. In this approach, faith is a part of the *effects* of regeneration, not the *condition* for regeneration. However, the Scripture is replete with passages making faith the condition for regeneration, not the result or effect of regeneration. The will to believe in Christ is the free decision of a sinner, but it is a decision that cannot be made without the prior tandem work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

According to the Bible, the unsaved who are spiritually dead have the ability to:

Act in accordance with conscience (Gen 3:7)

Hear God (Gen 3:10–13)

Respond to God (Gen 3:10–13)<sup>34</sup>

Repent of sins (Luke 15:18–19)<sup>35</sup>

Seek God (John 3)

Fear God (Acts 10:2)

Pray to God (Acts 10:2)<sup>36</sup>

Had prayers and alms recognized by God (Acts 10:4, 31)

Know the truth about God (Rom 1:18–20)

Perceive God’s invisible attributes (Rom 1:18–20)

But some Calvinists point out that in Ephesians 2, faith does not occur until verse 8, but the first work of God to make us alive is verse 5. Hence regeneration precedes faith. Not so fast! There are two problems with this. First, does the faith of verse 8 follow verse 5? Does faith follow our seating in heavenly places in verse 6? Does faith follow our future glorification in verse 7? Of course it does not. Second, the context for the perfect tense of verb suggests a broader definition which includes regeneration. If regeneration is a part of salvation and if faith logically precedes salvation, it also logically precedes regeneration.

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<sup>34</sup>Adam and Eve died spiritually when they ate the fruit but they were still capable of hearing from God and responding to God.

<sup>35</sup>The prodigal son, in a state of deadness (Luke 15:32) still recognized his sin and returned to the father.

<sup>36</sup>Both Nicodemus and Cornelius were “seeking” God before their regeneration. But if they are dead in their sins, how can this be?



One can see the absurdity of Shedd's attempt to defend regeneration preceding faith in the trenchant comments of Roy Aldrich:

For example, Shedd says:

'The Calvinist maintains that faith is wholly from God, being one of the effects of regeneration.' This results in a strange plan of salvation. Because the sinner cannot believe, he is instructed to perform the following duties: 1. Read and hear the divine Word. 2. Give serious application of the mind to the truth. 3. Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration. Thus an unscriptural doctrine of total depravity leads to an unscriptural and inconsistent plan of salvation. Doubtless the sinner is 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph 2:1b). If this means that regeneration must precede faith, then it must also mean that regeneration must precede all three of the pious duties Shedd outlines for the lost. A doctrine of total depravity that excludes the possibility of faith must also exclude the possibilities of 'hearing the word,' 'giving serious application to divine truth,' and 'praying for the Holy Spirit for conviction and regeneration.' The extreme Calvinist deals with a lively spiritual corpse after all. If the corpse has enough vitality to read the Word, and heed the message, and pray for conviction, perhaps it can also believe.<sup>37</sup>

Calvinists sometimes miss what John Calvin himself said about this text: "[Paul] does not mean that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God."<sup>38</sup> The Greek scholar A.T. Robertson points out that in the Greek, "'Grace' is God's part, 'faith' ours. And *that* (*kai touto*) [is] neuter [in gender], not feminine (*taute*), and so refers not to *pistis* [*pisteos*—'faith,' feminine] or to *charis* [*charity*—'grace,' feminine also], but to the act of being saved by grace [*sesosmenoi*] conditioned on faith on our part."<sup>39</sup>

Man cannot exercise saving faith on his own apart from enabling grace. But the very nature of faith itself means one can do otherwise than believe. It is not true that man's free will unassisted by enabling grace is sufficient to believe. To accuse non-Calvinists of this is a straw man. The question is whether God sovereignly chose to create humanity with the ability to exercise faith and whether God restores that ability by enabling grace for all apart from selective regeneration.<sup>40</sup>

Philosophically, a "principal" cause is an efficient cause which produces an effect by virtue of its own power. An "instrumental" cause is an efficient cause which produces an effect by virtue of

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<sup>37</sup>Roy Aldrich, "The Gift of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 122 (July 1965), 248. See also W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 2:512–13.

<sup>38</sup>John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, in Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ed. David Torrance and Thomas Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; 1996), 145.

<sup>39</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 525.

<sup>40</sup>See the discussion in Ronnie Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist* (Bloomington, IL: Cross-Books, 2012), 55.



the power of another cause.<sup>41</sup> When it comes to salvation in Eph 2:8–9, the Scripture indicates that grace is the principal cause and faith is the instrumental cause of salvation. One might illustrate this from the following syllogism:

1. “Through faith” is the instrumental cause of “made alive.”
2. An instrumental cause necessarily precedes its effect.
3. Therefore, faith precedes regeneration.

The only place an effect can precede its cause is in Star Trek.

Calvinists smuggle the notion of inability to believe into the meaning of “dead” in Eph 2:1–3. They then interpret faith as a direct gift of God given only to the elect. Faith is indeed a gift of God but not in the sense that God only gave the gift to some. Faith is a gift because it affords man the capacity to believe, the possibility to believe, the content of belief, the persuasion of truth, and the enabling to believe.<sup>42</sup> The theological contention “faith is a gift of God” is not coextensive with the grammatical contention “faith” is the antecedent of “this” in Eph 2:8–9. The latter would prove the former, but the theological point does not depend only on the grammatical line of evidence. Any understanding of the grammar and syntax admits the possibility that faith is a gift; at issue is whether the grammar here proves or even addresses it.<sup>43</sup>

Wallace, in his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, provides a summary of the views on the connection between grace and faith in Eph 2:8–9:

1. Grace as antecedent
2. Faith as antecedent
3. Adverbial rendering without an antecedent – “and at that; and especially”
4. Grace by faith Salvation as conceptual antecedent<sup>44</sup>

Paul’s repetition of “by grace you are saved” makes the antecedent clear. It is a summary of his main thought in 2:1–7. He reintroduces this clause at the beginning of v. 8 by means of the Greek conjunction *gar*, translated “for.”

In conclusion with respect to Eph 2:1–10, one enters into regeneration through the doorway of faith—not the reverse. The issue boils down to what one believes “faith” is and how it is exercised

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<sup>41</sup>Boris Hennig, “The Four Causes,” *Journal of Philosophy* 106.3 (2009): 137–60.

<sup>42</sup>Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will—Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 167.

<sup>43</sup>See the excellent discussion of this issue in Timothy Nichols, “Dead Man’s Faith: Spiritual Death, Faith, and Regeneration in Ephesians 2:1–10” (ThM thesis, Chafer Theological Seminary, 2004), 76.

<sup>44</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996): 334–35.

by the human subject. If the human will is not somehow actively involved from beginning to end in the activity of faith, then man is a mere inactive object when he is regenerated. This is what some Calvinists in fact affirm. Furthermore, faith is non-meritorious. Salvation by faith does not stand in contradiction to salvation by grace. The Calvinist seems to be saying: “if by faith (not given directly by God), then by works and not by grace.” The Scriptures teach: “by faith, not by works, but by grace.” As Rom 4:16 states: “It is of faith that it might be according to grace.” Faith is the condition for receiving salvation, not the ground for it. The atonement of Christ on the cross is the ground for salvation. Therefore the exercise of faith on the part of the sinner does not logically entail either: 1) faith is a work, or 2) faith is meritorious.

If a man were regenerated before faith, at the point of regeneration he would be a regenerated unbeliever. If a man believes and is not regenerated he would be a believing unregenerate. When viewed chronologically, it is difficult to find a nanosecond of a difference between faith and regeneration. Regeneration as an act of God on the human soul occurs in the nanosecond one believes. The notion of “regeneration before faith,” temporally and/or logically, is a flawed concept, as some Calvinists have themselves argued.<sup>45</sup> At the very least, faith is logically antecedent to regeneration.

### **Passages in the Bible which Indicate Faith Logically Precedes Regeneration<sup>46</sup>**

L. S. Chafer notes that there are about 115 passages that condition salvation on believing alone, and about 35 that condition it simply on faith.<sup>47</sup> Consider the following out of many that could be presented:<sup>48</sup>

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .” (Acts 16:30–31)

If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation. (Rom 10:9–10)

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom 10:13)

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<sup>45</sup>See, for example, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 944–59; Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 264–65; and Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 274–81. See the excellent discussion of this by non-Calvinist Steve Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, eds. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 134–40.

<sup>46</sup>Faith and regeneration, for practical purposes, may be considered to be essentially simultaneous when viewed chronologically.

<sup>47</sup>L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1949), 7:273–74.

<sup>48</sup>Texts are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

So then faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ. (Rom 10:17)

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in Him when you believed—were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (Eph 1:13)<sup>49</sup>

## Problematic Issues

1. If we say regeneration precedes faith, then what about the issue of understanding the gospel? Are we regenerated and given faith without understanding the gospel? How can we believe without knowing what we believe in? God saves (regenerates) those who believe. He does not cause them to believe after already having been regenerated.

2. If we say regeneration precedes faith, then what is the role of the Word of God in regeneration? The preparatory work on God's part necessary for anyone to be saved is found in God's call through the preaching of the gospel which involves either: 1) some concept of enabling grace, or 2) the notion of a sufficient calling. If regeneration precedes faith, then what of Rom 10:17 ("Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.")?

3. The Calvinist suggests that regeneration precedes faith because a sinner cannot have faith apart from regeneration. This suggests that the Spirit's conviction, revelation of truth about Christ, and the Word itself are not powerful enough to enable a faith response. What about the Spirit convicting the world of sin and judgment? Whenever the Word of God is preached, the Spirit is at work.

4. If faith is not a work (meritorious) *after* regeneration, why is it a work *before* regeneration? It is still man's faith either way. Faith is never a work in Scripture. In John 6:29, Jesus states, "This is the work of God, that you believe." John 12:36 states that "while you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light." Notice here that one becomes a son of light after one believes.

5. According to Calvinists, the external call of the gospel can be rejected but it cannot be accepted by the non-elect, and the effectual call cannot be rejected but it must be accepted by the elect. But this is nowhere stated in Scripture. It would be better to speak about the preaching of the gospel as a "sufficient" call. God's sufficient call brings people to a place where they can make a choice. When they believe, God's sufficient call becomes God's effectual call. "The efficacious call is the consummation of salvation for all who believe rather than the initiation in order for some to believe."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>The order here is clearly, first, hearing the word of truth, believing, and then being sealed. There is no evidence that the sealing of the Holy Spirit or regeneration precedes faith.

<sup>50</sup>Ronnie Rogers, *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist*, 72.

6. There is a difference in saying that faith is forced upon a person against his will and that regeneration is forced on a person either apart from or against his will. Calvinism denies the former but it appears must affirm the latter. The elect are regenerated by God in contradiction to their fallen nature and apart from their will. Once regenerated, the person has no more option not to believe than he had not to be regenerated. He had no choice in being regenerated and after regeneration has no choice not to exercise faith.

Spurgeon said that Arminianism marries Christ to a bride he did not choose.<sup>51</sup> I say Calvinism marries Christ in a shotgun wedding to a bride who did not have the choice to turn down his proposal. As Ken Keathley rightly notes: “God’s call may not be irresistible, but it is unavoidable (Acts 17:30–31).”<sup>52</sup>

## Historical Considerations

Prior to the Reformation, it seems no one in church history advocated regeneration preceding faith, including Augustine,<sup>53</sup> the Council of Orange,<sup>54</sup> and Aquinas.<sup>55</sup> Most sixteenth century reformers did not affirm the concept of regeneration preceding faith, including Luther,<sup>56</sup> Calvin,<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Charles Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 6 (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, 1981), 305.

<sup>52</sup>Ken Keathley, “The Doctrine of Salvation,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 727.

<sup>53</sup>See Augustine’s sermon on John 6:60–72 in P. Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 reprint), 501–4.

<sup>54</sup>The Council of Orange in A.D. 529 condemned Semi-Pelagianism. In spite of the Council of Orange’s argument in favor of infant baptism, the Council also took the position that regeneration is a result of faith and not vice versa (see Canon 5).

<sup>55</sup>Aquinas argued that God provided prevenient grace for all and that all were capable of exercising faith. He did not affirm regeneration prior to faith. See Nicholas Healey, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 116.

<sup>56</sup>In Luther’s “Preface to the Letter of Paul to the Romans” he states: “Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God.” Luther, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954), xvii. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther affirms Paul as teaching that regeneration comes by means of faith where faith is prior to regeneration: “Faith in Christ regenerates us into the children of God” (Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), 144.

<sup>57</sup>Calvin himself did not affirm the notion that regeneration precedes faith. Calvin identified regeneration with repentance and, for him, repentance always included faith. See his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 512–15. In his comment on 1 Cor 13:13, Calvin states: “In fine, it is by faith that we are born again, that we become the sons of God – that we obtain eternal life, and that Christ dwells in us.” Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, ed. by T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 283. In Calvin’s Commentary on Ephesians 2:8–9, he states: “gift” is not restricted to faith alone. Paul is only repeating his earlier statement in other words. He does not mean that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or that we obtain it by the gift of God (145). In Calvin’s sermon on Eph 2:1–10 he stated: “Moreover,

and Beza.<sup>58</sup> In the seventeenth century, Canon III-12 of the Synod of Dort appears to support the concept of regeneration causing faith.<sup>59</sup> But even many Calvinists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rejected this notion, such as Jonathan Edwards,<sup>60</sup> and Spurgeon.<sup>61</sup> J. I. Packer notes “many seventeenth century Reformed theologians equated regeneration with effectual calling and conversion with regeneration.” Also, “Later Reformed theology has defined

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nothing with us but faith alone. . . . even so must faith get rid of all the pride we have in ourselves that we may receive whatever God offers us, so that the praise of it is reserved to him” (159–60). Likewise, Calvin notes: “Wherefore, to be brief, let us not well this word ‘faith’, so that the pleasures and ease of this world may not keep us back from lifting up our hearts to our God. And that is the very way to fasten our anchor in heaven” (160). These clear statements by Calvin may assist in interpreting his somewhat more ambiguous statement in his commentary on John 1:13:

Hence it follows, first, that faith does not proceed from ourselves, but is the fruit of spiritual regeneration; for the Evangelist affirms that no man can believe, unless he be begotten of God; and therefore faith is a heavenly gift. It follows, secondly, that faith is not bare or cold knowledge, since no man can believe who has not been renewed by the Spirit of God. . . . It may be thought that the Evangelist reverses the natural order by making regeneration to precede faith, whereas, on the contrary, it is an effect of faith, and therefore ought to be placed later. I reply, both statements perfectly agree; because by faith we receive the incorruptible seed (1 Peter 1:23) by which we are born again to a new and divine life (John Calvin, *Calvin Commentaries*, ed. by T. F. Torrance [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961], 18–19).

<sup>58</sup>Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva, likewise did not affirm the notion of regeneration preceding faith:

Now, the effects which Jesus Christ produces in us, when we have taken hold of Him by faith, are two. In the first place, there is the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives to our spirit that we are children of God, and enables us to cry with assurance, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). In the second place, we must understand that when we apply to ourselves Jesus Christ by faith, this is not by some silly and vain fancy and imagining, but really and in fact, though spiritually (Rom 6:14; 1 John 1:6; 2:5; 3:7). In the same way as the soul produces its effects when it is naturally united to the body, so, when, by faith, Jesus Christ dwells in us in a spiritual manner, His power produces there and reveals there His graces. These are described in Scripture by the words ‘regeneration’ and ‘sanctification’, and they make us new creatures with regard to the qualities that we can have (John 3:3; Eph 4:21–24). See <http://www.apuritansmind.com/justification/faith-justification-by-dr-theodore-beza/>.

<sup>59</sup>See [http://www.prca.org/cd\\_text3.html#a12](http://www.prca.org/cd_text3.html#a12). See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:592. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 518–42, provides a summary look at what early Reformed theologians and confessional statements said about regeneration, conversion, and faith.

<sup>60</sup>Jonathan Edwards understood the terms “regeneration” and “conversion” to refer to one simultaneous act of salvation. Though these and other biblical terms for salvation emphasize distinct concepts, for Edwards, they all appear to describe the one salvation experience. See, for example, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Tryon Edwards, 2:109–13. See also John Gerstner, who confirms this understanding of Edwards in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhatan, VA: Berea Publications/Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1993), 149.

<sup>61</sup>See, for example, Spurgeon’s sermon on James 1:18 on January 5, 1868 (Sermon #3275); his sermon “Warrant of Faith,” #531, p. 532; and his sermon “Faith Essential to Pleasing God,” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1889 reprint), 35:446.

regeneration more narrowly, as the implanting of the ‘seed’ from which faith and repentance spring (1 John 3:9) in the course of effectual calling.”<sup>62</sup>

One of the theological issues that is driving the regeneration precedes faith issue is the position of many Paedobaptists who deny the necessity of the use of the means of the Word or preaching in regeneration. The operative word here is “necessity.” These men don’t deny the use of means, but they do deny its necessity. One sees this expressed in the writings of W. G. T. Shedd and Berkhof, and more recently in the writings of Sproul. Shedd, Berkhof and Sproul attempt to justify their view of the regeneration of infant children of believing parents to whom the covenant blessings have been given. Obviously, if infants are in some sense regenerated, this must take place apart from the instrumentality of the Word of God and preaching.<sup>63</sup>

Many Reformed Baptists bought into this error as is evidenced by the anti-evangelism and anti-missionary stance of the “Primitive” or “Hardshell” Baptists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What is of interest here is that the Reformed Confession of Dort appears to deny the possibility of regeneration apart from the use of the means of the Word of God through preaching, but Westminster affirms that children of elect parents can be saved without hearing the gospel and that “other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” can be regenerated.<sup>64</sup> But even so, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* does not describe any work of the Holy Spirit prior to faith as “regeneration.” Even more interesting is the fact that the Baptist Second London Confession of 1689 (Article 10) does not affirm regeneration preceding faith and expressly insists that the new birth is effected by the instrumental cause of the Word of God coupled with the Spirit of God as the efficient cause.<sup>65</sup>

The great puritan Stephen Charnock wrote prodigiously on the subject of the use of the Word of God as an instrument of regeneration.<sup>66</sup> Charnock did not advocate regeneration preceding faith, and strongly affirmed “that the gospel is the instrument whereby God brings the soul forth in new birth.”

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<sup>62</sup>“Regeneration,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 925.

<sup>63</sup>Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:402. Shedd attributes the distinction between regeneration and conversion to Turretin in the seventeenth century (492–94), and Berkhof follows suit (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 470–76).

<sup>64</sup>See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:588–91 for the Canons of Dort, and 3:624–30 for the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.3.

<sup>65</sup>John Peck, in an article entitled “Baptists of the Mississippi Valley,” *The Christian Review*, LXX (October 1852): 486, spoke of how some Regular Baptists of Kentucky in the nineteenth century so overemphasized speculative notions such as regeneration preceding faith that it ultimately led “to a ruinous extent among the churches of the Mississippi Valley.”

<sup>66</sup>Stephen Charnock, *A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration*. This work can be accessed online at [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/charnock/instr\\_regen/files/instr\\_regen.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/charnock/instr_regen/files/instr_regen.html).



Daniel Fiske sums it up the best when he writes:

In regenerating men, God in some respects acts directly and immediately on the soul, and in some respects He acts in connection with and by means of the truth. He does not regenerate them by the truth alone, and he does not regenerate them without the truth. His mediate and His immediate influences cannot be distinguished by consciousness, nor can their respective spheres be accurately determined by reason.<sup>67</sup>

The historical record indicates that even early Southern Baptist Calvinist theologians were not in agreement on the issue of regeneration preceding faith. For example, observe the difference between James P. Boyce and John L. Dagg on the subject. Boyce states:

Regeneration precedes faith. Logically the enabling act of God must, in a creature, precede the act of the creature thus enabled. But this logical antecedence involves actual antecedence, or the best conceptions of our mind deceive us and are not reliable. For this logical antecedence exists only because the mind observes plainly a perceived dependence of the existence of the one on the other. But such dependence demands, if not causal, at least antecedent existence. Here it is only antecedent. . . . There is not only antecedence, but in some cases an appreciable interval. This must be true of all infants. There is no reason why it should not be true of some heathen.”<sup>68</sup>

By contrast, John L. Dagg states:

Faith is necessary to the Christian character; and must therefore precede regeneration, when this is understood in its widest sense. Even in the restricted sense, in which it denotes the beginning of the spiritual life, faith, in the sense in which James [2:17] uses the term, may precede.<sup>69</sup>

Boyce affirms both a logical and a temporal antecedence of regeneration before faith. Dagg asserts at the very least a logical antecedence of faith before regeneration, and probably a temporal antecedence as well.

## Conclusion

Three conclusions, then, are in order:

1. There is no Biblical text that connects faith and regeneration in a grammatical structure that prescribes an order that supports regeneration preceding faith. Nor is there any statement in Scripture which precludes faith preceding regeneration.
2. There are biblical texts connecting faith and regeneration that support faith preceding regeneration.
3. There are texts that would seem to preclude the possibility of regeneration preceding faith.

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<sup>67</sup>Daniel Fiske, “New England Theology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. XXII (July 1865): 577.

<sup>68</sup>James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 381.

<sup>69</sup>John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 279.



There is no Scripture anywhere that directly says regeneration precedes faith. That is a theological deduction made by some Calvinists that is driven more by their system than it is by Scripture. The Scripture says things like “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,” as Paul said to the Philippian jailor in Acts 16.

Many Reformed theologians have attempted to place regeneration before faith in an effort to safeguard the notion that totally depraved sinners cannot come to God by faith apart from divine initiative. As Demarest rightly notes, the power that brings sinners to salvation “inheres in the Spirit’s effectual call rather than in the new birth itself.” Also, “Logically speaking, the called according to God’s purposes convert, and so are regenerated. Not only is this position biblical, but we avoid the difficulty of positing, logically at least, that regeneration precedes personal belief in the Gospel, repentance from sin, and wholehearted trust in Christ.”<sup>70</sup>

Methodist theologian Thomas Oden gets the final word: “God’s love and grace are the originating causes of salvation. The atoning death of Christ is the meritorious cause. The Spirit of God is the efficient cause. The Word of God is the instrumental cause. Faith is the conditional cause. The glory of God is the final cause.”<sup>71</sup> Regeneration does not precede faith.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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<sup>70</sup>Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 227.

<sup>71</sup>Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 3:118.

# What Were the Early SBC Leaders' View of Salvation?: A View from the Mountains



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## Revival Fires

Unforgettable. Such is the description of the first time I walked into a Southern Baptist church. On a cool fall evening in the early 1980s, I was invited to the Stelzer Road Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, for their biannual revival. The evangelist for the protracted, week-long meeting was a country preacher from the mountains of Kentucky whose preaching and demeanor were typical of the time. A blend of thunderous passion with simple exposition, Brother Joe, as he was called, heralded an intensely personal message pointed directly at me. He seemed a bit eccentric to me at the time, especially by his attire. Driving an old green car that resembled a boat more than an automobile, Brother Joe filled the back seat of his vehicle with suits he would wear as the circuit-riding evangelist crisscrossed the country hundreds of days a year. But one thing remained the same—he always wore red socks representing the blood of Jesus.

The revival meetings were also characteristic of revival services which had taken place for more than two centuries in Baptist life. The congregation loved to sing and frequently spoke back to the preacher. Often, the preacher walked up and down the aisle during his sermon as he spoke to the flock. The climax of the service was the altar call, a time in which anyone inquiring about the Lord was welcome to do business with Him. God waited eagerly, the evangelist would say, to have a conversation with you regarding your everlasting soul. Quickly the steps to the pulpit turned into a place where sinners were introduced to Christ, and believers pleaded for the souls of men. It was there at that simple church through a simple country preacher where heaven met earth, and my soul was saved.

What I did not realize at the time was that I had walked into an era forgotten by most churches, which had institutionalized their meetings. For most Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians by the mid-twentieth century, revival meetings were eradicated and churches went back to normal. As I learned in seminary years later, church historians pointed to the Second Great Awakening, led by Charles Finney (1792–1875), as the progenitor of such revivals. But the more I studied Baptist history, the more I recognized that what I had experienced that night some thirty years ago was not the invention of Finney but was part of the heritage of the Sandy Creek movement.

The Sandy Creek movement began nearly forty years before Finney's birth. Its founder, Shubal Stearns, practiced innovative evangelism methods long before Finney.

One such revival meeting in 1760 demonstrates well how these Separatists used means to draw men and women to Christ:

At the close of the sermon, the minister would come down from the pulpit and while singing a suitable hymn would go around among the brethren shaking hands. The hymn being sung, he would then extend an invitation to such persons as felt themselves poor guilty sinners, and were anxiously inquiring the way of salvation, to come forward and kneel near the stand, or if they preferred, they could kneel at their seats, proffering to unite with them in prayer for their conversion. . . . After prayer, singing, and exhortation, prolonged according to circumstances, the congregation would be dismissed to meet again at night . . . for preaching or prayer meeting. They held afternoon or night meetings during the week. In these night meetings, there would occasionally be preaching, but generally they were only for prayer, praise, and exhortation, and direct personal conversation with those who might be concerned about their soul's salvation.<sup>1</sup>

In some of those evening services, the preacher would not even preach. He would simply inquire regarding the state of the listeners' souls. Can you imagine an entire service dedicated to people who are considering, like Cornelius, their own soul?

While preachers from the First Great Awakening such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield may not have given the equivalent of an altar call, Sandy Creek Baptists, to whom Southern Baptists owe much of their heritage, dedicated themselves to such personal invitations to Christ long before Finney's revivals perfected such altar calls. These revival meetings and altar calls have been in our bloodstream for two hundred and fifty years. However, it seems we are undergoing a spiritual transfusion today, with new, more refined blood replacing the old stream. But it is revival fires that not only can see souls saved but unify a convention struggling with its theological moorings. Perhaps we should take heed of the words of the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, B. H. Carroll (1843–1914), who pleaded that his students would preach Christ to all men, especially in a day of theological struggle:

It was a time of strong doctrine, and many Baptists were hyper-Calvinists in their views. But Leland himself tells us how one day, while preaching, 'his soul got into the gospel trade winds,' which so filled his spiritual sails that he forgot about election and reprobation, and so preached Christ to sinners that many accepted him as their Saviour and Lord. And, oh, I would to God that his people now, like old John Leland of long ago, would get into the gospel trade winds and bear away with flaming canvas the everlasting gospel to earth's remotest bounds!<sup>2</sup>

When revival comes, we will not be caught in examining theological minutiae but busy seeing souls saved and baptized.

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<sup>1</sup>William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), 56.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremiah Jeter, *Baptist Principles Reset*, ed. R. H. Pitt (Dallas: Standard Publishing, 1902), 314.

## Two Baptists, Three Opinions: A Chronology of Theological Struggle and Maturation (1740–1820)

Baptists in Colonial America were a small group, one that seemed to be insignificant compared to the size of other denominations like the Puritans/Congregationalists of New England or the Anglicans of the South.<sup>3</sup> Most influential among Baptists in the North were those of the newly formed Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA) in 1707. This association was well organized and well defined both in its theology and scope, adhering to the English Particular confession known as the Second London Confession (1689). With a strong Calvinistic confession of faith, the association set out to influence other Baptists, sending out missionaries like John Gano (1727–1804) to convince churches of the truths of Calvinism. Gano, who was raised Presbyterian and attended Princeton University, experienced a deeply personal conversion and eventually became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of the City of New York. An ardent supporter of the so-called “doctrines of grace,” Gano was famous for visiting General Baptist churches and using church polity to win the church over to Reformed doctrine. As historian W. Wiley Richards explains, “[He] would visit a General Baptist church, call it into business session, inquire about the conversion experience of the members, exclude the unregenerate, and reconstitute the purged membership into a Particular Baptist Church.”<sup>4</sup> In time, Baptist associations were also convinced to affirm a Reformed theology. Entire associations of churches adopted the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* include the following:

- Kentucky: Salem, Long Run, and Tates Creek
- North Carolina: Broad River and Big Ivy
- Tennessee: Holston
- Virginia: Kettocton<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, it seemed clear that the theological flavor of the day was born out of Particular Baptists in England.

However, a closer examination of early Baptist life, before the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, is far more complex than such a conclusion. First, even associations that adopted that the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* modified the document in its theological rigor. The Tates Creek Association, which adopted the Reformed confession in 1793, demanded such a document to be non-binding. They wrote:

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas L. Purvis, *Colonial America to 1763* (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 180. Purvis’s statistical research is unmatched.

<sup>4</sup>W. Wiley Richards, *Winds of Doctrines: The Origin and Development of Southern Baptist Theology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 12.

<sup>5</sup>J. H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists from 1789 to 1885* (Cincinnati: n.p., 1886), in William Dudley Nowlin, *Kentucky Baptist History 1770–1922* (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1992).

We agree to receive the Regular Baptist Confession of Faith; but to prevent it usurping a tyrannical power over the conscience of any, we do not mean that every person is to be bound to the strict observance of everything therein contained; yet that it holds forth the essential truths of the gospel, and the doctrine of Salvation by Jesus Christ, and free, unmerited grace alone, ought to be believed by every Christian, and maintained by every minister of the gospel. And that we do believe in these doctrines relative to the Trinity; the divinity of Christ; the sacred authority of the Scriptures; the universal depravity of human nature; the total inability of men to help themselves, without the aid of divine grace; the necessity of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

This association, while generally affirming much of Reformed doctrine, also affirmed that diversity on some issues must be accepted and that the confession could not be used as a “tyrannical power.” Additionally, the statement above is a far simpler statement than the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*. Finally, the statement completely avoids any discussion of election.

The Reformed definition of election was particularly troubling to those birthed out of a Sandy Creek (Separatist) heritage. Historian George Washington Paschal explains that another association that generally affirmed the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, the Broad River Association, demanded an acceptance of theological variety concerning election:

In the Broad River several of the leading Baptist ministers were ardent Calvinists and champions of the Doctrine of Election, and in general were Regular Baptists, accepting in full the Philadelphia Confession and Articles of Faith based upon it; on the other hand, the three churches that came to the French Broad from the Holston Association and their ministers had a Separate Baptist heritage, and like Shubal Stearns thought the New Testament a sufficient confession of faith, and like him, refused to accept Higher Calvinism and the Doctrine of Election, and were classed as Arminians and Free Willers. Probably, it was among the ministers and leaders rather than among the members generally that this difference was most pronounced, and it was less marked in some churches than in others. . . . All of the leading spirits were Calvinistic, but there were many minds that revolted at the sterner aspects of Calvinism. Men generally held to the idea of moral free agency.<sup>7</sup>

Like Broad River, the Yadkin Baptist Association, a Separate Baptist group in North Carolina, affirmed a confession after the *explicit denial* of particular election. The scope of the atonement was originally stated, “We believe in the doctrine of particular election by grace.” The minutes, preserved by the American Baptist Historical Society, plainly illustrate that the word “particular” was erased after discussion.<sup>8</sup> The Big Ivy Association, too, was greatly troubled by the Particular view of election and would only affirm the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* after the doctrine of election was removed. The acceptance of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* in 1829 came with this caveat: “16. None of the above-named articles shall be so construed as to hold with

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<sup>6</sup>Spencer, 2:89.

<sup>7</sup>George Washington Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh: The General Board North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1955), 2:426–27.

<sup>8</sup>John Sparks, *The Roots of Appalachian Christianity: The Life and Legacy of Elder Shubal Stearns* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 242.

Particular and Eternal Election and Reprobation, or so as to make God partial, either directly or indirectly, so as to injure any of the children of men.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the discussion above has not even taken into consideration those associations that affirmed confessions of faith other than the Calvinistic *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*. In 1785, the Elkhorn Association in Kentucky affirmed the First London Confession, a more moderately Calvinistic document, believing it contained “a system of the evangelical doctrines agreeable to the gospel of Christ, which we do heartily believe in and receive.”<sup>10</sup> In 1801, the Green River Association of Kentucky, which was accused by Regular Baptists of being Arminian, put together their own simple confession of faith. It states:

3. We believe in the fall of Adam, and the imputation of his sin to his posterity, the corruption of human nature, and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will ability. 4. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.<sup>11</sup>

In 1809, Jesse Mercer (1769–1841), the famed Calvinist of Georgia that founded the college that holds his name, presented the Second London/Charleston Confession, but the Hephzibah Baptist Association in Georgia rejected it, instead choosing not to adopt a confession.<sup>12</sup>

No wonder, then, why John Leland (1754–1841), the American Baptist minister who adamantly opposed slavery and stood for religious liberty, explained at the end of the eighteenth century:

I conclude that the eternal purposes of God and the freedom of the human will are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men is the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of souls, mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism.<sup>13</sup>

Nearly twenty years later, Leland composed a hymn that seems to invite sinners to pray what is now called a Sinner’s Prayer: “Sinners, hear your God and Saviour, Hear his gracious voice to-day; Turn from all your vain behaviour, O repent, return, and pray; Open now your hearts before him, Bid the Saviour welcome in, O receive and glad adore him, Take a full discharge from

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<sup>9</sup>Paschal, 2:432.

<sup>10</sup>Spencer, 2:9.

<sup>11</sup>C. P. Cawthorn & N. L. Warnell, *Pioneer Baptist Church Records of South-Central Kentucky and the Upper Cumberland of Tennessee 1799–1899* (Gallatin: Church History Research & Archives, 1985), 13.

<sup>12</sup>Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association* (Washington: n.p., 1838), 48–49. Mercer put together his own confession in 1793 that was adopted in associations across the South.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Land, “Congruent Election: Understanding Salvation from an ‘Eternal Now’ Perspective,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 46.

sin.”<sup>14</sup> Calvinism had risen to prominence through the Philadelphia Baptist Association and had gained an audience across much of the South. But by the end of the century, due to revivalistic beliefs, the confession was rejected at least in part. In its stead, Baptists in the nineteenth century embraced a simple Biblicism, one that was to be viewed through the lens of the Second Great Awakening and a new missionary movement in its infancy. And it would be that generation which would birth the people called Southern Baptists.

### **Transition and Tumult (1820–45): A Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation**

At the turn of the century, two movements arose that both tempered Calvinism as well as flamed the fires of evangelism: the rise of the modern missionary movement and the unification of the Regular and Separate Baptists. First, the modern missionary movement was born out of the hearts of Particular Baptists William Carey and Andrew Fuller. The latter published his work, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, in 1786, transitioning English Calvinism into a more missiological model. That was especially the case in 1801 when Fuller, after debating with a General Baptist, revised his book, proclaiming a general atonement and indefinite invitations. He writes,

If the atonement of Christ were considered as the literal payment of a debt—if the measure of his sufferings were according to the number of those for whom he died, and to the degree of their guilt . . . it might be inconsistent with the indefinite invitations. . . . But it would be equally inconsistent with the free forgiveness of sin, and with sinners being directed to apply for mercy as supplicants, rather than as claimants. . . . If the atonement of Christ excludes a part of mankind in the same sense as it excludes fallen angels, why is the gospel addressed to the one any more than the other? The message of wisdom is addressed to men, and not to devils. The former are invited to the gospel supper, but the latter are not. These facts afford proof that Christ, by his death, opened a door of hope to sinners of the human race as sinners; affording a ground for their being invited, without distinction, to believe and be saved.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, Fuller articulated that faith is not a gift from God, but the responsibility of man. He writes in *Gospel Worthy*, “If faith in Christ be the duty of the ungodly, it must of course follow that every sinner, whatever be his character, is completely warranted to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Fuller rejects Total Depravity as articulated by some of his contemporary High Calvinists. He states, “If by total Mr. B. means unable in every respect, I grant I do not think man is, in that sense, totally unable to believe in Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Fuller broadened the atonement and demanded the response of sinners.

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<sup>14</sup>John Leland, *The Writings of John Leland*, ed. L. F. Greene (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 323.

<sup>15</sup>Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, in *The Complete works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), 21–22.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 438.



Regardless of how to categorize Fuller, there is no question that he wore his theological struggles openly and his theological views developed. Baptists in America, themselves struggling with the theological definitions of predestination and election at the beginning of the nineteenth century, appreciated his transparency. Fuller's debate with Arminian Daniel Taylor, the General Baptist who saw revival ensue in his New Connexion group, was published for all to see. Fuller readily admitted that as a Particular Baptist, he could not answer the arguments of Taylor. Fuller states, "I tried to answer my opponent . . . but I could not. I found not merely his reasonings, but the Scriptures themselves, standing in my way."<sup>18</sup> Thus, Fuller modified his view from particular atonement to general atonement, as Peter Morden demonstrates in his dissertation, *Offering Christ to the World*:

Fuller both clarified and modified his theology of salvation between the years 1785 and 1801, years in which this theology was a crucial motor for change in the life of the Particular Baptist denomination. The most important change was his shift from a limited to a general view of the atonement during his dispute with the Evangelical Arminian Dan Taylor.<sup>19</sup>

The maturation of Fuller's faith would be borne out on Baptists in America as well. During the same time as Fuller's theological struggle, Baptists in America, attempting to unite into one movement, were working out their own theological maturation. Regular Baptists (Calvinists) argued, as one chronicler recollects, "Separates were not sufficiently explicit in their principle, having never published or sanctioned any confession faith; and that they kept within their communion many who were professed Arminians."<sup>20</sup> Separatists responded, "[It is] better to bear with some diversity of opinion in doctrines, than to break with men."<sup>21</sup>

In 1801, Regular and Separate Baptists in two associations in Kentucky joined together for the sake of the Gospel. Their terms of union demanded fidelity to "the infallible Word of God" and simple Biblicism. The plan of the newly formed United Baptists included eleven principles "that by nature we are fallen and depraved creatures" and "that the preaching [that] Christ tasted death for every man, shall be no bar to communion."<sup>22</sup> As Dr. W. Wiley Richards concludes: "In the Terms of Union adopted in 1801, the doctrines of election and extent of the atonement were omitted from the eleven brief articles. Concerning depravity, it makes the simple assertion

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<sup>18</sup>Andrew Fuller, *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth*, in *Fuller's Works*, II, 709–10, cited in David Allen, "Preaching for a Great Commission Resurgence" in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam Greenway (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

<sup>19</sup>Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*, in *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 8 (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK/Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 75–76.

<sup>20</sup>David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1813), 60–62.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Lumpkin, 146.

that humans are fallen and depraved creatures.”<sup>23</sup> Irresistible grace is nowhere to be found; only eternal security is stipulated clearly. Article 5 states: “the saints will finally persevere through grace to glory.”<sup>24</sup>

While unity among many Baptists occurred, there were still deep divisions between Separate Baptists, who mocked tenets of Calvinism such as unconditional election, and Regular Baptists, who excluded general atonement ministers from associations.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the one common denominator for missionary Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike was the protracted revival meetings, the means of converting the sinner. One historian writes:

This most important type of revival service for Baptists was the protracted meeting. This was a revival in which generally several ministers preached for an extended period. With preaching only once a month, church began to depend on the annual protracted meeting for revival, usually in August and September when the farmers had the most leisure, for spiritual rejuvenation and the gathering of converts. The annual revival became so important that many churches and pastors expected no conversions except in that period. S. E. Jones, pastor at Murfreesboro, claimed that some preachers ‘think that the gospel is a sort of a dead thing, and that the Holy Ghost is incapable of operating except once a year.’<sup>25</sup>

### **Neither Calvinist nor Arminian but Baptist: The New Hampshire Confession and the Rise of the Southern Baptist Zion<sup>26</sup>**

About a decade before the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptists in New Hampshire were about to write what would become the most disseminated confession in the history of Baptist life in America.<sup>27</sup> This document would serve as the predecessor of the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The doctrine was so unique that longtime Southwestern Seminary theologian James Leo Garrett explains, “One can conclude that the label ‘moderately Arminian’ would

<sup>23</sup>W. Wiley Richards, “Southern Baptist Identity: Moving Away from Calvinism,” *Baptist History and Heritage* (October 1996): 28.

<sup>24</sup>See Wardin, 112–14. The case of exclusion was as follows: “When Elijah Hanks (1793–1871), pastor of the Knob Creek and Friendship churches, which were members of the Cumberland Association, began preaching that Christ tasted death for every man instead of dying only for the elect, three leading pastors of the association, including Garner McConnico and Peter S. Gayle, visited him around 1829. His refusal to change his views resulted in his churches being excluded from the association.”

<sup>25</sup>Wardin, 52.

<sup>26</sup>I am indebted for this title of this section to the paper written by Allen, Keathley, Land, Lemke, Patterson, Vines, and Yarnell, “Neither Calvinists nor Arminians but Baptists,” at <http://www.baptisttheology.org/white-papers/neither-calvinists-nor-arminians-but-baptists/>.

<sup>27</sup>The New Hampshire Confession was printed in Brown’s Baptist Church Manual, Hiscox’s Baptist Church Manual, Pendleton’s Baptist Church Manual, Baptist Why and Why Not (1900), Mullin’s Baptist Beliefs, 1925 BFM, Carroll’s Articles of Faith, and Haynes’s The Baptist Denomination (1856).

be as accurate as the term ‘moderately Calvinistic.’”<sup>28</sup> Another writer asserts, “Calvinism and Arminianism are almost ignored.”<sup>29</sup>

According to Dr. Richard Land, the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833) solidified the fact that the Sandy Creek soteriology, with its skepticism towards Calvinistic interpretations of particular redemption, unconditional election, and irresistible grace, was now the majoritarian view of early Southern Baptists.<sup>30</sup> While there were and are classical Calvinists in Southern Baptist life (such as P. H. Mell [1814–88], who served as president of the SBC for a record seventeen years),<sup>31</sup> they were not and are not the “melody” but the “harmony.”<sup>32</sup>

The *New Hampshire Confession* can be best described as a simple Biblicism that unites doctrines of Scripture without philosophical speculation. While some may find it ambiguous in its rendering, many Baptists found it refreshing in its uncomplicated articles. For example, compare Article 3, “Of the Fall of Man,” with the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, “On the Fall of Man”:

### *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742)

They being the root, and by God’s appointment, standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of the sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation, being now conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, the servants of sin, the subjects of death, and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus set them free. . . . From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.<sup>33</sup>

### *New Hampshire Confession* (1833)

“We believe that man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker, but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint but choice; . . . positively inclined to evil.”<sup>34</sup> The difference is

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<sup>28</sup>James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 132.

<sup>29</sup>James Edward Carter, “The Southern Baptist Convention and Confessions of Faith, 1845–1945,” (Th.D. Dissertation, SWBTS, 1964).

<sup>30</sup>Land, 50.

<sup>31</sup>For a biography on P. H. Mell, see Emir and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003).

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup><http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/phila.htm#6>.

<sup>34</sup><http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/the-new-hampshire-confession-of-faith.pdf>.

not merely in the articles themselves, but in distinct articles omitted from the *New Hampshire Confession*, including the following soteriological articles:

1. Of God's Decree
2. Of Divine Providence
3. Of God's Covenant
4. Of Effectual Calling
5. Of Adoption
6. Of the Gospel, and of the Extent of the Grace Thereof

In its place, the *New Hampshire Confession* places heavy emphasis on a new article: "Of the Freeness of Salvation." The statement sets the 1833 confession apart for its importance to Baptists who at the very least believed in human responsibility if not libertarian will. Article 6 states:

We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial penitent, and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation.<sup>35</sup>

The confession, quoting different Scriptures, references Matthew 23:37 as a defense of the article, the passage where Jesus cries out to Jerusalem and His desire for her, yet she was not willing.

With the confession gaining prominence across the South, many churches and associations began adopting the statement. In 1843, three associations in Tennessee affirmed the new confession's article on the freeness of salvation and then articulated that none of the articles adopted were to be "construed in their meaning as to hold with the doctrine of particular, eternal and unconditional election and reprobation."<sup>36</sup> Two years later, the Sandy Creek movement adopted a new confession of faith at the same time as the Southern Baptist Convention was formed. The confession was a near replica of the *New Hampshire Confession*, with the exception of excluding two articles ("Of Repentance and Faith" and "Of Sanctification"). The new *Declaration of Faith* (1845) was different than the 1816 confession that spoke of effectual calling and election from eternity. Like the *New Hampshire Confession*, the new Sandy Creek confession affirmed in full the "freeness of salvation." The discussion of election, under the article "Of God's Purpose of Grace," is now "consistent with the free agency of man."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Richards, 58.

<sup>37</sup>Purefoy, 199–214, 205. No explanation is given as to why the two articles are omitted.

## Early Southern Baptist Leaders and Their Views

A closer look into Baptist history demonstrates that Baptists perpetually struggled with theological complexities, especially that of Calvinism. But by the beginning of the Southern Baptist Convention, the stage was set for diversity among the people who would be called Southern Baptists. In terms of Reformed doctrine of salvation, it was acceptable to question all of the classical points of Calvinism with one exception, eternal security. And while Baptists agreed with our Reformed brethren on the basic definition, the intricacies of even this doctrine were debated. Thus, Southern Baptists did not move away from Calvinism due to the experiential viewpoint of Southern Seminary's president, E. Y. Mullins, at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Baptists matured in their faith, they had questioned, rejected, or redefined much of Calvinistic doctrine since the pinnacle of Calvinism in the mid-eighteenth century. They sought and demanded a simple faith, one based in their hope for revival.

A simple survey of the early Southern Baptist landscape will evidence its divergence away from Reformed doctrines either in part or substantively. First, there were obviously those who held to a classical Calvinism. James P. Boyce (1827–88), one of the founders of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859, was a strict Calvinist. Boyce believed wholeheartedly in his theological system and wanted to convert others towards his theology, believing it would benefit the churches and even bring about revival. His good friend and co-founder of the Seminary, John Broaddus, recollected about students entering the new seminary: "Though the young men were generally rank Arminians when they came to the Seminary, few went through [Boyce's] course without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views."<sup>38</sup> The new seminary, located in Greenville, South Carolina, was ground zero for Reformed theology. Basil Manly Sr., one of its professors and a leader within the Charleston/Particular tradition, explained, "The number of the elect is, to the mind of God, necessarily definite and certain."<sup>39</sup> Other examples of strict Calvinism include J. L. Dagg, Southern Baptists' first writing theologian, and Jesse Mercer, president of the Georgia Baptist Convention for its first nineteen years (1822–41). It is clear that Calvinists found positions of prominence early and often organized Baptists into associations and state conventions.

Andrew Broaddus (1770–1848) was representative of a milder breed of Calvinists considered a Fullerite by his contemporaries. A contemporary biographer, Jeremiah Jeter, categorizes him as "moderately Calvinistic, agreeing, in the main, with those of Andrew Fuller."<sup>40</sup> While affirming faith is a gift from God and that election is not based on foreknowledge, Broaddus did advocate an unlimited atonement. He explains,

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<sup>38</sup>John A. Broaddus, *Memoirs of James Petigru Boyce* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 54. The admission implies that pastors were not consistently teaching the "doctrines of grace."

<sup>39</sup>Thomas J. Nettles, "Southern Baptist Identity: Influenced by Calvinism," *Baptist History and Heritage* (October 1996): 22.

<sup>40</sup>Andrew Broaddus, *The Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus*, ed. Andrew Broaddus, Jr. (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852), 49.

These remarks on the *nature* of the atonement, lead to the question as to its *extent*. And here I take occasion to say, that a consistent and scriptural view of this subject appears to lead to the conclusion, that the atonement is *general* in its *nature* and *extent*. As opening a way for the salvation of sinners, considered as *sinners*, it is *general* in its nature; and as being of sufficient value for the salvation of the world, it is general in its *extent*. At the same time, it may be proper to remark, that *redemption* considered as the result and application of the atonement, is limited, of course, to those who actually become the subjects of grace; in other words, to those who become believers in Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

Broadbush, like most other Baptists of his day, offered open invitations for sinners to lay hold of eternal life. His view of the atonement was most easily seen in these invitations where he would lead in a closing hymn, saying, “Come, my guilty brethren, come, groaning beneath your load of sin. His wounded hands shall make you room, His bleeding heart shall take you in. He calls you all, invites you home—Come, O my guilty brethren, come.”<sup>42</sup>

Still others recognized that while a mystery, free will, not coercion, is the reason for the conversion of the soul. J. L. Burrows (1814–93), who attended the first Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 and succeeded Basil Manly Jr. as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia,<sup>43</sup> stated, “Now, there is no coercion in conversion. . . . A man is converted because he wishes to be. How the wish is created within his soul by the Holy Spirit and the truth we may not clearly comprehend. But all agree, Calvinist and Arminian alike, that every regenerated soul has desired and sought forgiveness.”<sup>44</sup> B. H. Carroll stated likewise about free will, using the Sinner’s Prayer:

Absolutely without partiality, I say to one and all, whoever you are, sinful as you may be, in whatsoever social or financial grade you stand, man or woman, boy or girl, rich or poor, great or small, whoever will this day in your heart seek God and look to one who can save from sin, God will comfort you, your soul will be saved.

It is not an idle request. I mean that you thereby admit that you are a sinner. You admit that you need a Saviour. You intend by it that in your heart, not out loud with your mouth but that in your heart to-day you will simply think this prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”<sup>45</sup>

Other influential leaders who moved away from Calvinism include those of the Landmark movement, which emphasized the local church and Baptist distinctives and opposed any mixed communion with other paedobaptist denominations. J. M. Pendleton (1811–91), arguably the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century whose *Church Manual* (1867) reproduced the *New Hampshire Confession*, thus giving it prominence, denounced both Calvinism and

<sup>41</sup>J. B. Jeter, *Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broadbush with A Memoir of His Life* (1852), 45.

<sup>42</sup>Broadbush, 86.

<sup>43</sup>Caner and Caner, 44.

<sup>44</sup>J. L. Burrows, *What Baptists Believe* (Baltimore: H. M. Wharton and Company, 1887), 1:20.

<sup>45</sup>B. H. Carroll, *Evangelistic Sermons*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 28, 42.



Arminianism, explaining, “Presbyterians and Methodists will commune together and denounce each other’s Calvinism and Arminianism the next day, if not the next hour.”<sup>46</sup> J. R. Graves (1820–93), the most controversial figure of Landmarkism who served as editor of the *Tennessee Baptist* for forty years, denounced eternal decrees, instead arguing, “God knew from the beginning who would believe. He determined to save those in all ages who would believe, and Christ died for these.”<sup>47</sup>

Still others attacked the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Edwin C. Dargan (1852–1930), a renowned professor of homiletics and ecclesiological history at Southern Seminary beginning in 1892, defined total depravity, according to Richards, as “meaning that all of one’s faculties are more or less twisted out of shape by sin, affecting the whole of one’s nature.”<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, it was revivalism that halted discussion over doctrinal differences. For example, in a revival at the First Baptist Church of Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1883, Thomas Skinner (1825–1905) preached a simple sermon on the love of God. He proclaimed to the congregation:

Oh! what a gospel it is, then, to be able to tell every man and woman, and every boy and girl, salvation may be yours, you may be saved, and this I will prove by four good reasons— 1. Because you are the work of God. 2. Because Jesus Christ died for you. 3. Because so many have been saved. 4. Because the Bible teaches us so.

If you were to make Christ’s forgiving love your own, there must be personal contact of soul with the loving heart of Christ. There must be the individual act of my own coming to Him, and as the old Puritans used to say, ‘my transacting’ with Him. . . . I can shut it out, sealing my heart love tight against it. I do shut it out unless, by my own conscious, personal act of trust I come to Him.<sup>49</sup>

Such simple Biblicism was seen throughout the South as revivals burst forth in the countryside. One contemporary account described a revival that occurred in Kentucky that stopped the theological infighting. It exclaimed:

The effect of the revival [1800], on Christians, was permanently good. It imbued them more deeply with the spirit of the Master, and gave them clearer views of the spirituality of religion. It turned their minds away from metaphysical abstractions about dogmas, and inspired a greater earnestness for spreading the gospel of salvation. They became more interested in sinners’ being ‘born again,’ than in determining the comparative orthodoxy of Calvin and Arminius; and were more desirous to promote love and harmony among brethren, than to discover indistinguishable shades of

<sup>46</sup>J. M. Pendleton, *Three Reasons Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville: Graves, Marks & Co., 1857), 203. He also advocates unlimited atonement.

<sup>47</sup>Timothy George and David Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 238.

<sup>48</sup>Richards, “Moving Away from Calvinism,” 31.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas E. Skinner, *Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1894), 14–16, 58.



heterodoxy in each other's creeds. The mere forms, of religious morals, ceremonies, and learning catechisms, gave way to a firm belief in the necessity of experimental religion.<sup>50</sup>

As this chapter draws to a close, there are at least five lessons we must learn from our past.

1. Revival may be our only hope for the Southern Baptist Convention and its future.
2. While Baptists debated many doctrines, eternal security is not negotiable.
3. Baptists historically moved away from Calvinism if we believed such doctrines could hurt evangelism and revival.
4. We cannot sacrifice the unity of a local church for the unity of a denomination.
5. We cannot abandon our heritage of evangelistic methods, including altar calls.

### **A Final Example through Melody: Sometimes a Song Better Expresses the Soul than a Sermon**

William Walker (1809–75), also known as “Singing Billy,” was an American Baptist made famous for his shape-note hymnal sung in three part harmony. “Amazing Grace,” America’s most well-known religious song, was written by John Newton but owes its modern-day tune and popularity to William Walker. His songbook, *The Southern Harmony*, which eventually sold more than 600,000 copies, was a folk collection, known as the “people’s music,” that became so prominent in religious circles that its 1854 edition is still in use today.<sup>51</sup> In *The Southern Harmony*, we find lyrics like these:

p. 2: Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched, Weak and wounded, sick and sore, Jesus ready stands to save you, Full of pity, love, and pow’r. He is able, He is willing, Doubt no more.

p. 4: Today, if you will hear his voice, Now is the time to make your choice; Say, will you to Mount Zion go? Say, will you have this Christ or no?

p. 84: Come, humble sinner, in whose breast A thousand thoughts revolve, Come, with your guilt and fear opprest, And make this last resolve: I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin Hath like a mountain rose; I know his courts, I’ll enter in Whatever may oppose.

Thus, perhaps the most accurate picture of who we are as Southern Baptists may not be found solely in the sermons preached, but in the songs sung. Let us cast our eyes on the altar.

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<sup>50</sup>Spencer, 1:543.

<sup>51</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y19i50sZ3Ao>. This video documentary explains the importance of this little-known figure. Walker was a member of the Lower Fair Forest Baptist Church (SBC) in Union County, South Carolina.

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Let us make open invitations. May the Lord help us so we don't become so intellectual—preaching thunderously without giving sinners the chance to respond.

If our altars be filled, then we may see a coming awakening. However, if our altars remain empty, so, too, does our hope for another Great Awakening. Will the altars in Southern Baptist churches be empty this week? Or will they be filled with two types of people: the lost being saved and the saved as they plead for the souls of men? That is the history of Southern Baptist life.

Truth is Immortal.

# Ministry Evangelism



**Timothy W. Mims, Ph.D.**

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## Introduction

**O**ne major challenge today in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ is an increasing number of lost people who have been turned off by much of modern Christianity. In his book *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, Dan Kimball explains, “The world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century. But knowing and acting on it are two different things. So far the North American Church largely has responded with infusions of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and back around to the church.”<sup>1</sup>

Can a church reach such an at-risk group across North America without compromising the gospel of Jesus Christ? Yes, and one effective way of building the bridge between the church and lost communities is ministry evangelism. While I was in seminary, Christ captured my heart for ministry evangelism through a chapel speaker, Charles Roesel, as he shared the miraculous story of First Baptist Church (FBC) of Leesburg, Florida.

Through the leadership of Charles Roesel, the Lord took a declining church in a challenging place and changed the culture of a community. In *Meeting Needs Sharing Christ*, Atkinson and Roesel state, “A revolution has taken place at First Baptist Church. The church regularly baptizes more than three hundred persons each year. A miracle has taken place and the people of the FBC of Leesburg, Florida, call that miracle ministry evangelism.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. Atkinson and Charles L. Roesel, *Meeting Needs, Sharing Christ: Ministry Evangelism in Today's New Testament Church* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1995), 10.

## Defining Ministry Evangelism

Charles Roesel defines ministry evangelism as “a passion for the lost and a way for the church to care for people’s deepest needs—needs that are physical, emotional, and spiritual.”<sup>3</sup> Ministry evangelism combines meeting the needs of hurting people with the verbal proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The method of ministry evangelism considers the whole person and focuses on long-term ministries.

After hearing Charles Roesel’s story of ministry evangelism at FBC of Leesburg, I discovered that there was a difference between servant or servanthood evangelism and what Roesel spoke of as ministry evangelism. While servanthood evangelism focuses on an act of kindness in order to build a bridge to the lost, ministry evangelism takes service a step further in order to help the new disciple mature in the Lord. Ministry evangelism is not simply giving the hungry a fish, but teaching that hungry person how to fish.

Roesel discovered early in the ministry at FBC of Leesburg that if they were going to see transformation in the lives of the hurting, they would have to keep them longer. He explains, “At first we would provide a night’s stay, food and clothing, share the gospel, and then send them on their way. God convicted us to begin more long-term ministries in order to see their lives transformed.”<sup>4</sup>

Matthew 25:31–46 became Roesel’s life verse and the foundation for ministry evangelism. Roesel explains, “Everyone wants to know what’s going to be on the final exam. In Matt 25:31–46, our Lord provides for us the answers to the final. Ministry evangelism seeks to meet those in need with the love of Jesus and love them as we would Him.”<sup>5</sup> The results of leading a church in ministry evangelism over a period of thirty years reveal God’s stamp of approval over that kind of ministry.

Atkinson and Roesel describe the impact of ministry evangelism on First Baptist Church of Leesburg,

Ministry evangelism has brought many changes to the church. Church properties now include the original buildings plus 19 contiguous properties and buildings. The church’s income has increased from \$180,000 in 1979 to more than \$2,000,000 annually. Most importantly, the church regularly baptizes more than 300 persons each year. A miracle has taken place in Leesburg, Florida. The members of the First Baptist Church call the miracle ministry evangelism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Charles L. Roesel, interview by author, digital recording, New Orleans, LA, September 14, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Atkinson and Roesel, *Meeting Needs, Sharing Christ*, 10.

While ministry evangelism focuses on the physical and emotional needs of people, the priority is on the greatest need of salvation through Jesus Christ. In *Meeting Needs, Sharing Christ*, the authors define ministry evangelism as “simply caring for persons in the name of Jesus Christ. It is meeting persons at the point of their need and ministering to them physically and spiritually. The intent of ministry evangelism is to present the good news of God’s love in order to introduce persons to Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

Alvin Reid identifies several characteristics of ministry evangelism through a contrast with servanthood evangelism. He writes, “Ministry evangelism is ongoing, meets deep needs, involves well-trained volunteers, and involves significant organization and oversight.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, Reid states, “The concept used with great effect by Charles Roesel and the First Baptist Church of Leesburg, Florida, has its own strengths. This church has scores of wonderful ministries that are intentionally evangelistic and have reached multitudes.”<sup>9</sup>

Another key factor in ministry evangelism is “loosing the laity.”<sup>10</sup> Roesel states, “My greatest mistake was thinking that I was the only one who knew how to do ministry evangelism. My greatest accomplishment was to liberate and empower the laity.” Also, “Moving from a [ministry for us] mentality to a [ministry to others] mind-set was like turning a barge in a ditch.”<sup>11</sup> Rather than doing all the ministry, Roesel sought to equip others to carry out the work of ministry.

While Roesel led the church to use the resources available, God blessed their faithfulness with greater resources and facilities. Today, the ministries are housed in state-of-the-art facilities across the road from the church facility. Another aspect of wise stewardship is the use of people resources. The ministries depend on volunteers within the church to accomplish ministry evangelism.

Over five hundred volunteers assist with the daily needs of the ministries. Roesel states, “When someone joins FBC of Leesburg, they know that they are expected to serve. When they are presented to the church for membership, we tell the members where they will be serving.”<sup>12</sup> Those who join FBC of Leesburg are expected to serve. The level of expectation was set early, and members find their way into a multitude of ministries that results in discipleship multiplication by the thousands. Roesel made assimilation of members into the church a priority in leadership, preaching, and ministry evangelism.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Alvin Reid, *An Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 211.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Roesel, interview.

<sup>11</sup>Charles L. Roesel Ministry Evangelism, Inc., [http:// www.ministryevangelism.org](http://www.ministryevangelism.org).

<sup>12</sup>Roesel, interview.

## Implementing Ministry Evangelism

People need to experience the love of God through the lives of His people, the church, and that involves meaningful discipleship. Roesel provides three stages of ministry evangelism through the life of a local church in his book, *It's A God Thing*.<sup>13</sup> The first stage focuses on the initial discipling of a new believer. Our Lord charged, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19–20).<sup>14</sup> Roesel writes, "Something is wrong with evangelism that doesn't result in discipleship."<sup>15</sup>

Several steps are identified in the initial discipling process at FBC of Leesburg. First, there needs to be a passionate invitation to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors should clarify how one may respond to the biblical message. Second, wise counsel should be provided for those responding to the invitation. Ministry evangelism allows the disciple makers more time to spend counseling the new believer. Third, a required new members' class helps close the back door and keep the new believers on track. Fourth, a place of service should be provided by the close of the new members' class. Fifth, enrolling new members in Sunday School or a small group places the believers on the road to maturity. Sixth, newborn Christians should be assigned sponsors for at least a year. The sponsor and the new Christian can be introduced at the close of the new members' class. Seventh, an assimilation secretary enables leadership to assign members sponsors, track attendance, and call periodically through the first year of membership.

The second stage in the discipling process involves equipping the new member for service in the kingdom work of God in the church. New members need to be discipled and trained specifically for the work they are gifted to perform. The equipping process encourages the new believer to become more useful for kingdom service. The equipping part of the ministry provides the necessary tools for new believers to mature, and enables other believers to use their gifts to help build up the body of Christ.

The third stage of the discipling process equips the graduates of the programs to move through recovery to meaningful relationships with God, families, church, neighbor, and a capacity to work and provide for themselves and their families. The third stage should be used with ministries focused on recovery from addiction or abuse programs. Roesel writes, "We worked with the men and women to establish a kingdom mentality and help them discover what their gifts and talents were for serving. This allowed them to meet their financial obligations and provide a testimony to God's grace in their lives through honest hard work."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The stages and steps were taken from Charles Roesel, *It's A God Thing: The Powerful Results of Ministry Evangelism* (Abbotford, WI: Life Sentence, 2013).

<sup>14</sup>All Scripture citations are from the *New King James Version*.

<sup>15</sup>Roesel, *It's A God Thing*, 28.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

## Possibilities for Ministry Evangelism

The possibilities for ministry evangelism through a local church are many. Some of the ideas are more applicable, depending on the community of the church. The following list was adapted from Roesel's book, *It's A God Thing*. One idea of ministry evangelism is ministry to parents and married couples. Many parents today are struggling with issues related to raising their children as well as cultivating a healthy marriage. A ministry that provides help to those parents who are searching for answers would offer a foundation for ministry evangelism. An example would be to provide babysitting for new parents. Another example would be to offer family seminars focused on issues such as discipline, safety, or nutrition. Three ministries that were at the heart of FBC of Leesburg's ministry evangelism were to men, women, and children. While the idea may not work in every church, the rescue missions for men, women, and children provide long-term possibilities for transformation.

Providing day care, school clothing, or Vacation Bible School provides opportunities for ministry evangelism to children in most communities. Ministry evangelism to youth and students could include tutoring students with academic problems or providing a free breakfast once a week that includes Christian fellowship and witness. Ministry to senior adults also provides a great opportunity for ministry evangelism. Adult day care for those who need care while their care givers are away during the day would could be a great opportunity for ministry evangelism. Ministries to those with special needs provides another area for effective ministry evangelism. Creating a Sunday School class or discipleship group focused on ministering to deaf people is a good example of ministry evangelism to those with special needs. Support group ministries offer another idea for ministry evangelism. Divorce recovery for those who are divorced or face divorce provides opportunity for ministry evangelism. Another example of support group ministries could be to support and help provide assistance for people who are victims of sexual abuse. While the ideas are endless, another good idea is ministry to internationals that helps with language skills.

## Conclusion

First Baptist Church of Leesburg has provided an example of reaching its community with the message of the gospel through ministry evangelism. May many churches follow its lead by identifying and meeting the needs of people in their communities in order to reach people with the life-changing message of the gospel.



# Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism



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**C**. S. Lewis boldly asserts, “There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God or counter-claimed by Satan.”<sup>1</sup> Scripture and human experience testify to the validity of Lewis’s statement. An invisible battle rages within and around humans that may be described best as war. Humans experience life in contrasts and conflicts: light and darkness, good and evil, peace and war, right and wrong, righteousness and sin, life and death, truth and falsehood, hope and hopelessness, love and hate, order and chaos, heaven and hell. The invisible and inner struggles of humans affect both individuals and society.

An explanation of the conflict within people, within and between societies, and throughout the earth may be found in the Bible. Behind and beyond earthly conflicts is a cosmic struggle between God and Satan for control of humanity and earth. The first eleven chapters of the Bible describe the beginning of human life and the spreading of evil that engulfed the earth after humanity’s fall.<sup>2</sup> The last book of the Bible describes the ultimate resolution of the conflict at the end of the ages when evil is banished and followers of Christ inherit a redeemed and restored, “new” earth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 33.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur F. Glasser with Charles E. Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Shawn B. Redford, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 40–42. See also Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 100–2. Von Rad argued that the biblical account of creation and the fall explains both how God brought an ordered cosmos and how chaos developed in the cosmos as a result of sin. Because of sin, humanity is left with “a life entangled in an unbounded and completely hopeless struggle with the power of evil” (102).

<sup>3</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, Herschel H. Hobbs and Ray Frank Robbins, *Revelation: Three Viewpoints* (Nashville: Broadman, 1977). Although the three authors present views representing three different approaches to interpreting Revelation, all agree that a central issue in the last book of the Bible is the ultimate victory of Christ and his church over evil. Beasley-Murray summarized, “The believer’s running battle with evil in the world is seen to have its source in the basic opposition between universal evil and the righteous God” (245). He further stated, “Revelation’s vision of the defeat of evil by Christ in his atoning death and triumphal return offers hope for such a world” (246). See also George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation*

Spiritual warfare is a spiritual battle that has manifestations and implications in the physical realm. Spiritual warfare as defined by Chuck Lawless and John Franklin is “the conflict of two opposing wills—namely that of God and his followers versus Satan and his followers.”<sup>4</sup> Satan has infiltrated all human structures with demonic forces. Although the kingdom of Satan is spiritual, his rule is manifested through political, social, economic, physical, and spiritual entities. Physical battles depicted in Old Testament narratives are the results of deeper spiritual realities in conflict. The lordship of Yahweh is displayed in the Old Testament through power and authority encounters.<sup>5</sup> God’s claim upon Israel, His rule over the nations, and the truth of His words were validated by His ability to overcome all opposing powers and fulfill His words.

New Testament accounts of spiritual warfare differ from Old Testament accounts in one important way: authority, power and truth are localized in the person of Jesus Christ. Spiritual warfare in the New Testament centers on the lordship of Christ. Jesus’ miraculous ability to supersede the laws of nature demonstrates that He is the Messiah to whom belongs lordship. His authority and power over nature, the spirit world, disease, and death validate both His message and His messiahship. The most compelling testimony of Jesus’ lordship is His resurrection.

## Evangelism and Spiritual Warfare

Central to the issue of spiritual conflict is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ communicated through the power of the Holy Spirit is the means by which people experience salvation. The gospel alone has the power to effect the transfer of people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God. The gospel alone has the power to bring people into conformity with the will of God. Therefore, “the principalities and powers of evil [seek] to overthrow the church and frustrate its task of world evangelization.”<sup>6</sup>

Jerry Rankin and Ed Stetzer note the connection between evangelism and spiritual warfare in *Spiritual Warfare and Missions: The Battle for God’s Glory among the Nations*.<sup>7</sup> They write, “We have been called into a spiritual battle. . . . We are commissioned to take the rulership of Christ

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). Ladd’s discussion of various interpretations of Revelation discloses essential agreement regarding the ultimate victory of God over evil. Regarding his understanding of Revelation, Ladd states that “while the Revelation was primarily concerned to assure the churches of Asia of the final eschatological salvation at the end of the age, together with the judgment of the evil world powers, this had immediate relevance to the first century” (13).

<sup>4</sup>John Franklin and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare: Biblical Truth for Victory* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001), 7.

<sup>5</sup>Chinaka Samuel DomNwachukwu, *Incessant Warfare: A Critical History of Spiritual Warfare through the Ages* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011), 123, 127.

<sup>6</sup>“The Lausanne Covenant,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Conference on World Evangelism, Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Jerry Rankin and Ed Stetzer, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions: The Battle for God’s Glory among the Nations* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2010).

to every tribe and nation. . . . We are a spiritual people charged with a spiritual engagement to displace the dominions of darkness.”<sup>8</sup> Evangelism and spiritual warfare are interrelated realities vital to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

## Evangelism Involves Spiritual Warfare

In the words of the *Manila Manifesto* (a document released by the Lausanne Movement<sup>9</sup> in 1989 concerning world evangelism), “All evangelism involves spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, in which only spiritual weapons can prevail.”<sup>10</sup> Rankin and Stetzer assert that “victory will not come [in the spiritual battle] if we fail to understand the nature of the enemy and discern the challenges we face in overcoming him.”<sup>11</sup> While warning against the twin errors of being unaware of or preoccupied with spiritual warfare, Preston Nix observes that Satan’s efforts to stop the spread and reception of the gospel must be recognized by Christians to be effective in evangelism.<sup>12</sup> Effective evangelism thus involves both a recognition of the reality of spiritual warfare and an understanding of the role of spiritual warfare in evangelism. Jesus commissioned his followers to continue His ministry of making disciples. Asserting that all authority had been given to Him, Jesus promised that He would be with the disciples whenever and wherever they preached the gospel (Matt 28:18–20). Acts 1:8 connects the sending of Jesus’ disciples with the promise of power. This juxtaposition of Jesus’ promise of power and authority with His evangelism mandate presupposes that evangelism involves both a proclamation of truth and a contest of power and authority. Arthur Glasser notes that Paul understood from his calling that he “would inescapably become involved in spiritual warfare, in power encounters, and in suffering.”<sup>13</sup>

## Evangelism is Spiritual Warfare

Chuck Lawless notes that “evangelism is in itself a spiritual battle taking the gospel of light into the kingdom of darkness.”<sup>14</sup> Paul understood his missionary commission to link spiritual

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>9</sup>The Lausanne Movement is a Christian movement promoting the goals adopted by the 1974 International Conference on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland. The conference resulted in a covenant to promote the evangelization of the whole world. For more information, see <http://www.lausanne.org/about-lausanne>.

<sup>10</sup>John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 338.

<sup>11</sup>Rankin and Stetzer, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions*, 72.

<sup>12</sup>Preston Nix, “Preparing for Spiritual Warfare in Evangelism,” in *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest: Voices and Views from the Southern Baptist Professors of Evangelism Fellowship*, ed. Thomas P. Johnston (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 128.

<sup>13</sup>Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 288.

<sup>14</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregal, 2002), 83.

conflict and evangelism. Paul's personal testimony of conversion and commission as recorded in Acts 26:15–18 infers that evangelism both involves spiritual warfare and is spiritual warfare. In part, the Risen Lord tells Paul, "I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:17b–18a).<sup>15</sup> Because Paul understood the inherent power of the gospel, he boldly asserted in Rom 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Faith to believe the Gospel and to confess Jesus as Lord comes from hearing the message about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When we communicate the good news about Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, spiritual eyes are opened and faith is imparted to those who will receive. Some people will respond with repentance and confession of Jesus as Lord. Evangelism is, therefore, the means by which God defeats darkness and rescues those held in bondage by the devil.

Evangelism is the tip of the spear of spiritual warfare. Conversion, baptism, and learning to obey all that Jesus taught might be possible after the message is communicated, but it is the proclamation of the gospel message that initially opens the eyes of blinded hearts to believe in Christ. Paul's questions in Rom 10:14 are applicable today: "How are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching?"

### Evangelism Precipitates Spiritual Warfare

A believer's personal experience of spiritual conflict has a bearing on evangelism. In *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters*, Clinton Arnold considers the subject of spiritual warfare from the larger context of all of Paul's letters.<sup>16</sup> He asserts that spiritual warfare is more than a component of the Christian life; spiritual warfare is the context of the Christian life. In light of spiritual warfare as the context of the Christian life, the primary concerns of a believer are conduct and spreading the gospel. From his study of Paul's teachings, Arnold provides these suggestions for Christians to contend effectively with evil powers: (1) reevaluate one's worldview in light of the Scripture; (2) reflect on where the powers may be influential personally; (3) know one's identity in Christ; (4) receive and appropriate God's enabling power; (5) resist the evil one; (6) join God's people in the redemptive mission.<sup>17</sup>

Satan battles evangelism in various ways. He works to keep unbelievers from hearing the gospel. He also works to keep believers from sharing the message. The enemy battles to keep churches inwardly focused so they will not evangelize. He will work overtime to divide, discourage, distract, and destroy followers of Christ so their commitment to sharing the gospel is diluted or abandoned. Christians should, therefore, expect demonic opposition to evangelism.

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<sup>15</sup>Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.

<sup>16</sup>Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 210–17.

When followers of Christ obey the Great Commission, they can expect increased evil opposition. According to Nix, demonic activity heightens during evangelistic encounters. He explains that “spiritual activity breeds spiritual activity.”<sup>18</sup> A commitment to evangelism by individuals and churches precipitates demonic activity to block the progress of the gospel. This hostile activity often seems to become most intense at the moment when a soul winner calls someone to receive Christ personally as Savior.<sup>19</sup> Satan battles continually against evangelism because it is the means of announcing the Good News of Christ’s victory over Satan and sin and calling whoever is “held captive by him [Satan] to do his will” (2 Tim 2:26) to freedom in Christ.

Because the enemy does not want to lose anyone he holds captive, dark powers lash back at the gospel and all who share it. However, followers of Christ need not be afraid of the fight. The power of Christ is more than sufficient to sustain them. Nix observes, “The reality is that the devil is already a defeated foe and Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection from the grave has already won the victory over Satan.”<sup>20</sup> Believers must realize that the battle is real so they will rely upon God’s provisions for victory.

### Areas of Evil Influence

Christians who are ignorant of Satan’s strategies invite defeat (2 Cor 2:11). Nabeel Jabbour identifies five areas of evil influence which he calls “strands in a rope of evil.”<sup>21</sup> Satan works through each of the five strands to infiltrate and influence humanity in opposition to Christ. The five areas of evil influence include demonization, culture, basic beliefs, structures of power, and thought life.<sup>22</sup> Each area of evil influence is like an individual strand in a rope of evil. The evil influence of each strand is multiplied when combined with other strands. The rope metaphor suggests both the strength of evil when multiplied and the difficulty of combating multiple forces of evil influence. Additional areas of evil influence through which Satan might seek to hinder the gospel include feelings, human relationships, and communication.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Preston Nix, “Preparing,” 126.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>21</sup>Nabeel Jabbour, *Unseen Reality: A Panoramic View of Spiritual Warfare* (Singapore: Navigators, 1995), 28.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 28–29.

<sup>23</sup>Gary Dennis, “An Examination of Spiritual Warfare Content in Baptist Evangelism Theory in Light of a Panoramic View of Spiritual Warfare” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 156.

## **Suggestions for Winning the War**

### **Saturate Your Life with God's Word**

Books based upon experiences may or may not be helpful. However, the Bible is always accurate and helpful. God's Word is alive and powerful. The Word of God is the Holy Spirit's sword in the hand of believers. Saturate your mind, your heart, and your life with the living and powerful Word of God. Remember that spiritual warfare involves both truth and power encounters. Evaluate all experiences and all encounters by the Bible. Read books about the subject but trust *the* book. Learn from the teachings and practices of Jesus and New Testament evangelists.

### **Seek Wisdom**

Proverbs 4:5 instructs, "Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight." Spiritual warfare is a broad subject with many complexities. A wise person does not assume understanding or wisdom. A wise person seeks to gain both biblical understanding and godly wisdom for application of knowledge. Perhaps this sage advice is especially appropriate for those who engage in evangelism and spiritual warfare.

### **Focus on Christ, Not the Enemy**

Beware of becoming fascinated by stories about evil powers. Such fascination is dangerous and can be destructive. Look at the enemy no more than is necessary to understand what you are facing. Fix your gaze upon Jesus Christ. Take your thoughts captive for obedience to Christ. Tune your heart to sing His praise.

### **Pursue Holiness**

Pursue holiness in every area of your life. Satan specializes in mind and heart pollution. Cultivate an undivided heart (Psa 86:11). Holiness in life means purity in mind, heart, and actions. Holiness also means aligning your priorities to reflect God's ownership of your life. Cultivate Christlikeness in every area of life. Live in such a way that the enemy has no valid accusations to hurl at you and no foothold from which to pollute you.

### **Choose Humility and Flee Pride**

Pride always brings a fall. Humility always brings God's grace. Lucifer's pride was his downfall. So, remember Lucifer. Also, remember Peter, who confidently boasted that he would never deny Jesus. Also, Peter pridefully boasted that he would die for Jesus. Remember Peter's denial of Jesus and his subsequent weeping. Remember Peter, and choose humility.

## Deepen Your Prayer Life

Remember that the Son of God found it necessary to devote entire nights to prayer. Some battles cannot be won apart from fervent seasons of prayer. One implication of Eph 6:10–20 is that Christians must put on the armor of God so that they can pray effectively for the spread of the gospel.

## Be Willing to Suffer

Evangelism *is* spiritual warfare. Expect opposition. Jesus did not call us to a life of comfort. We are called to deny self, to die to self, and to take up our cross and follow in Christ's steps. We cannot follow Jesus without discomfort. The cross is not cushioned. Forget about your comfort zones and obey the Great Commission, regardless of cost or consequences.

## Go! Preach Christ!

If you are a follower of Christ, then the Great Commission applies to you. You do not need another call. Get up. Go. Evangelize. Call people to repentance, faith, and submission to Jesus. Evangelize in the power and authority of Jesus Christ. You can count on His presence, power, and authority to accompany you as you proclaim the gospel. Do not be ashamed of your master or His message. Baptize those who respond. Teach them to obey all things that Christ taught His original disciples. When you encounter evil opposition, deal with it in the name, power, and authority of Jesus. Fight the enemy offensively with the fearless proclamation that Jesus is Lord! God's power is promised for evangelism. Go! Preach Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit until He comes or calls you home.



*Against Calvinism*. By Roger Olson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 207 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.

Roger Olson's *Against Calvinism* is by design the companion volume to Michael Horton's *For Calvinism*.<sup>1</sup> To their credit, both authors are irenic in spirit while disagreeing on the issues. The titles in this intentional pairing of books, while attractive for marketing purposes in highlighting the pros and cons of the Calvinist perspective, is unfortunate. Presumably, Horton is primarily for Christ and Christianity, not for Calvinism; likewise, Roger Olson is not really "against" his Calvinist brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>2</sup> A similar pair of books with equally negative titles (*Why I Am Not an Arminian* by Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams and *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* by Jerry L. Walls and Joseph F. Dongell)<sup>3</sup> was published seven years earlier. Another concern with this particular pairing is that it privileges Calvinism by making its doctrines the "issue." The publisher might address this asymmetrical imbalance by publishing a similar pairing of books entitled *For Arminianism* and *Against Arminianism*. Furthermore, this dialog would be greatly enhanced by offering other alternatives to this polarity—including the perspective of the majority of Baptists and other evangelicals who are neither fully Calvinist nor Arminian.<sup>4</sup> Since so many theological topics and thinkers are addressed in each of these companion volumes, both texts would have been enhanced with the addition of an index.

Olson was Professor of Theology at George W. Truett Seminary at the time of writing the book, and was reared in the Open Bible tradition within Arminianism, which fits neatly within neither the Reformed nor Wesleyan streams of Arminianism. Olson's writing is more focused than Horton's because he is not called upon to describe or defend his own position (as he does

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<sup>1</sup>See my review of Horton's book in this issue of the journal.

<sup>2</sup>Indeed, in the "Preface," Roger Olson asserts, "I would rather proclaim what I am *for* than denounce what I am *against*," and that "I am not against Calvinists" (12).

<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); and Jerry L. Walls and Joseph F. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>Both Horton and Olson deny the existence of "Calminianism" (a mixture of Calvinism and Arminianism). Horton opines, "There is no such thing as 'Calminianism.'" Horton, "Preface" in Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 10. Olson dedicates an entire chapter in his earlier book, *Arminian Theology*, to debunking the "myth" that "a hybrid of Calvinism and Arminianism is possible." Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 61–77. Since this "Calminian" view is held by the majority of the largest Protestant denomination in America, the Southern Baptist Convention, perhaps Horton and Olson should consider the existence of this view. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, this limited "either-or" alternative commits the logical error known as the "fallacy of false alternatives." See Steve Lemke, "Using Logic in Theology: The Fallacy of False Alternatives," at <http://sbctoday.com/2011/06/03/using-logic-in-theology-the-fallacy-of-false-alternatives>. The Baptist "Middle Way" between Calvinism and Arminianism is articulated in a statement entitled "Neither Calvinists Nor Arminians, But Baptists," authored by a group of Baptist theologians associated with the book *Whosoever Will: A Biblical and Theological Critique of Five Point Calvinism*, available at [http://www.baptistcenter.net/papers/Neither\\_Calvinists\\_Nor\\_Arminians\\_But\\_Baptists.pdf](http://www.baptistcenter.net/papers/Neither_Calvinists_Nor_Arminians_But_Baptists.pdf).

in *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*). In this volume, Olson is focused on pointing out concerns with Horton's Calvinism. And, for the most part, he does an effective job in doing so.

The first three chapters provide a helpful overview of historic and contemporary Calvinism. In chapter one, Olson addresses why the discussion of Calvinism is important. He surveys the impact of "New Calvinism," with its "Piper cubs" who are "young, restless, and Reformed" (15–22). Olson then raises some concerns/themes to which he will return repeatedly in the pages that follow—that the doctrine of God in Calvinism makes God indistinguishable from Satan, and that Reformed theology makes God the cause of evil (23). Olson states that he will utilize the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) in his analysis of Calvinism (24).

In chapter 2, entitled "Whose Calvinism? Which Reformed Theology?," Olson rightly points to the wide diversity within Reformed theology. He points out that orthodox Reformed theology is generally thought to be the affirmation of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, but such a standard disallows many Presbyterians who affirm the Westminster Confession. Olson significantly notes that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) includes no "Reformed Baptist" churches. Therefore, Baptists who consider themselves "Reformed" are in a one-sided relationship; Reformed churches do not consider them sufficiently Reformed to be included in their communion (29–30). Olson then notes that his concerns primarily address what he will variously label as "radical Reformed theology" (28) or "classical high Calvinism" (31). He finds more agreement with thinkers whom he describes as "revisionist" Reformed theologians (31), exemplified by the writings of Alan P. F. Sell, G. C. Berkouwer, Hendrikus Berkhof, James Daane, Adrio König, Donald McKim, and Richard Mouw. Each of these more moderate "revisionist" Reformed thinkers ameliorate some of the doctrines that many find most objectionable in high Calvinism.

The third chapter surveys the five points of traditional Calvinist soteriology in the "TULIP" doctrines of the Synod of Dort (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints), as well as other key Calvinist doctrines, and offers a preview of his critique of each of these doctrines. Although space does not permit a discussion of each of these critiques, Olson raises particular concerns about the Reformed affirmation of meticulous divine providence and double predestination. He cites Loraine Boettner's assertions that God "predetermined every event that would happen," even "the sinful acts of men," thus leaving "nothing casual or contingent in the world" (39–40). Likewise, Calvin himself asserted that what God has foreordained "must necessarily so take place," and that even evil was not merely permitted by God, but, in Olson's words, was "rendered certain" by God (39–40). John Piper takes this doctrine so far as to assert that the tragic events of 9/11 were "designed" and "ordained" by God, and that if a dirty bomb leveled his home city of Minneapolis, he would attribute this evil disaster to God (59). This "divine determinism," with its concomitant affirmation that God causes evil, is what Olson finds most reprehensible about high Calvinism. Regarding predestination and reprobation, Olson cites Boettner's affirmation that God's will is the "decisive

factor” in people going to hell, thus raising a question about God’s character (43–46). Regarding limited atonement, Olson cites John Piper’s puzzling and apparently contradictory affirmations that God both sincerely desires the salvation of all people but declines to provide the only possible means by which they might be saved (48).

In the next four chapters, Olson contrasts a belief of high Calvinism with an alternative belief which he affirms: “Yes to God’s Sovereignty, No to Divine Determinism;” “Yes to Election, No to Double Predestination;” “Yes to Atonement, No to Limited Atonement/Particular Redemption;” and “Yes to Grace, No to Irresistible Grace/Monergism.” The arguments presented in these chapters are too rich to describe in detail in the space limitations of this review. However, in each of these chapters, Olson provides a withering critique of the Calvinist doctrine, and then provides a cogent, biblically and theologically-sound alternative which is compatible with Arminianism or moderate Calvinism. I am honored that Olson referred to several articles in our book, *Whosoever Will*,<sup>5</sup> including following the argument in my chapter identifying inconsistencies in Scripture with the doctrine of irresistible grace (164–66). A final chapter summarizes the logical “conundrums” of Calvinism, which Olson equates with logical contradictions. Throughout these critiques, Olson consistently argues that high Calvinist doctrines such as meticulous providence, double predestination, and limited atonement are an affront to the character and glory of God. His primary concern is to defend the goodness and reputation of God against these Reformed doctrines that present God as being less than holy, righteous, and loving. The book concludes with two appendices—one on Calvinist attempts to rescue the reputation of God, and the other with responses to Calvinist arguments (including the allegation that non-Calvinists are semi-Pelagians).

This book is well written and more focused than Horton’s companion volume, *For Calvinism*. Many Baptists who have recently become aware of Calvinism will find Olson’s book informative, readable, and helpful. Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike will profit by giving Olson’s arguments careful consideration.

– Steve W. Lemke, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*For Calvinism*. By Michael Horton. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. 208 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.

Michael Horton, who serves as J. Grescham Machen Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in California, writes *For Calvinism* as a companion volume to Roger Olson’s *Against Calvinism*. Commentary on this pairing of companion volumes is provided in my parallel review of Olson’s *Against Calvinism* in this issue of the journal.

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<sup>5</sup>Steve Lemke and David Allen, ed. *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

In the Introduction, Horton acknowledges the common phenomenon of young Calvinists who are arrogant and divisive, what Horton describes as the “cage stage” (i.e., when they should be kept in cages rather than let out to prey on others, 13, 177), a phenomenon that “often proves the caricature” or “stereotype” with which Calvinists are presented, leading its critics to confuse “Calvinism with hyper-Calvinism” (13–14). In the Afterword, Horton describes himself transparently as a former Baptist who, upon becoming a Calvinist, “became pretty hard to deal with” and “imprisoned by my own pride.” He argued with his parents and became impatient with his Christian friends. Horton attributes the “cage stage” to Calvinistic converts being to “being bowled over by a sense of God’s majesty and grace” (13), but it is hard to understand how a genuine experience of God’s grace can lead to arrogance and belligerence. Later, Horton realized that he was immaturely attempting to defend himself “under the guise of defending the truth” (193–95).

Even years later in his early academic career, Horton was a vitriolic critic of Arminianism. In a now-infamous article in *Modern Reformation*, Horton claimed that “Arminius revived Semi-Pelagianism,” that Arminians viewed faith as a work, that Arminianism is “human-centered” rather than “God-centered,” that “evangelical Arminian” was an oxymoron, that Arminians believe that “we save ourselves with God’s help,” and that “an evangelical cannot be an Arminian any more than an evangelical can be a Roman Catholic.”<sup>1</sup>

Although still an unwavering advocate of Calvinism, Horton has come a long way since those days, and has become more irenic and balanced, as evidence in this volume. He even participated in a collegial discussion in the Wesleyan study group in a recent Evangelical Theological Society meeting on Arminian and Calvinist hymnody. Horton is to be commended for his transparency, his fairness in dealing with Arminianism, and his frank acknowledgement of weaknesses within contemporary Calvinism (170–89).

Horton does not structure *For Calvinism* by merely describing the five points of soteriology, popularly summarized in the acronym “TULIP.” Like most true Calvinists, he considers Reformed theology to be much broader than such a narrow perspective, noting that “it is a mistake to reduce Calvinism” to just these five beliefs (15, cf. 23, 25, 179–80). In fact, in his first chapter, Horton summarizes what he takes to be the essence of Calvinism. He describes the Reformed tradition as being “catholic” (i.e., following the orthodox creeds), “evangelical,” and affirming the five “*solas*.” Horton disagrees that the central dogma of Calvinism is not predestination, because “Calvin was not the first Calvinist,” “Calvin was not the only shaper of the Reformed tradition,” and “Calvin never identified predestination or election as a central dogma” (28–29). Indeed, Horton regards the term “Calvinism” to be “unfortunate,” preferring “Reformed theology” or the “doctrines of grace” instead (21). Horton asserts that, at least after

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Horton, “Evangelical Arminians,” *Modern Reformation* 1 (1992): 15–19. In contrast, in this newer volume, Horton asserts, “I have never met an evangelical Arminian who would say, ‘I am trusting in Christ and in my own effort for salvation’” (Horton, *For Calvinism*, 18).

Melanchthon and Bullinger, covenant theology “emerged as the very warp and the woof of Reformed theology” (30). Horton concludes the chapter by asserting that just as Calvinists reject caricatures of their views, it is equally a caricature to describe Arminians as being Semi-Pelagian or Pelagian (31–34).

At times, Horton frustrates the reader with discussions of doctrines that are not distinctive to Calvinism, but are broadly held by most evangelical Christians. These “common core” beliefs are held by all Christians who affirm the orthodox confessions and evangelical Christianity, including Arminians; they are not unique to Reformed theology (and thus unusual in a “pro” and “con” pairing of books). Horton sometimes seems to be covertly suggesting that Reformed theology is the only true expression of orthodox Christianity. He seems to be guilty of this sort of doctrinal imperialism when he denies that “Reformed churches add any new doctrines to the Christian faith” (25),<sup>2</sup> and when he approvingly repeats Spurgeon’s inflammatory claim that “Calvinism is the gospel” (19). At the same time, in this broader discussion Horton offers no chapters on subjects one might expect, such as the doctrines of God, ecclesiology, and eschatology, or the church in relation to the world.

The next four chapters address human sinfulness, election, atonement, effectual calling, and perseverance—the main theological topics that one would expect in such a volume. Chapter 3 on human sinfulness outlines the Calvinist doctrines of original sin, total depravity, and compatibilism. In this discussion, Horton misdefines libertarian freedom such that it “insists on nothing less than the ability to choose anything,” such that “not even God has this kind of freedom of will” (43–44). Obviously, few advocates of libertarian freedom would define libertarian freedom in this way. Horton has set up a paper tiger. On the other hand, Horton describes his view of compatibilism as affirming that “our choices are determined by our nature” (44). Indeed, Horton appears to absolve humanity of our sinfulness with the claim that “we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners” (51). Since we are not sinners because we have sinned but because of our nature, and God created our human nature and decreed all our actions, the implication is that Horton’s view appears to attribute human sinfulness to God.

The fourth chapter deals with election and predestination. Horton argues for individual election and against corporate election, and for predestination against God electing on the basis of foreseen faith. As a true Calvinist, he argues that children of the elect who die in infancy go to heaven; he does not address the eternal destiny of the children of unbelievers (75–76). He rightly argues that election helps provide assurance of salvation, but asserts that the “secret will”

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<sup>2</sup>The doctrines which are unique to Calvinism might include: (a) an infralapsarian or supralapsarian *ordo salutis* with divine decrees, (b) covenant theology assuring the salvation of children of believers, (c) the atonement of Jesus being limited in its intent to a predestined group, and (d) Presbyterian church polity. Oddly, Horton later describes perseverance of the saints as one of the “distinctive” doctrines of Calvinism (115), which seems to contradict his claim that there are no unique Calvinist doctrines.

of God is inaccessible to believers. How can believers be assured that God's "secret will" is that their salvation not be effectual?

Horton makes a number of claims in this chapter, usually close to each other in the text, which appear to contradict each other, or at least seem difficult to reconcile:

Horton asserts that "it is not that God foreknew our decision, but he foreknew those whom he predestined" (58), a standard Calvinist view of election.

YET Horton also asserts that "no one is saved by divine coercion and no one is rejected apart from his or her own will" (57).

Horton asserts that salvation is based on "foreordination, since it is after all determination" (59).

YET Horton also he affirms a "double agency" in which "two agents—God and human agents—are involved" (64).

Horton affirms the statement of the *Westminster Confession* that Calvinists affirm divine "omnicausality, predestination includes His foreordaining "everything that comes to pass" (64).

YET Horton asserts that only hyper-Calvinists affirm divine "omnicausality, as if Calvinism teaches that God directly causes everything that happens" (65), and that God "cannot determine that any of his purposes will end in evil or sin" (67).

Horton affirms that "God's decree not only determines that the act will occur but that it will be freely done by the agent" (70).

YET Horton also affirms that "God only permissively decrees evil" (67) and that the Bible "does not tell us how God can decree their sin while holding them responsible" (64).

Horton affirms that "Pharaoh's resistance is foreordained" (69).

YET Horton also affirms that "God is not active in hardening hearts in the same way he is in softening hearts" (57), and that only "the hyper-Calvinist will say that God directly and immediately hardened Pharaoh's heart" (68).

Horton does not provide a clear explanation of how these obviously contrary statements can be reconciled. He ends this chapter with a section entitled "Conclusion: Election Is a Mystery."



Clearly, it is a mystery (if not inexplicable or incoherent) how such opposing ideas can be reconciled.

The fifth chapter addresses the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement. Horton provides a helpful survey of various views of the atonement, and advocates an “integrated” view which draws from aspects of each of these theories. He also surveys options about the extent of the atonement and, predictably, opts for the limited atonement view. Horton heavily weights the “objective” aspect of the atonement, focusing on the interrelationships within the Trinity:

“Our entire salvation is credit not to the cooperation of sinners with God, but of the cooperation of the persons of the Trinity” (94). Horton thus gives short shrift to the appropriation of the atonement by the believer through faith. In fact, he rejects the notion that persons are condemned for their refusal to trust Christ for salvation, because they are “condemned already” (John 3:18) for their sins. In arguing for particular redemption, Horton addresses but does not provide an adequate account of the repeated statements in Scripture that salvation is offered to all persons; nor does he provide an account of why formulas for salvation in the New Testament always require faith in Christ.

Chapter 6 addresses both the “effectual calling” (which he prefers over “irresistible grace”) and perseverance of the saints. Regarding the effectual calling, Horton repeats a distinction he makes several times between the natural ability and moral ability of the will. He affirms that we have the natural (created) ability to make free choices, but he asserts that we do not have the moral ability to do so. A person can be saved only by the effectual inward and outward calling. Horton describes Billy Graham as being “semi-Pelagian” in his best-selling book *How to Be Born Again*, because Graham calls for a faith response by believers. Horton misrepresents the Arminian position by asserting that is the “error that repentance and faith cause the new birth” (110). What Arminians actually believe is that repentance and faith are the fruit of the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit. Horton clearly affirms that the new birth precedes conversion, but eschews the hyper-Calvinist “error” that just because the new birth or effectual calling precedes any human response that there is no place for human response (110). Horton attempts to present effectual calling as not being coercive or against a person’s will, on the one hand, but more than “moral persuasion, a gentle wooing that can be yielded to or resisted” (107). It is hard to understand how something this strong, a power that is irresistible, does not become coercive. Horton asserts this view with little argument from Scripture, and thus is not very convincing.

Regarding perseverance in salvation, many Baptists would count themselves as affirming perseverance as one of the five points, but Horton makes it clear that those who believe in “eternal security” because of the believer’s trust in Christ should not be identified as “moderate Calvinist,” but as a “moderate Arminian” (122). Horton describes the eternal security view as “inconsistent synergism” (122), because it is based on the believer’s decision to trust Christ



rather than exhibiting sufficient good works to demonstrate “deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

The next two chapters deal with the Christian life and missions. Chapter 6 affirms Scripture as the regulative principle for the Christian life, attempts to avoid both legalism and antinomianism, explains the Reformed view of the sacraments in worship, compares Calvinist and Arminian views of sanctification, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Pietism. One point that emerges as ambiguous is the believer’s responsibility in sanctification. In the prior chapter, Horton strongly rejects the notion that sanctification required human cooperation; rather, our faith and obedience “are produced in us from beginning to end by the same grace of God” that monergistically saved us in justification (111). However, in this chapter, Horton insists that sanctification is “not something that happens without [our] personal engagement” (128). Again, this joining of contraries appears to be incoherent.

In Chapter 7, Horton attempts to make a case against the criticism that Calvinism is anti-missionary or unevangelistic. Horton is evidently unable to build this case from Presbyterianism alone, in that he has to evoke the missionary accomplishments of Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists like William Carey, and other evangelical denominations. Furthermore, Horton does not adequately deal with situations such as the Dutch Reformed Church, in which missionary efforts were largely a tool of colonialism and oppression. Horton also proposes some curious math in arguing that the 600 foreign missionaries sent by one Presbyterian denomination provided stronger missions support than the 5,000 North American missionaries and 5,000 international missionaries supported by the Southern Baptist Convention. Horton bases this curious logic on the Presbyterians giving slightly more per capita for missions, but does not consider that Presbyterians as a whole are wealthier than many Southern Baptists, or the difference in how membership is counted between the two denominations. In short, while pointing to some missionary accomplishments by Calvinists, he falls short of making his case that “Calvinists have been among the most zealous missionaries and evangelists in church history” (167). In fact, in the next chapter Horton acknowledges that Calvinists’ obsession about proper doctrine can become “a liability when our concern for getting the gospel *right* is disconnected from the zeal to get the gospel *out*” (173). Indeed, Horton acknowledges that no Calvinist can properly say to a lost person, “Christ died for you” (164).

Horton’s final chapter is a thoughtful “SWOT” analysis of Calvinism. This is by far the best chapter in the book. Horton is very transparent in acknowledging a number of possible dangers that confront Calvinism: a cold intellectualism that misses the emotions, obsession for doctrine over evangelism, the tendency to idolize Calvinist heroes by forgetting that they are also fallen sinners, the arrogance of equating our fallible interpretations with God’s Word, and the danger of New Calvinism becoming a parachurch “movement” (170–91). Yet, each of these dangers also present opportunities for Calvinists through continual reformation.

*For Calvinism* presents a good overview of Calvinism. Non-Reformed readers, such as myself, may find much with which to disagree in the book, but Horton presents the material fairly for the most part, and with an irenic spirit. I recommend this readable book for any pastor or layperson who wants to understand from the view of a Calvinist what Calvinists actually believe.

— Steve Lemke, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology.* By Jeremy R. Treat. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 320 Pages. Softcover, \$26.99.

Jeremy R. Treat is a pastor at Reality LA in Hollywood, California, and an adjunct professor at Biola University in La Mirada, California. He earned his Ph.D. from Wheaton College in Systematic Theology; he also holds degrees from Seattle Pacific University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In *The Crucified King*, Treat seeks to analyze the theological and biblical relationship between two prominent motifs in the Bible: the kingdom of God and atonement. He notes that an emphasis on one of these two themes tends to lead to neglect of the other. Treat's goal in the work at hand is to provide a balanced treatment of the relationship between the kingdom and atonement in both biblical and systematic theology. His thesis is that the kingdom of God is brought in through the atonement of Christ (37–39). Another goal of Treat's work is to unify two theories of the atonement, Christus Victor and penal-substitution (39). His thesis here is that Christ is victorious over the powers of evil through his penal-substitutionary atoning death.

Treat divides his work into two sections, biblical theology and systematic theology. He notes in the introduction that a dichotomy has been forced between these two disciplines that should not have been. He claims they are distinct yet inseparable disciplines. He defines them and their relationship as follows: "Biblical theology is faith seeking understanding of the redemptive-historical and literary unity of the Bible in its own terms, concepts, and contexts. Systematic theology is faith seeking understanding of the logical coherence of the Bible in conversation with the church's tradition and contemporary theology" (35). In the first section of the book, Treat analyzes the relationship between kingdom and atonement in biblical theology, and then he addresses this relationship in systematic theology in the second section.

There are many commendable aspects of Treat's work. First, Treat rightfully discusses and critiques the false dichotomy that has appeared in theologies of the kingdom of God and theologies of the atonement. One typically ends up emphasizing the kingdom of God while neglecting the atonement, or vice versa. Treat, through sterling exegesis of the biblical texts, shows how these themes are inseparable. Using the theme of victory through sacrifice, Treat shows how one ought to understand this relationship. He notes this theme in the Old Testament in the following biblical accounts: creation, fall, the protoevangelium, Abraham, the Covenant,

Joseph and Judah, the Exodus, David, Temple, the righteous sufferer of the Psalms, and the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah. Using careful exegesis, he then shows the occurrence of this theme in the New Testament, primarily in the books of Mark, Colossians, and Revelation.

Second, Treat rightfully critiques the rift that has appeared between the Christus Victor and penal-substitution theories of the atonement. He shows, again using the theme of victory through sacrifice, how both theories are found in the Bible, but not in separation from one another. Using key passages in Hebrews, Colossians, Revelation, and 1 John, Treat shows that Jesus conquers the powers of evil through his propitiatory death. He rightfully shows that after the fall, humanity came under the rule of Satan as a result of God's wrath and justice. In order to conquer the powers of evil, God's wrath had to be appeased. By His death on the cross, Jesus satisfied the wrath of God and conquered the powers of evil. This is what Treat means by the phrase "Christus Victor through penal-substitution" (39).

There are, however, some weaknesses in Treat's work. For instance, Treat notes significant Hebrew and Greek terms that are related to his project, but never provides transliterations of said words. Though this would pose little problem to professional theologians and biblical scholars, it might hinder the lay reader who is not familiar with these languages; however, this does not appear so much that it would make the book inaccessible to the lay reader.

Another weakness is that Treat seems to presuppose both Christus Victor and penal-substitution theories of the atonement. Though he does interact with competing theories, such as Peter Abelard's Moral Influence theory and the Ransom theory of the early church fathers, he does not provide a clear defense as to why his chosen theories offer a better explanation of the biblical data. He only deals critically with the penal-substitution theory and the Christus Victor theory, and this is only for the sake of reconciling them. Treat's work might have been strengthened if he had argued toward both a penal-substitution theory and a Christus Victor theory and then reconciled them, instead of simply presupposing both and then reconciling them.

Overall, Treat has provided a work that offers a lot to the conversation on the relationship between the kingdom of God and the atonement of Christ, as well as conversations regarding atonement theories. Treat displays critical, exegetical work when dealing with biblical passages, and provides coherent conclusions to his arguments. He successfully shows the relationship between the kingdom and the cross, and their implications in both biblical and systematic theologies. The kingdom of God and the atonement of Christ are both essential to the gospel preached by the apostles. *The Crucified King* provides a much needed discussion partner to one interested in understanding the relationship between the kingdom and the cross.

– Andrew Hollingsworth, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA

*Evangelistic Preaching 101: Voices of the Past and Present on Preaching Effectively*. By Frank R. Shivers. La Vergne, TN: Lightning Source, 2010. xii + 246 pages. Hardcover, \$19.95.

Having served in vocational evangelism since 1974, Frank R. Shivers is a member of both the national and state (South Carolina) Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists. Previously, he served in local churches as youth pastor, associate pastor, and senior pastor. Shivers received a B.A. from Charleston Southern University and a Th.M. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. For over forty years, he has led his own evangelistic association and maintained an active speaking schedule, conducting area crusades, revivals, and evangelistic rallies. Shivers has written over a dozen books, including *Soul Winning 101*, *The Evangelistic Invitation 101*, *Revivals 101*, *Christian Basics 101*, *Evangelistic Preaching 101*, and his latest work, *The Minister and the Funeral*.<sup>1</sup>

In the preface to *Evangelistic Preaching 101*, Shivers notes the decreasing number of baptisms and members within Southern Baptist churches. Suspecting a correlation between these statistics and a decline of evangelistic preaching, he determines to encourage preachers to share evangelistic messages more regularly. Therefore, the author presents his material with the purpose of enhancing “the preacher’s content, structure, and delivery of the evangelistic sermon” (x). In preparing this work, Shivers relies upon his own experiences as well as insights from a variety of noted preachers and evangelists.

Throughout the book’s ten chapters, Shivers addresses a variety of topics related to evangelistic preaching. He presents his case with a strong sense of urgency regarding “man’s eternal peril apart from Christ and the glory of God” (2). While noting the simplicity of the gospel message, the author reminds preachers that evangelistic sermons do not have to be shallow (6). His point is well-taken, especially during an era laden with “feel good” messages. Contemporary preachers have the responsibility to share substantive information regarding “the *depth* of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33, italics added).

In discussing the content of evangelistic sermons, the author emphasizes the importance of proclaiming scriptural truth concerning God’s law, sin, the cross, the resurrection, grace, the need for repentance, and salvation (19). He also points out the vital role that both prayer and the Holy Spirit play in effective evangelistic preaching. Regarding prayer, Shivers reminds readers that “evangelistic preaching is dedicated *to* prayer (saturation); determined *by* prayer (subject); developed *through* prayer (structure); dependent *upon* prayer (success); delivered *in* prayer (strength); but is doomed *without* prayer” (31, italics original). In addition, the author urges continual reliance upon the Holy Spirit as the true source of power in the pulpit. After all, evangelistic preaching consists of more than mere human words; it involves sharing God’s

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<sup>1</sup>Shivers offers a brief description of his publications on his evangelistic association’s website, [www.frankshivers.com](http://www.frankshivers.com).

inspired Word regarding the incarnate Word. Shivers captures this thought by urging a faithful following of the inspired text to avoid any misappropriation of the truth.

One of the strengths in this work is Shivers's conviction and sincerity with his readers. He addresses the need for faithful fervency in the ministry and warns the preacher not to "enter the pulpit with sermon in hand" without it being "ablaze in his heart" (68). In short, preachers must never forget the personal dimension of preparedness in evangelistic preaching. Regarding the need for ongoing conviction, the author also challenges his readers to preach boldly for decisions, while avoiding any hint of manipulation. In an era when the evangelistic invitation has been questioned repeatedly, Shivers unashamedly contends that "the evangelistic invitation is clearly mandated in Scripture," as "the Bible is a book of invitations" (76). He substantiates this claim by citing several scriptural references.

*Preaching Evangelistically 101* contains a great deal of information. However, readers might find the book somewhat disjointed. The chapters largely consist of extended quotations with little introduction or explanation. Also, Shivers includes numerous, lengthy lists throughout his work. For example, in the second chapter, he presents twenty-eight "time-tested, proven traits of the evangelistic sermon." Later, in chapter 7, he offers ninety practical, yet unorganized "hints for evangelistic preaching." In short, the author's presentation could be strengthened. In one discussion, he warns preachers that alliteration must "never be forced upon a text" (65). Yet, ironically, he proceeds to alliterate all of the book's chapter titles in a rather contrived fashion.<sup>2</sup>

*Preaching Evangelistically 101* proves to be an encouraging work, even if not a scholarly one. Shivers engages in research, but the book still is not an academic work. Largely consisting of quoted material, it reads more like an evangelistic "pep rally" for preachers. It serves that purpose well. Nonetheless, the work's lack of organization and frequent grammatical errors weaken its readability. Some statements simply seem misplaced. In addition, Shivers relies heavily upon secondary sources, when he easily could have referenced the original works. In one of the book's endorsements, fellow evangelist Bailey Smith remarks, "The research is remarkable and the quotes will be a treasure for a lifetime" (back cover). While this evaluation may be accurate, the lack of an index will limit the book's usefulness as a reference work. The author includes a bibliography, though, along with biographical sketches of many personalities quoted or referenced in the book.

Shivers's call for vigilance among evangelistic preachers is a timely one. He rightly urges readers to remain secure in their divine calling, and Shriver maintains deep conviction from the book's beginning to its very last line: "So preach, brother, preach and preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, resurrected, and soon to come again" (219).

— *Phillip E. Weaver, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

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<sup>2</sup>The book contains ten chapters with the following titles: Subject, Sermon, Structure, Summons, Samples, Soul, Suggestions, Seeds, Specialists, and Summary.

*From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective.* Edited by David and Jonathan Gibson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. 703 pages. Hardcover, \$50.00.

*From Heaven He Came and Sought Her* is a tour de force of Reformed theology. Editors David and Jonathan Gibson have assembled essays from twenty-one contributors to univocally affirm definite atonement (also known as particular redemption and limited atonement). The aim of the seven hundred page tome is to persuade readers that Jesus did not die so that *all* people *might* be saved, but so that *some* people *will* be saved.

The book is neatly organized, clearly written, and theologically consistent. Regarding its organization, the material following the front matter and introduction is divided into four major sections. The major sections address definite atonement in church history, the Bible, theological perspective, and pastoral practice. This organization provides readers with a thorough treatment of the most important matters in each area.

Each chapter is well written in both content and style. All of the contributors hold advanced academic degrees and have already published articles or monographs on the topic they address in their respective essays.

The volume is theologically consistent. Each of the essays reflect shared general and particular theological commitments. Generally, the essays reflect a fidelity to Reformed theology. As Henri Blocher explains, “The tendency of Westminster Calvinism leads to particular redemption” (545). The essays presuppose a uniform commitment to a theological preunderstanding which guides the project, even when the writings of historical figures or biblical authors make claims not consistent with those commitments. The theological preunderstanding from which the authors operate consists of commitments to: the divine decree, two wills in God, the covenant of redemption, and a Dortian view of election. Each of these views will be addressed below.

The first theological preunderstanding which informs this presentation of the doctrine of definite atonement is an affirmation of the divine decree. Donald Macleod explains, “As understood in Reformed orthodoxy, the divine decree is all-encompassing: God has freely and unchangeably ordained ‘whatsoever comes to pass’ (WCF, 3.1). This includes the eternal destiny of human beings. Some are predestined to everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death (WCF, 3.3)” (402).

The editors reveal their preunderstanding by explaining the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) with the divine decree,

The argument set forth in this book is that, before time, the triune God planned salvation, such that the Father chose a people for himself among fallen humanity, a choice that would involve the sending of his Son to purchase them and the sending of his Spirit to regenerate



them. In the mind of God, the choice logically preceded the accomplishment and the application of Christ's redemptive work, and so in history it circumscribed them both (46).

The statement above could be interpreted to be consistent with general atonement (the view that Christ died for the sins of every person). To clarify, the editors explain that election is determinative for salvation, the decree of election was prior to the decree of redemption, and God loves the elect in a higher and greater way than He loves all other people (46). One of the unique results of this view is that believers are united to Christ *before* placing their faith in Him (49).<sup>1</sup>

The primary challenge to those affirming the divine decree is found in this question posed by Blocher, "In what sense is any event 'possible' if God did not decree it?" (576). The reply is that God permits, but does not decree, certain events. The word "decree" implies causation, which is problematic for every occurrence of sinful actions. Those who affirm the divine decree seek to hold a high view of God's providence but in doing so, they make evil necessary to God's purposes and leave God morally responsible for sinful, evil acts.<sup>2</sup>

The second theological preunderstanding which informs this presentation of the doctrine of definite atonement is a view of two wills in God. Paul Helm writes of John Calvin's affirmation of the secret will of God (to save only those chosen for salvation) and the revealed will of God (to save all people) (97–119). Writing of Theodore Beza's views, Raymond Blacketer claims there are not two wills in God. Instead, there are "two ways of considering God's will" (138). This is a distinction without a difference. On the one hand, Blacketer affirms, "God wills the salvation of all." On the other hand, "God's grace is only for those whom he has chosen. The church is to present the gospel to all, but only because human beings cannot determine who is elect and who is reprobate" (138). Lee Gatiss mentions the distinction made by the Synod of Dort (1618–19) between the revealed will of God and His secret will (162). In his groundbreaking presentation of the theology of Moïse Amyraut, Amar Djaballah explains, "The bifurcation of God's will (revealed and secret) is the key to understanding Amyraut's doctrine of predestination and atonement" (190). To this point in the volume, such references to two wills is justified because these essays concern the historical development of definite atonement. Two wills is a view which developed to support definite atonement. However, it was disconcerting to see this extra-biblical preunderstanding read into the exegesis of the biblical sections. Thomas Schreiner, for example, writes: "We have seen in this chapter that we must

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<sup>1</sup>David and Jonathan Gibson, "Sacred Theology and the Reading of the Divine Word," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 49, "This is why the particularity of the atonement cannot be introduced at the point of application, for we were united to Christ in his death and resurrection *prior* to appropriating the benefits of his atonement by faith—which means that the scope of redemption accomplished and applied are necessarily coextensive." Emphasis theirs.

<sup>2</sup>For a defense of this view, see Bruce A. Little, "Evil and God's Sovereignty," in *Whosever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 275–98.



distinguish between God's desired will (his desire for all to be saved) and his decretive will (his determination that only some will be saved)" (397). Extra-biblical notions should not drive exegetical conclusions. Rather than the secret/revealed distinction advocated in these essays, a more fruitful view of God's will regarding salvation can be found in Aquinas' antecedent/consequent will.<sup>3</sup>

The third theological preunderstanding which informs this presentation of the doctrine of definite atonement is the covenant of redemption. Carl Trueman explains, "The covenant of redemption emerged as a separate terminological concept c. 1645, though its roots lie in Reformation and post-Reformation discussions of the Protestant claim (and Roman Catholic denial) that Jesus Christ is Mediator according to both natures" (212–13). Also, "The theological purpose of covenant of redemption language is to ground the historical economy of Christ's work in the inner life of the Trinity" (213). Specifically, the Father appoints the Son as Mediator. The Son accepts the role and accomplishes the task and is supported by the work of the Holy Spirit. This preunderstanding of the inter-Trinitarian commitment to definite atonement is affirmed repeatedly throughout the volume.

The editors warn against the "fatal disjunction" of affirming that the Son died for all but the Father elects only some (49). Matthew Harmon says such a view "presents the persons of the Trinity working at cross-purposes with each other" (272). Jonathan Gibson refers to this as "dissonance in the Trinity" (368). Stephen Wellum cites approvingly the statement of Robert Letham that such a view posits "a disruption in the heart of Christ's high-priestly work" (518). The greatest challenge faced by supporters of the covenant of redemption is that it is *read into* rather than *drawn out of* the Bible.<sup>4</sup> It is possible to affirm God's Trinitarian work of redemption and its pre-creation scope without affirming the extra-biblical, seventeenth-century views of the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works. Proponents of this New Covenant Theology (235–36, 517–39) fail to appreciate that the effects of the atonement, in

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<sup>3</sup>This distinction can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burnes and Oates, 1942), 1:272. Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil: The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs*, B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics, ed. Robert L. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 85, explains: "Regarding salvation, God wills *prior to and independent of* considering the free decisions of people that all of them will be saved; *after* consideration of a person's free decision he may or may not will for them to be joined with him in glory." Emphasis his.

<sup>4</sup>When attempting to support the covenant of redemption, or *pactum salutis*, Matthew Harmon cites theological essays or systematic treatments by Louis Berkhof, Richard Muller, Herman Bavinck, and John Webster. Harmon adds, "Even if one is uncomfortable with the expression 'covenant of redemption,' there can be no doubt that Scripture speaks of an agreement in eternity past between the Father and the Son that lays out the plan of redemption historically" (270n8). Harmon appeals to the writings of Reformed theologians rather than explicit biblical support because the covenant of redemption is a theological presupposition *read into* the Bible, not a clear teaching *drawn out of* the Bible. Harmon's treatments of John 6, John 17, and Revelation 4–5 presuppose an acceptance of the divine decree, two wills, covenant of redemption, and a Dortian view of election (270–73).

both the Old and the New Testaments, are beneficial only to those who believe God. Stated another way, people have never been saved only by means of a covenant; people have always been saved *by faith*.

The fourth theological preunderstanding which informs this presentation of the doctrine of definite atonement is the Dortian view of election. For the authors, election is determinative for salvation, the decree of election precedes the decree of redemption, and “God’s electing love for his elect” is greater than “his universal love for mankind” (46). The editors explain, “In the Scriptures, God’s electing love is given the most distributive emphasis.” Also, they refer to “the moment of election,” which is inseparable from redemption accomplished and union with Christ (47). Macleod explains that “the discrimination between the saved and the unsaved is ultimately a matter of the eternal counsel of God. Some men and angels are predestined to everlasting life, others are passed by (WCF, 3.3; 3.7)” (406–7). Macleod clarifies that election is “soteriological predestination” (407). Paul Williams writes about atonement texts in the Pentateuch while presupposing that “election here clearly circumscribes atonement.” Also, in Israel’s experience, “election precedes atonement and is its theological prerequisite” (229n4). For Williams, election is about God choosing from eternity to save particular people. Also, “Atonement and intercession were made only for the people of Israel, representative of God’s elect” (245; see also 44, 271, 346, 517–39). This Dortian view of election might be the correct interpretation of Scripture. It is also possible that such an interpretation reads into the Bible a seventeenth-century notion which was not in the minds of the biblical writers when they penned Spirit-inspired texts referring to Israel and the church as the elect, or the chosen.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to challenges posed by operating with the four theological presuppositions detailed above, other concerns about the study can be raised. Is Motyer justified in making the claim that “the atonement *itself*, and not something outside of the atonement, is the cause for any conversion” (261, emphasis his)? Is it a necessary conclusion that affirming penal substitution results in one of only these options: definite atonement, universalism, or the salvation of no one (48, 440, 480, 508, 529, 629)?

The contributors should be commended for their clarity that the message of the gospel should be declared to all people (266, 280, 314, 658–64). For example, the editors write: “To herald the gospel is to herald a *Savior* who has by his blood *established* the covenant of grace which all are called to join” (52, emphasis his). But in making such a declaration, the claim appears to be at odds with itself. The thesis of the book is that Christ died to save only the

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<sup>5</sup>For examples of biblical-theological interpretations of election which do not depend on the Canons of Dort, see William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990; reprint Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001); and Eric Hankins, “Commentary on Article 6: The Election to Salvation,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9.2 (Fall 2012): 66–74, available: [http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM\\_9-2\\_Fall\\_2012.pdf](http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_9-2_Fall_2012.pdf). This essay will appear in *Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of “Traditional” Southern Baptist Soteriology*, ed. David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood (forthcoming).

elect, who were unconditionally chosen by God from eternity for salvation. In what way are *all* called to join this covenant of grace, which will be comprised of *only* those whom God has already chosen? It seems that a universal gospel invitation is more consistent with a universal, or general, view of atonement.

I do not affirm definite atonement, the view endorsed in this volume. Rather, I agree with David Allen that this view of the atonement is contrary to the *Baptist Faith and Message*.<sup>6</sup> Even so, definite atonement falls within the realm of orthodoxy, and I recommend that all pastors, seminarians, and theology students read and consider for themselves the arguments contained in this book, which will likely hold the place for a generation as the weightiest argument in print for definite atonement. I recommend the book with the following caveat: Readers who are already committed to theology undergirded by the Westminster Confession, divine decrees, soft determinism, and two wills in God will find the essays to be a breath of fresh air. However, readers who are already committed to the view that Christ died for every person, God loves every person, and God desires to save every person will find the essays to be deeply troubling.

— Adam Harwood, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*Going Public with the Gospel: Reviving Evangelistic Proclamation.* By Lon Allison and Mark Anderson. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2003. 180 pages. Paperback, \$15.00.

Lon Allison is Associate Professor of Evangelism and Leadership, and director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Mark Anderson is international director of Call2All and president of Global Pastors Network. At the time of the writing of this book, he was affiliated with Youth With a Mission. He still maintains ties to that organization through board memberships. Both men exhibit a lifelong passion for reaching the lost for Christ.

In order to put the book in context, both authors offer their personal testimony in the introduction. Both were brought to salvation through evangelistic preaching. Their purpose in writing the book is twofold. First, they attempt to argue for the importance of proclamation in evangelism. They both believe evangelistic preaching is a primary tool in reaching the world for Christ. Second, they propose methods of effectively preaching as an evangelist. This section is followed by a short chapter devoted to the power of speech in history.

The first part of the book is a brief history of evangelistic preaching and its biblical underpinnings. Chapter 2 identifies the problems as a marked decline in evangelical growth and a malaise in evangelical churches concerning evangelism. Chapter 3 is a brief theology of evangelism traced through Acts 2. Allison and Anderson regard evangelistic campaigns (like Pentecost

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<sup>6</sup>See David L. Allen, "Commentary on Article 3: The Atonement of Christ," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9.2 (Fall 2012): 48, available: [http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM\\_9-2\\_Fall\\_2012.pdf](http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_9-2_Fall_2012.pdf).

in Jerusalem) as occurring in three phases: preparation, proclamation, and preservation (discipleship). They briefly support this process with excerpts from Paul's epistles. The fourth chapter is a brief survey of Christian history from the early church fathers to the turn of the twenty-first century. The marked issue entering the present century is the lack of evangelistic preachers.

The second part of the book attempts to answer why evangelists are a disappearing breed and what can be done to reverse the trend. Much of the responsibility is placed on a lack of accountability and the destructive stereotypes propagated by abuses among itinerant evangelists in the mid-twentieth century. A focus is placed on a healthy relationship with the living Christ. The fifth chapter discusses the damage on the message due to a church that is unwilling to proclaim the truth of the Bible. The effects of humanism and an unwillingness to confront the reality of lostness leads to an empty message. Clearly proclaiming the truth of the gospel is identified as understanding the importance of surrender. The concept embraced by modern churches conveys Jesus as an addition to our life. The appropriate biblical understanding should be one of exchange: we give our lives up to live in and for Christ.

The third part of the book offers a practical guide to preaching evangelistic sermons effectively and how to prepare to lead an evangelistic preaching ministry. Chapter 7 clearly delineates what the authors perceive to be the message of evangelistic preaching. Evangelistic preaching should convey the importance of separation from God and the need for forgiveness. The content should focus on God's creation, our separation due to sin, the reality of hell, and a robust, truth-centered presentation. Positive elements of evangelistic preaching include God's love for people and the promise of eternal reward in heaven. The ultimate goal is to move toward a non-manipulative invitation. Chapter 8 focuses on the ways in which preaching should be characterized by the speaker. The message should be relevant, truthful, simple to understand, and compassionate. The ninth chapter is an interesting look at signs and wonders in the Bible, and how those miraculous events might be used to reach the lost today. Included are modern and personal examples of miraculous acts that help to convey God's reality and power. Chapter 10 focuses on spiritual warfare and how to effectively wage spiritual warfare as an evangelist. The final chapter employs the metaphor of the seed and sower to describe discipleship. An epilogue chronicles some of the personal experiences of the authors in planting churches, with appendices following.

In conclusion, *Going Public with the Gospel* is a book that is not difficult to read and that highlights the need for evangelistic preaching. Pastors, and those preparing to serve in that role, will find this book to be an insightful explanation of effective evangelistic preaching. The authors did not write the volume for an academic audience, but as a book that is accessible for all who seek to make Jesus known to a lost and dying world. I recommend the book as a fine addition to any pastor or seminary student's library.

— J. T. Wright, Jr., *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA, and Airport Boulevard Baptist Church, Mobile, AL*

*Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary.* By J. D. Greear. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011. 266 pages. Softcover, \$14.99.

J. D. Greear serves as lead pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and invested two years in Southeast Asia working among Muslims. His other works include *Breaking the Islam Code*: (Harvest House, 2010) and *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved* (B&H, 2013).

Greear, who grew up as a Southern Baptist, became convicted that he lived a busy life for Jesus and was focused on a works-based righteousness. Thus, Greear's personal experience shapes the aim of the book. He desires for people to return to the true gospel, one that is not based on anything humans can do but instead focuses on all that Jesus has done for humanity. Many people substitute devotion to God for other things in their lives and eventually become dissatisfied. Even spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, fasting, church attendance, and Scripture memorization become a chore instead of a delight. These good habits can serve as "functional gods" (27).

The first part of the book details three reasons for the failure of religion. First, "[r]eligious activities fail to address the root idolatries that drive our sin" (30). Second, pride and fear, which he calls root sins, are exacerbated when our view of acceptance by God is based on our performance (33). Third, many people are left insecure, wondering if they have done enough to be accepted by God. This can lead to resentment of God, rather than love for Him (34). These three reasons for religious failure frame the main section of his book, which focuses on what he calls "the Gospel Prayer."

The significance of this prayer for the book is vital. Thus, it is included in full below:

In Christ, there is nothing I can do that would make You love me more, and nothing I have done that makes You love me less. Your presence and approval are all I need for everlasting joy. As you have been to me, so I will be to others. As I pray, I'll measure Your compassion by the cross and Your power by the resurrection (44).

The prayer focuses on both the inward and outward aspects of one's faith in Christ. Part two of Greear's book makes up the majority of the book. Greear explains in detail each sentence of "the Gospel Prayer." He weaves biblical stories and personal examples to illustrate the significance of the prayer in his own life, and how he thinks it will benefit any believer who is trying to follow Christ. Greear argues that this prayer can change a Christian's relationships, generosity, and outlook on the unsaved.

In the third and final section of the book, Greear focuses on moving toward a gospel-centered understanding of life (189). He writes that gospel-centeredness is "really all about not moving past the Gospel, but continually going deeper into it" (191). This section is the most

practical of the book because Greear answers questions often posed by believers. These questions include: Why are there commands in Scripture? What is the right way to work for God? What does a gospel-centered church look like? In this section, he continues his practice of weaving biblical examples and personal examples to illustrate his points.

Greear should be commended for his candidness. Many of his personal examples reveal information that some would not be willing to share publicly. These examples help the reader identify with the author. His style is conversational, which helps make the book a more enjoyable read. Greear offers fresh insights throughout the book and reviews important concepts and phrases by placing them in small boxes on the side of the page. For Greear, going deeper with Christ means “never going beyond the Gospel, but going deeper into the Gospel” (22). Thus, the primary strength of this book is its attention to the magnificent power of the gospel itself. Nothing else is needed for salvation, and Greear is trying to help people understand that fundamental truth.

While the book is a beneficial read for believers, it is not without its weaknesses. The use of personal examples, whether they are positive or negative, often gives the impression that the author is without substance in his illustrations. Although Greear’s personal illustrations provide transparency, finding other types of illustrations would provide a fresh perspective for the reader. Also, “the Gospel prayer” seems to be portrayed as a solution to spiritual problems. It would have been helpful for Greear to remind his readers that “the Gospel prayer” is simply one method and is not a guaranteed solution to all problems. Even so, this book is an excellent resource for laypeople and scholars alike. *Gospel* is a good reminder for Christians to keep the gospel in the forefront, a reminder that is needed and appreciated.

– Taylor Rutland, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*Preaching Evangelistically: Proclaiming the Saving Message of Jesus.* By Al Fasol, Roy Fish, Steve Gaines, and Ralph Douglas West. Nashville: B&H, 2006. 148 pages. Softcover, \$14.99.

In *Preaching Evangelistically*, four authors seek to provide preachers and teachers information on preaching evangelistic sermons by focusing on different elements of gospel preaching in order to “effectively proclaim Jesus.” Each chapter focuses on a different area of evangelistic preaching, including the setting of the sermon, preparing the evangelistic sermon, selecting a biblical text, preaching with authority, the invitation, and sermon delivery. The final chapter provides examples of evangelistic sermons that include the information presented in the first six chapters of the book. The four authors are: Al Fasol, former Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS); the late Roy Fish, Professor of Evangelism at SWBTS; Steve Gaines, pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee; and Ralph Douglas West, pastor of Brookhollow Baptist Church in Houston, Texas.



In chapter 1, Gaines focuses on creating an atmosphere that produces an effective evangelistic service. He points out key elements in a worship service that produce a soul-winning climate. The worship setting must be warm and inviting, emphasize Jesus, proclaim the gospel, and allow the listeners an opportunity to respond to the evangelistic message. After noting key elements of the worship setting, Gaines provides a suggested format for an evangelistic service, and concludes the chapter by clarifying that the preacher must preach for an immediate verdict. In chapter 3, Gaines summarizes how a preacher can prepare an evangelistic sermon. The preacher must talk with God every day for a clean heart, for the sermon idea, for insight, and for spiritual conviction. Prayer is important in preparing the sermon, but reading and studying the Scriptures are also crucial for sermon preparation. Gaines helps the preacher by suggesting appropriate evangelistic texts and offering ways to organize the sermon. He concludes by summarizing an effective invitation and sharing W. A. Criswell's characteristics of an effective evangelistic sermon.

In chapter 2, West helps the preacher select the text for an evangelistic sermon. He begins by arguing that "nothing is more important than evangelistic preaching," and that it is through preaching that God's kingdom grows and the church finds its joy (17). Knowing this, the preacher should select the most powerful text from Scripture in order to persuade people to come to Christ. Also, when selecting a text for an evangelistic message, the preacher needs to consider God's eternal agenda and making disciples of Christ. Furthermore, the selected text of an evangelistic sermon should lead to the preacher telling people what to do with their sins. A strong text is needed in preaching evangelistically today because people do not understand their need for God. West then highlights the steps in text selection. The preacher must find authentic evangelistic texts by knowing their intended meaning, and he should follow a process of text selection, which may follow a preaching lectionary, the calendar, or community events. Finally, West helps the preacher by offering him some biblical texts that are intended to be evangelistic.

In chapter 4, Fasol emphasizes where the preacher gets his authority, gives instruction on how to measure biblical authority in order to prepare the sermon, and summarizes how the preacher can obtain authority in order to be effective when preaching evangelistically. Fasol teaches preachers how to know the truth of Scripture and how to deliver that truth effectively during their sermon in chapter 6. If the preacher can demonstrate the disciplines that Fasol teaches, then the preacher will be able to hide behind the cross as he preaches in order to "maximize" the evangelical message. The aim of his chapter is to engage the listeners in a way that allows them to "see" the message being preached, the message of Jesus Christ. This aim is accomplished by using verbal communication, such as vocal variation, pitch, volume, rate, pauses, body language, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and posture. Finally, Fasol gives examples for preachers to use in order to practice good oral communication during preaching.

Fish offers his expertise on giving an effective gospel invitation in chapter 5. The invitation is based in Scripture, such as God calling all to come to Him (Isa 55:1, 3), and Jesus calling for all to come to Him in order to receive everlasting life (Matt 11:28; John 6:37). Preachers must



prepare their heart, understanding that eternal destinies are at stake before giving an invitation (heart preparation). Emphasis is placed on planning the invitation, and examples of different types of invitations are provided and evaluated. Finally, Fish outlines characteristics of a good invitation. Invitations must be given with confidence, expectation, clarity, and urgency.

The final chapter provides examples of evangelistic sermons that reflect the content of the first six chapters of the book. Also, the sample sermon incorporate various learning styles, such as auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile learning. A summary and analysis follows each sermon.

A strength of this book is found in its ability to educate and encourage pastors to preach evangelistically. The book provides information on preaching evangelistically in order to proclaim salvation through Jesus (vii). It describes an atmosphere conducive for preaching an effective evangelistic message (chapter 1), provides helpful texts and themes for evangelistic sermons (chapters 2 and 3), and describes an effective evangelistic invitation (chapter 5). These elements of evangelistic preaching should be considered by all Christian preachers. Another strength is that the word of God serves as the basis for this book, rather than statistical data or personal agenda.

The book presents preachers with a tremendous amount of helpful information which can enhance their ministry. Even so, a couple of areas might be addressed which could strengthen subsequent editions of the book. First, a detailed discussion of how to prepare evangelistic messages is absent from the book. Also, a couple of chapters are weaker than others because they do not contribute directly to the topic of evangelistic preaching. Even with these suggestions, *Preaching Evangelistically* will encourage pastors in their Christian calling, which is to faithfully proclaim God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

– Brooks R. Beike, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction.* By Jonathan T. Pennington. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012. xiv + 268 pages. Softcover, \$24.99.

Jonathan Pennington currently serves as associate professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He received his Ph.D. in New Testament Studies from The University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where he studied under Richard Bauckham and Philip Esler. Pennington's research interests include hermeneutics, the Gospels, and biblical theology. In addition to *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, Pennington has also written *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* and is currently working on a commentary on Matthew for the Pillar New Testament Commentary series.

*Reading the Gospels Wisely*, according to Pennington, was written to offer methodological insrucal instruction and to instruct the reader on "how to be a wise hearer and follower" of

Christ (xii). The text is intended to serve as a helpful guide for reading, interpreting, and applying the message of the Gospels. Although not explicitly stated as part of the purpose, Pennington also offers suggestions for faithful preaching and teaching of the Gospels. He asserts that the book is written “for any reader who is interested in learning how to engage the Gospels more deeply and how to apply them for personal study and/or preaching or teaching” (xiii). The text is intended to supplement, rather than replace, more traditional commentaries and introductory texts.

In the first two chapters of the text, Pennington seeks to answer the question, “What are the Gospels?” In order to accomplish this task, biblical usage of the term as well as conceptions of “gospel” as a genre are explored. Pennington distills the genre description down to “theological historical biography” and enumerates four ways in which such a description impacts a reading of the texts (31). Chapter 2 elucidates Pennington’s fully-developed definition of “gospel”: “Our canonical Gospels are theological, historical, and aretological (virtue forming) biographical narratives that retell the story and proclaim the significance of Jesus Christ, who through the power of the Spirit is the Restorer of God’s reign” (35).

Chapters 3 and 4 address the relevance of the Gospels in biblical interpretation and, more specifically, the reason why four Gospels are needed. Pennington argues against the overemphasis of potential historical discrepancies among the four Gospels, concluding that modern readers should embrace the diversity of the Gospels with joy and appreciate “their complementary univocality” (73).

Chapters 5–7 are the least accessible of the book. In chapter 5, Pennington provides a survey of historical criticism as it relates to the Gospels, giving particular attention to the work of N. T. Wright. The chapter concludes with an introduction to Richard Bauckham’s proposed category of “testimony” as a means of understanding the type of history presented in the Gospels. Chapters 6 and 7 provide hermeneutical backgrounds for interpreting the Gospels. Pennington orders his discussion around three well-known categories of “behind the text,” “in the text,” and “in front of the text.” He argues for multiple meanings within the text, but qualifies his assertion by saying that texts cannot “be bent and manipulated into whatever shape and direction we choose” (128). Pennington discusses the views of Ricoeur and Gadamer to supplement his own views, concluding that “a balance should be maintained between the text as authoritative and the inescapable situatedness of every reader” (131).

Chapter 8 summarizes the preceding material and provides a segue into part two of the book. In this section, Pennington lays out his strategy for a literary interpretation of the Gospels. He constructs an eight-step narrative model to aid interpreters in “reading Gospel pericopes well” (202). However, he also vehemently asserts that there is no single correct way to analyze a narrative and that his strategy will not work on every passage. His methodology is simply offered as a helpful framework from which to examine narrative texts.

Part three of the book moves on to Pennington's recommendations for applying and teaching the Gospels, adding the final step to the methodology developed in part two. Pennington recommends three "framing questions," or concepts that the preacher/teacher should consider in the expository process: fallen condition, redemptive solution, and virtue formation (220–21). He then proposes a generic sermon outline for conveying the results of one's study of a particular pericope.

The final chapter of the text slightly diverges in its content and purpose. Pennington argues for the centrality of the Gospels within the canon of Scripture. He likens the Gospels to the keystone of an archway, with the Old Testament on one side and the remainder of the New Testament on the other. The text concludes with theological, hermeneutical, and ecclesial implications of his argument.

Pennington is to be applauded for his excellent contribution to scholarship on the Gospels. His text is accessible, his writing is clear, and his organization is logical. The frequent use of analogy enables readers to grasp more firmly the concepts he presents. However, while the vivid examples serve to keep the reader's interest and make the text more accessible, he perhaps overuses the technique. Chapter 4 begins with an odd analogy relating an imaginary extraterrestrial encounter with the four-fold Gospel witness. The illustration does not particularly aid the reader's understanding of the material, although it does keep one reading in order to see where Pennington is going on his imaginary journey.

The emphasis of *Reading the Gospels Wisely* is clear from its subtitle: *A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Throughout the text, Pennington gives primary attention to literary considerations. While he is not to be faulted for his detailed consideration of narrative structures, such concerns are not balanced by historical considerations. On the surface, Pennington advocates historical investigation, but pragmatically his methodology makes little room for the real-world background of the texts. Unfortunately, he provides little, if any, rationale for his preference of literary over historical concerns. Also somewhat puzzling is Pennington's propensity for using from the Old Testament to explicate his methods (e.g., Gen 1:1 in chapter 6 and Jer 29:11 in chapter 7).

Somewhat surprising is Pennington's affinity for "in front of the text" avenues of study. Pennington's listing of such avenues does not include overtly reader-response types of analysis, but the trajectory set forth is troubling. Here and in other instances throughout the book, he insists that the reader interacts with the biblical text to create meaning. Fortunately, his comments are thoughtfully counterbalanced by what he describes as "posture." Pennington cleverly asserts that readers should not only seek to "understand what God is saying . . . but to stand under his Word" (137).

As a final point of critique, Pennington's arguments for the primacy of the Gospels are unconvincing. Like many scholars, Pennington finds his own area of specialization of utmost importance. However, the historical and theological basis of the Old Testament, as well as the

essential doctrines of the Epistles, cannot be ignored. A scholar steps into precarious territory when she implies that one segment of scripture is more important than others.

Regardless of the stated problems, *Reading the Gospels Wisely* is an important text for biblical students and scholars. Pennington's overt commitment to the Bible as the inspired word of God marks his text as a trustworthy resource for conservative scholars. Pennington's appreciation for the literary artistry of each Gospel is greatly valued. His step-by-step method for approaching, analyzing, and explicating the text of the Gospels is a helpful tool that is balanced by his encouragement to be flexible in both interpretation and exposition.

— Andrea L. Robinson, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons.* By R. Larry Moyer. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012. 245 Pages. Softcover, \$17.99.

Larry Moyer is the founder and CEO of EvanTell, Inc., a Dallas-based ministry focused on evangelistic training. Moyer was born with a speech impediment, but he knew that God called him to preach the gospel. Through God's work in his life and through speech therapy, he has almost forty years of experience preaching the gospel and speaking on evangelism around the world (11–15). He received his Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary and his D.Min. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous books, including the *Show Me How* series. This book is part of that series, which addresses sharing the gospel in a variety of settings.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelistic preaching is not affirmed by all people, including evangelical Christians. In *Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons*, Moyer does not assume that all of his readers agree with him that evangelistic preaching is important. However, he does not simply present the importance and logistics of evangelistic preaching, as his title might imply. Rather, he includes another element, expository preaching. Moyer believes that expository evangelistic preaching is needed in churches today. The reason that he believes evangelistic sermons should be expository is that “it's the Word God uses to convict” (37). The evangelistic preacher should not attempt to convict anyone with his own words, but only the Word of God.

Moyer divides *Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons* into three sections. The first section, “Looking at Our Opportunity,” focuses on why Christian preachers should use expository evangelistic preaching. In order to defend expository evangelistic preaching, and since few preachers use this method, he begins by explaining why church leaders should share the gospel. Next, he explains expository preaching. Moyer bases his description of expository preaching on Haddon Robinson's definition, followed by an explanation of each element of the definition.

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<sup>1</sup>EvanTell Inc., “Leadership,” <http://evantell.org/About-Us/Leadership>.

After defending evangelism and defining expository preaching, Moyer devotes the remaining pages of the first section to the how, what, when, and why of expository evangelistic preaching.

Moyer's second section of *Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons* is called "Looking at Our Message." In this section, he describes an expository evangelistic sermon and explains what elements must be in the message and why. Moyer addresses theological and practical elements. He discusses the meaning of words such as sin, believe, repentance, grace, truth. He also addresses concepts such as the audience, length of the sermon, illustrations, humor, repetition, invitation, follow-up, and how to arrange an expository evangelistic sermon.

The final section of Moyer's book contains three appendices to assist the reader in implementing expository evangelistic preaching in his ministry. The first two appendices are examples of expository evangelistic sermons from John 3:16 and Luke 19:1–10. The third is a booklet on how to get heaven, published by EvanTell.

Moyer's book, *Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons*, has many strengths. First, Moyer has a high view of Scripture. Moyer's premise is that expository evangelistic preaching should be used because it is God's Word that convicts people. Second, his work is directed very practically at the preacher or evangelist, but does not avoid addressing difficult theological issues related to the gospel. Third, Moyer presents the rare homiletic method of preparing and presenting an expository evangelistic sermon.

Readers might notice a minor weakness in Moyer's book. He states that an expository evangelistic sermon "may give less attention to the text" (26). Moyer explains why this is the case, but in doing so moves away from the definition he provided earlier for expository preaching. As a result of this understanding of expository evangelistic preaching, the example he gives of an expository evangelistic sermon on John 3:16 does not match the definition of an expository sermon. He does not present an unbiblical sermon, but fails to follow his own definition of an expository sermon. *Show Me How to Preach Evangelistic Sermons* is a book that all preachers should read. The principles presented will strengthen the preacher who is already preaching the gospel, and convict the preacher who does not preach evangelistically. In the work, Moyer presents an under-utilized model of evangelistic preaching that should not be neglected any longer.

— Robert M. Ridgeway, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA, and Grace Baptist Church, Springfield, TN*

*Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved.* By J. D. Greear. Nashville: B&H, 2013. 128 pages. Softcover, \$12.99.

J. D. Greear is pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he is visiting

Fletcher Professor of Missions. His other published books include *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (B&H, 2011) and *Breaking the Islam Code: Understanding the Soul Questions of Every Muslim* (Harvest House, 2010).

Evangelicals may find the adage “Do not judge a book by its cover” difficult when considering Greear’s most recent book titled *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*. However, in the preface to the book, Paige Patterson helps to shift the reader’s perspective when he writes, “I confess that I dislike the title of the book.” Also, “The title itself is not meant to prevent anyone from calling on the Lord. It is rather a genuine admonition for everyone to seek and trust the Lord Jesus” (xiii). Therefore the subtitle, *How to Know for Sure You Are Saved*, more legitimately reveals the purpose of the book.

Greear seeks to answer the question, “How can anyone know, beyond all doubt, that they are saved?” (3). The question is deeply personal for the author; after being baptized four times, he persisted in doubting his eternal security. Yet, Greear finally received the peace he longed for and expresses confidence that the reader can as well. In order to accomplish this, he examines what biblical salvation is and how it can be obtained, and then shows how a person can know with certainty that he or she is saved.

According to Greear, the mandatory components of biblical salvation are belief in the gospel and repentance of sins. Belief “is acknowledging that God told the truth about Jesus, namely that He is Lord and that He has finished forever the work of our salvation” (7). He succinctly summarizes the gospel as “Jesus in my place” (35). However, genuine belief in the gospel must lead a person to repentance, which simply means “acting on that belief” (7).

How can a person know if she is genuinely saved? According to Greear, a person can be assured of her salvation, not simply because she prayed a prayer, but by remaining in a posture of faith and repentance towards God (5). “Repentance and faith are postures you begin in a moment but maintain for a lifetime. Those who persist in that posture can be assured that they are saved” (109). Once a person is saved, she cannot lose her salvation; yet, Greear is careful to explain that true “saving faith always endures to the end” (79). The key to experiencing assurance is understanding that “once saved” a person must be “forever following” Jesus Christ (87).

From an evangelical perspective, any controversy over this book will not concern the author’s soteriology, which is steeped in the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. Instead, any controversy surrounding the book will likely center on the author’s seeming dislike for the sinner’s prayer. However, his primary concern is not the prayer, but an overdependence on a one-time act to the exclusion of persevering faith. For example, he writes, “Salvation is not a prayer you pray in a one-time ceremony and move on from; salvation is a posture of repentance and faith that you begin in a moment and maintain for the rest of your life” (5). Greear explicitly states his feeling concerning the sinners prayer when he says, “My purpose in writing the book hasn’t been to rail against the sinner’s prayer. I have led many to pray that prayer as an expression of their faith, and, hopefully, will lead many more to do so” (110). Therefore, the



prayer is not dichotomous to faith and repentance; rather, it should be seen as a vocalization of their inward working.

*Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* is a helpful text, especially for those who are unsure of their salvation. Readers will find that the book's colloquial style and brevity make it accessible for youth and adults. Some pastors may choose not to endorse the book because of its controversial title. Perhaps those pastors will consider the content of the book, which is to clarify the nature of salvation and point people toward genuine assurance in that salvation, rather than dismiss it due to its title.

— Joseph Bird, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*The Explicit Gospel*. By Matt Chandler with Jared Wilson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. 237 pages. Hardcover, \$17.99.

In the current evangelical landscape, few terms are as connotatively loaded as the term gospel. The fact that evangelicals are wrestling with the meaning of such a foundational word as gospel is discouraging. However, words are important. Therefore, considering the meaning and usage of words such as gospel are important. This is especially true for a word that has at its core the idea of a message of good news.

Matt Chandler's first book and contribution to this discussion is *The Explicit Gospel*. Chandler is the pastor of The Village Church, a multi-campus, 10,000-member church in the Dallas area. He holds a bachelor's degree in Bible from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. Chandler is a popular conference speaker and his sermon podcasts extend his influence well beyond The Village Church and Dallas. He also serves as a council member of The Gospel Coalition and is the president of Acts 29.

*The Explicit Gospel* grew out of Chandler's pastoral experience. He was repeatedly confronted by people who had grown up in church, had made some sort of profession or commitment of faith as a young person, and perhaps even had been baptized, yet claimed to have never heard the gospel prior to doing so at The Village Church. After meeting with many of these individuals, Chandler determined that a generation has been raised in the church where the gospel too often was assumed in preaching and in Bible study material. Chandler correctly makes the assertion that churches need to be explicit in its presentation of the gospel.

The book is divided into three parts. The first two present "frames of reference" for the gospel. Part one describes what Chandler refers to as the "Gospel on the Ground." This is the personal, life-transforming aspect of the gospel. Chandler examines this frame of reference through chapters that deal with God, man, Christ, and response.



Part two describes the “Gospel in the Air.” Rather than the “micro” level of part one, part two is the “macro” story of what God is doing through all of Scripture and all of creation. Chandler traces this metanarrative, beginning with creation, continuing through the fall and reconciliation, to final consummation.

The third and final part of the book deals with “Implications and Applications.” Chandler argues that both views of the gospel are necessary. He presents one chapter each on the dangers of a gospel that remains either on the ground or in the air too long. In the concluding chapter, Chandler calls for “grace driven effort” to combat the “moralistic therapeutic deism” that he sees in many of the congregants who have been raised in the church.

*The Explicit Gospel* has its merits. The beginning supposition that churches need to be explicit in presenting the gospel is both accurate and crucial. For instance, Chandler correctly notes that when sin and its punishment of hell are not preached in the name of God’s love, the value of that love is undercut. Chandler also challenges believers to remember that the gospel has implications beyond salvation, into sanctification and even glorification. The book is readable and well organized, even if the two frames of reference for the gospel are a little abstract for a book with “explicit” in the title.

*The Explicit Gospel* also has its weaknesses. The target audience of the book is difficult to pinpoint. It initially seems aimed at the layperson, particularly those who may have grown up in the church and not heard the gospel. However, Chandler frequently makes use of terms and refers to theological disagreements in passing with which the average layperson most likely would not be familiar. Another weakness of the book is the lack of definitions and explanations. In a book titled *The Explicit Gospel*, one would expect clarity. Chandler uses descriptors such as “plain gospel,” “simple gospel,” and “gospel-centered ministry,” sometimes only once and without any clarifying remarks. On occasion, he includes a statement making a direct point about the “explicit gospel,” but these are buried within the organization of his material and are not highlighted in any way.

The greatest example of the lack of clarity in the book is the lack of a succinct definition of the word gospel. Perhaps this reviewer’s expectations were misplaced, but he was expecting a much more comprehensive and methodical survey of the biblical writers’ use of the term, particularly Paul, as well as some treatment of how the church has historically viewed the gospel. Rather, what is provided more closely resembles an approach at a systematic theology than a book on the gospel. Taking at face value that the explicit gospel involves everything in Chandler’s book, then certain concerns arise. Where is the line between what one must believe in order to be saved and what one later learns in the process of sanctification? Similarly, while Chandler does not explicitly call for a gospel-centered hermeneutic, one certainly can infer that he is headed in that direction.

As already mentioned, the book is an easy read. However, Chandler’s style can sometimes get in the way of—if not obscure—the point he is trying to make. A few examples include:

referring to King David as schizophrenic (114), referring to pastors being fed a “pabulum of church growth” all the way through seminary (41), and claiming “85% of it [the Old Testament] is God saying, ‘I’m going to have to kill you all of you if you don’t quit this’” (64). The book would have been helped by better word selection and fewer generalizations, but the issue of target audience addressed above compounds this issue.

Overall, the value of *The Explicit Gospel* is diminished by not providing a clearly articulated, biblically-grounded gospel message that should be proclaimed explicitly. However, Chandler’s influence on a generation of young Christians warrants giving this book consideration.

– Keith Taylor, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

*What is the Gospel?* By Greg Gilbert. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. 127 pages. Hardcover, \$12.99.

Since earning his graduate degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Greg Gilbert has served as an elder at Third Avenue Baptist Church and with 9Marks, a ministry led by Mark Dever. Gilbert’s book is part of the 9Marks series of that addresses key biblical doctrines, such as church membership, evangelism, and church discipline. Gilbert examines the first of the doctrines addressed in the series, the gospel. One could wonder if such a work is necessary since the 9Mark books target an audience that should already understand the gospel. However, Gilbert cites Christian musicians and members of conservative evangelical churches who present various definitions of the gospel that leave out key truths such as repentance and the importance of the blood of Christ. Due to the disunity of a definition of the gospel among people who are supposed to hold similar beliefs, a work addressing the topic is warranted.

The brevity of the work could lead the reader to question if Gilbert can address the topic in a way that accomplishes his stated purposes of both making it clear to the lost, and enhancing even mature Christians’ understanding of the subject matter. Gilbert’s intentional and direct writing style allows him to discuss a wide span of information in only 127 pages. Using the first four chapters of Romans, he defines the gospel as both the bad news that man has fallen out of a right relationship with God because of sin, and the good news that Christ’s death and resurrection invites the lost to repent and place their faith in Christ to receive salvation. The major ideas are analyzed in individual chapters focusing on God’s authority, man’s sinfulness, Christ as Savior, the Kingdom of God, the centrality of the cross, and the power of the gospel.

Gilbert bases his arguments on Scripture, relying heavily on the first four chapters of Romans. He quotes numerous verses from both the Old and New Testament. The chapters contain many illustrations which Gilbert carefully selects that both maintain the attention of his readers and clarify his points. He also addresses alternate views of the gospel that contain some truth, but that are incomplete, such as the gospel as creation restored, the gospel as cultural transformation, and the gospel as mending a hurt relationship with God.

Gilbert's treatment of the kingdom of God is theologically accurate and understandable. Kingdom is a topic that many struggle to define, or wrongly take out of context to promote a certain theological view. Gilbert explains how the writers of the four Gospels viewed the kingdom as the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament. Although it is already complete, believers should strive to invite others into the kingdom. Gilbert follows in the spirit of writers like John Stott in advocating the importance of the cross and the foolishness of minimizing its role in salvation.

The work, despite its brevity, supports its thesis and could serve as a multi-week resource that pastors could teach their congregations. Each chapter could be converted into a Sunday morning or evening sermon, or a Wednesday night Bible study. Pastors could present the material in more detail to Sunday School teachers or other church leaders to ensure that those in their congregation understand the gospel and how to present it. Unfortunately, many leading in churches today fumble through presenting the gospel or cannot express it with enough clarity for another person to understand and respond. A resource like this goes beyond giving them the right words to say and presents them with a stronger understanding and appreciation of salvation.

The primary weakness of the book is that it fails to deal with presenting the gospel to others. Since the work presents the subject in such a clear manner, a logical conclusion to the book would have been to issue a challenge to share the gospel and to offer guidance on how a deeper understanding of the gospel improves evangelism. Despite this shortcoming, D. A. Carson's challenge in the forward for pastors to purchase the book by the case and distribute it to their congregations is sound advice. Gilbert's work not only has the potential to further the gospel in the pulpit, but to take the gospel beyond the pulpit.

— *Joshua Powell, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA, and Woodland Baptist Church, Springfield, LA*

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Beisner is spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation and is also an author and speaker on the application of the Biblical world view to economics, government, and environmental policy. He has published over ten books, including *The Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*, and hundreds of articles, and has contributed to, or edited, many other books and been a guest on television and radio programs. A ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he has spoken to churches, seminars, and other groups around the country for nearly twenty years.



### Bill McKibben

McKibben is currently a Scholar in Residence at Middlebury College and is the founder of 350.org, an international climate change campaign named for the safe level of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere, 350 parts per million. Bill's 1989 book *The End of Nature* was the first book to warn the general public about the threat of global warming. Bill is a frequent contributor to various magazines including *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Outside*. He is also a board member and contributor to *Grist Magazine*. He has been awarded Guggenheim and Lyndhurst Fellowships, and won the Lannan Prize for nonfiction writing in 2000.

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New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary will host a free conference titled *Five Views on Infants and Children in the Church* in HSC 219. It will be comprised of paper presentations co-sponsored by the NOBTS Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry and the Christian Education Division.

## SCHEDULE

- 8:30 Refreshments
- 8:55 Introductions – Adam Harwood, Ph.D., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- 9:00 Presentation of Eastern Orthodox view – Jason Foster, Ph.D., Durham University
- 10:00 Presentation of Roman Catholic view – David Liberto, Ph.D., Marquette University
- 11:00 Presentation of Lutheran view – David Scaer, Th.D., Concordia Seminary
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Presentation of Presbyterian view – Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D. University of Southern Miss.
- 2:00 Presentation of Baptist view – Adam Harwood
- 3:00 Panel Discussion – Kevin E. Lawson, Ed.D., University of Maine
- 4:00 Presentation on Children's Ideas of God – Donna Peavey, Ph.D., NOBTS
- 5:00 Conclusion

For more information, please contact Dr. Adam Harwood at [aharwood@nobts.edu](mailto:aharwood@nobts.edu)

To register, visit [www.nobts.edu/infantsandchildren](http://www.nobts.edu/infantsandchildren)

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