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NEW CALVINISM:
A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract

New Calvinism is a theological movement that has significantly impacted evangelical Christianity and has served to weaken the influence of dispensationalism. New Calvinism portrays itself as the flagship of Reformed theology. Part of the attraction to New Calvinism is its claim to represent the historical position of the church; however, while retaining the primary weaknesses of Reformed theology, it also differs in some respects from historical Reformed theology. Like historical Reformed theology, New Calvinism's priority on soteriology and forced Christocentric hermeneutic constrain it to conclusions that are contrary to a literal, grammatico-historical interpretation of Scripture. The theology of New Calvinism also produces a dangerous lack of assurance of salvation for the believer, at times approaching the same level of insecurity as is found in Arminian theology.

This dissertation will focus on the teachings of the following influential New Calvinist "leaders": John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Albert Mohler, Timothy Keller, Kevin DeYoung, D. A. Carson, and Mark Driscoll, while also considering the contributions of other New Calvinist preachers, teachers, and authors. Of particular importance will be what this author considers to be the sine qua non of New Calvinism, namely: (1) Dortian Calvinism, (2) eclecticism, (3) soteriocentric focus, (4) A supersessionist view of Israel and the Church, (5) a focus on the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and (6) a compromised practice regarding the authority of Scripture.

Introduction

In the March 12, 2009, issue of *Time*, David Van Biema identified “New Calvinism” as one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.” This marks a dramatic shift from the major influences of the twentieth century. The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed remarkable activity and interest in evangelical Christianity in two separate theological areas: (1) Arminianism through the influence of the Jesus Movement along with the concomitant phenomenon of the Calvary Chapel churches; and (2) dispensationalism¹ through the influence of Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, popular movies such as *A Thief in the Night*, prophetic conferences, and such educational institutions as Dallas Theological Seminary and Moody Bible Institute. The twenty-first century has begun with remarkable activity and interest in American Christianity with what appears to be a pendulum swing away from both Arminianism and dispensationalism through the movement that has come to be known as “New Calvinism.”

New Calvinists claim to herald a return to historic Reformed theology and thus to present a corrective to what they perceive as doctrinal aberrations that have crept in through the influence of both Arminianism and dispensationalism. The earliest historical conflict involving Calvinist theologians involved their opposition to Arminianism seen notably in the Synod of Dort (ca. 1618–1619). Opposition to dispensationalism was not a possibility until the appearance of systematized dispensationalist writing around the time of John Nelson Darby (ca. 1830–1882)

¹ Here, and throughout this dissertation, the term “dispensationalism” is used as defined by Ryrie, characterized by the threefold sine qua non: a distinction between Israel and the Church, a consistently literal interpretation of the Bible, and the glory of God as the underlying purpose of God in the world. See Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 38–41. Neither progressive dispensationalism nor hyper dispensationalism are considered valid expressions of dispensationalism.

and Charles Henry Mackintosh (ca. 1820–1896). Though there was some Calvinistic criticism of the early Brethren movement, serious Calvinistic criticism of dispensationalism did not develop a major focus until the conflict between B. B. Warfield and Lewis Sperry Chafer over their divergent views of sanctification.² Still, the primary arena of controversy over Calvinism continued in the realm of the Arminian/Calvinist debate. New Calvinism’s popularity in the early twenty-first century had some precedents in the late twentieth century teachings and writing ministries of such men as R. C. Sproul and John Stott, who both popularized a non-dispensational, Calvinistic approach to theology. Since the turn of the millennium, the widely popular teachings of New Calvinists John Piper, Wayne Grudem, D. A. Carson, Timothy Keller, Kevin DeYoung, Albert Mohler, Mark Driscoll, Francis Chan, Paul Washer, et al. have led many young, restless, and reformed³ away from a dispensational position. For example, Collin Hansen, author of the book *Young, Restless, Reformed*, said in a roundtable discussion on the meaning of New Calvinism:

[The emerging church movement] was a difficult thing for me to really understand. I had just graduated from Northwestern University in the school of journalism in 2003, and I had been involved in a number of different Christian groups, including Campus Crusade for Christ there. And I simply had not met Christian students who were reading a lot of Donald Miller or Rob Bell, or reading more from Tony Jones, whom we’ll hear more from tomorrow, and some authors like that. Obviously they were out there somewhere; I just hadn’t come across them in my experience. In my background the people I knew were reading books like Wayne Grudem, a professor who recently served, until a few years ago, served the seminary where I currently attend, his book published by Zondervan, called *Systematic Theology*. . . . This was the sort of thing that I saw fellow students reading. A graduation gift that our ministry gave out to Seniors was John Piper’s book, *Desiring God*. The seminaries that they talked about attending were places like the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville which has under Al Mohler’s

² Randall Gleason, “B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification,” *JETS* 40, no. 2 (June 1997).

³ John Piper asserted that “Young and Reformed” meant the same thing as “New Calvinism” in a roundtable discussion on the meaning of New Calvinism. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/on-the-new-calvinists> (accessed November 23, 2013). From September 11, 2009, Religious Newswriters Association Annual Convention, “On the New Calvinists.” Quote begins at 0:35.

leadership, you have a book from him, *Atheism Remix*, under his leadership has become the largest seminary in the country. Essentially the idea was not that Christians needed to depart from historic, orthodox beliefs, not that they needed to find something new to be able to reach a changing culture, but in fact that what was needed was a return to what they understood—and this is really foundational for understanding this new reform movement—what they found to be very Biblical beliefs, things as core to the Biblical message as God’s initiative in saving a people for His own glory. Again, the idea that there’s nothing that you can do to merit salvation and to merit that grace, but in fact only God’s grace can save you from yourself, can save you from your sin. These are the centrality and the message of Jesus Christ’s death, His atoning death for sin on the cross, and of course His triumphant resurrection three days later. These were the sort of things that were discussed among the groups that I knew, and the people who they looked back to . . . folks like Charles Spurgeon . . . Jonathan Edwards . . . more recently being taught by John Piper . . . Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.⁴

Like most new movements, New Calvinism can be difficult to define. All new movements suffer from this problem. Kevin DeYoung cogently remarked: “We have all the problems that any movement has. For starters, no one knows who ‘we’ is. There is no established confession that binds us together, no official spokesperson, no adjudicating assembly. At many times, we still have to figure out how to disagree profitably among ourselves.”⁵ It is a phenomenon that exhibits “constantly changing manifestations of a movement still growing and developing.”⁶

⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/on-the-new-calvinists> (accessed November 23, 2013). From September 11, 2009, Religion Newswriters Association Annual Convention, “On the New Calvinists.” Quote begins about 3:25.

⁵ Kevin DeYoung, “What Do You Think of When You Think of the New Calvinism?” Young, Restless, and Reformed blog, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/12/11/what-do-you-think-of-when-you-think-of-the-new-calvinism> (accessed December 12, 2013).

⁶ Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered* (Faverdale North Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013), 8. By 2013, Walker observes that the movement has already moved on to a more advanced, more mature, and less energetic phase. He says, “There is not the same buzz, the same energy, the same drive as once there was. The river is broader and it is slower. The enthusiasm has shifted slightly and the issues and arguments have developed. I am not saying that there is any less vigour in some quarters, but this is not the rushing mountain stream it once was, with the dynamism simply to carry light things before it” (Ibid., 38).

New Calvinism bears both similarities and dissimilarities to traditional Reformed theology. Mark Driscoll, in a 2009 blog article, attempted to delineate the ways in which New Calvinism differs from Old Calvinism by outlining the following:

1. Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.
2. Old Calvinism fled from the cities. New Calvinism is flooding into cities.
3. Old Calvinism was cessationistic and fearful of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. New Calvinism is continuationist and joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Old Calvinism was fearful and suspicious of other Christians and burned bridges. New Calvinism loves all Christians and builds bridges between them.⁷

On the other hand, C. Michael Patton notes that “the ‘New Calvinism’ is not essentially a new form of Calvinism. Theologically, it is not really any different. . . . ‘The New Calvinism’ is simply a designation given for the 21st century resurgence of Calvinism among Evangelicals and conservative Christians.”⁸ John Piper, at the Seventh Annual Gaffin Lecture held at Westminster Theological Seminary, March 12, 2014, attempted to show how the New Calvinism was not essentially any different than traditional Reformed theology by delineating the following twelve points:

⁷ Mark Driscoll, “Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea,” March 12, 2009, <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea> (accessed August 16, 2013).

⁸ C. Michael Patton, “What Is the ‘New Calvinism’? . . . and Are You Part of It?” Parchment and Pen blog, April 5, 2010, <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/04/what-is-the-new-calvinism-and-are-you-a-part-of-it/> (accessed September 30, 2013).

1. The New Calvinism, in its allegiance to the inerrancy of the Bible, embraces the biblical truths behind the five points (TULIP), while having an aversion to using the acronym or any other systematic packaging, along with a sometimes qualified embrace of limited atonement. The focus is on Calvinistic soteriology but not to the exclusion or the appreciation of the broader scope of Calvin's vision.
2. The New Calvinism embraces the sovereignty of God in salvation, and in all the affairs of life in history, including evil and suffering.
3. The New Calvinism has a strong complementarian flavor as opposed to egalitarian, with an emphasis on the flourishing of men and women in relationships where men embrace a call to robust, humble, Christlike servant leadership.
4. The New Calvinism leans toward being culture-affirming rather than culture-denying, while holding fast to some very culturally alien positions, like positions on same-sex practice and abortion.
5. The New Calvinism embraces the essential place of the local church. It is led mainly by pastors, has a vibrant church-planting bent, produces widely sung worship music, and exalts the preached word as central to the work of God locally and globally.
6. The New Calvinism is aggressively mission-driven, including missional impact on social evils, evangelistic impact on personal networks, and missionary impact on unreached peoples of the world.
7. The New Calvinism is interdenominational with a strong (some would say oxymoronic) Baptist element.
8. The New Calvinism includes charismatics and noncharismatics.

9. The New Calvinism puts a priority on pietism or piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of affections in Christian living, while esteeming the life of the mind and being very productive in it, and embracing the value of serious scholarship. Jonathan Edwards would be invoked as a model of this combination of the affections and the life of the mind more often than John Calvin, whether that's fair to Calvin or not.
10. The New Calvinism is vibrantly engaged in publishing books and even more remarkably in the world of the Internet, with hundreds of energetic bloggers and social media activists, with Twitter as the increasingly default way of signaling things new and old that should be noticed and read.
11. The New Calvinism is international in scope, multiethnic in expression, and culturally diverse. There is no single geographic, racial, cultural governing center. There are no officers, no organization, nor any loose affiliation that would encompass the whole. I would dare say that there are outcroppings of this movement that nobody (including me) in this room has ever heard of.
12. The New Calvinism is robustly gospel-centered, cross-centered, with dozens of books rolling off the presses, coming at the gospel from every conceivable angle, and applying it to all areas of life with a commitment to seeing the historic doctrine of justification, finding its fruit in sanctification personally and communally.⁹

⁹ Jared Oliphint, "John Piper's Twelve Features of the New Calvinism," Reformed Forum, <http://reformedforum.org/john-pipers-twelve-features-new-calvinism> (accessed January 6, 2015). Video of Piper's message can be viewed at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2014/03/14/john-pipers-lecture-at-westminster-theological-seminary-on-new-calvinism-and-the-new-community>.

New Calvinists, it seems, want desperately to be accepted into the traditional Reformed club, but some traditional Reformed theologians are reluctant to accept their membership.¹⁰

David Van Biema did something of a disservice when he labeled this movement “New Calvinism” in his 2009 *Time* article, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.”¹¹ Van Biema may have been unaware that the label “New Calvinism” (or “Neo-Calvinism”) had already been used to describe a movement within Calvinism harkening back to Abraham Kuyper, the nineteenth-century Dutch cultural leader.¹² The subject of this dissertation might be better labeled “New Puritanism”; nevertheless, the label “New Calvinism” has caught on and describes the current twenty-first-century movement. Thus, “New Calvinism” in this dissertation will refer, not to the nineteenth-century Kuyperian movement, but to the current twenty-first-century movement. While not technically a definition in the strict sense of the word, an initial, albeit broad, attempt at describing “New Calvinism” may be as follows: New Calvinism is that movement that appears to have taken on considerable momentum in Evangelical Christianity in the early twenty-first century that promotes Reformed theology, has become increasingly popular among young evangelicals, and is drawing many away from dispensationalism. Some prominent names and figureheads in the New Calvinist movement include John Piper, D. A. Carson, Francis Chan, Matt Chandler, Kevin DeYoung, Mark Driscoll, Ligon Duncan, Wayne Grudem, Tim Keller, Albert Mohler, and Paul Washer. Some of the prominent organizations and

¹⁰ See, for example, R. Scott Clark, “Calvinism Old and ‘New,’” *Heidelblog*, March 15, 2009, <http://heidelblog.net/2009/03/calvinism-old-and-new>, (accessed September 30, 2013). Clark is professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California.

¹¹ David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” *Time*, March 12, 2009.

¹² Bob Robinson, “Which Is the New Calvinism? ‘Neo-Puritanism’ or ‘Neo-Calvinism?’” <http://vanguardchurch.blogspot.com/2009/04/which-is-new-calvinism-neo-puritanism.html> (accessed November 7, 2013).

ministries involved in promoting New Calvinism include: 9Marks, the Acts 29 Network, Desiring God Ministries, Together for the Gospel, Redeemer City to City, Sovereign Grace Ministries, and The Gospel Coalition. To a lesser degree, some may be included as within the sphere of influence of New Calvinism, while not truly being “New Calvinists” themselves, such as John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul.¹³ New Calvinists generally claim to represent the historic Reformed faith, and they tend to claim some degree of credence for their position precisely *because* it is the historic position of the reformation. More important than stating a formal definition of New Calvinism is identifying the *sine qua non* of New Calvinism. In the studied opinion of this author, the *sine qua non* consists of the following:

1. Dortian Calvinism

The title “Dortian Calvinism” is used here to denote an attachment to what the acronym TULIP represents and the New Calvinists’ understanding of what these five points mean. This is a given. No one could be considered a New Calvinist without adhering to the five points of Dortian Calvinism. Some Reformed scholars dislike defining “Calvinism” simply in terms of the five points, insisting that true Calvinism is much broader than the five points and includes such things as the *Institutes* and the major confessions (Westminster, Heidelberg, Belgic). In some cases, more traditional Reformed scholars have taken issue with those who would refer to themselves as Calvinists while rejecting the authority of the confessions (e.g., Reformed Baptists, or Reformed Charismatics). In some cases, the five points are poorly understood by

¹³ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 24–25. Opinion varies widely in the blogosphere as to whether these two men are truly New Calvinists or not. This is reflective of what has already been said about the difficulty of defining this movement.

New Calvinists, relying too heavily on the TULIP acronym, rather than on the fuller explanations found in the Canons of the Synod of Dort themselves.

2. Eclecticism

In a panel discussion seeking to define “New Calvinism” on the Gospel Coalition’s website,¹⁴ Al Mohler used the term “eclectic” to describe New Calvinism. This characteristic certainly distinguishes New Calvinism from Old Calvinism. There is a conscious effort to be inclusive of a wide spectrum of Christianity. At times, this translates into a fervent effort to proselytize from widely differing groups: Charismatics, Baptists, Presbyterians, etc. New Calvinism is not necessarily confessional, and this allows for positions that are both premillennial (“historical”) and amillennial, continuationist and cessationist, pedobaptistic and credobaptistic, and is often tolerant of mysticism. One theological position that is not tolerated within the New Calvinist camp is dispensationalism.

3. Soteriocentric Focus

In common with covenant theology, New Calvinism is soteriocentric, as opposed to dispensationalism’s doxological focus. This is seen particularly in the prominence of such catchphrases as “gospel-centered” and “gospel-driven.” This also leads to misinterpretation of key Scripture passages that relate to God’s program for Israel (see next point). A “gospel-centered” approach to hermeneutics tends to read the New Testament back into the Old Testament; a “gospel-centered” approach to worldview and soteriology tends to bring such themes as social change and environmentalism into New Calvinism’s understanding of the Great

¹⁴ “What’s New about the New Calvinism,” recorded panel discussion between Kevin DeYoung, Ligon Duncan, and Al Mohler, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2010/10/18/deyoung-duncan-and-mohler-whats-new-about-the-new-calvinism> (accessed September 26, 2013).

Commission and to view the kingdom of God from the perspective of an “already/not yet” paradigm; a “gospel-centered” approach to ecclesiology and eschatology tends to blur the distinction between Israel and the Church; and a “gospel-centered” approach to pneumatology tends to ignore the distinctions between the Holy Spirit’s activities in the present dispensation versus other dispensations.

4. Supersessionist View of Israel and the Church

Though a few New Calvinists may claim to be dispensationalists (e.g., John MacArthur¹⁵), they display a deficient understanding of dispensationalism that shows up as a deficient view of God’s program for Israel. Amillennial New Calvinists are, of course, supersessionist in their view of Israel. Premillennial New Calvinists, on the other hand, while allowing for a future salvation of Jews, do not see a separate program for national Israel that is separate from the Church. Premillennial New Calvinists who see any future for Israel simply see a mass future conversion of Jews becoming Christians and thus may be described as mild supersessionists. There is generally a negative view of dispensationalism in New Calvinism, unless, like MacArthur, one simply redefines “dispensationalism.”

5. A Focus on the Reformed Doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints

The Calvinistic doctrine known as the perseverance of the saints has tragically led many believers to a lack of assurance in their salvation. This doctrine is dear to all Calvinists, including

¹⁵ Whether or not John MacArthur should be included within the designation “New Calvinist” may be debated. His ministry and teaching share many points in common with those of New Calvinists, and he has frequently participated with New Calvinists in promoting common Calvinistic themes. Some would object to labeling MacArthur as a New Calvinist based on his cessationism and dispensationalism; however, other New Calvinists are cessationists (e.g., Al Mohler). On the other hand, it may be legitimate to question whether MacArthur is truly a dispensationalist; his definition of “dispensationalism” certainly may be challenged as to its legitimacy, and MacArthur identifies himself as a “leaky dispensationalist” who has more in common with New Calvinists than with dispensationalists.

the New Calvinists. One aspect of this doctrine, the eternal security of the believer, is a thoroughly Scriptural teaching. However, the focus in New Calvinism has been on a different aspect, one that insists a genuine believer will necessarily persist in holiness until death—a teaching that has sometimes been labeled “lordship salvation.” Scriptural support for this aspect of the doctrine is questionable, though the primary motivation behind its eager support may be commendable, namely a desire to see holiness exhibited in the lives of those who profess faith in Jesus. Nevertheless, sound doctrine must be based on Scripture, not on commendable motives.

6. A Compromised Practice Regarding the Authority of Scripture

All New Calvinists claim to uphold the sole authority of the Bible. On the one hand, they tend to be more faithful to Biblical authority than Old Calvinists, even at times being skeptical of portions of the historic confessions that they believe cannot be supported by Scripture. On the other hand, this claim to Biblical authority is conditioned by their theological presuppositions (especially points 1, 3, and 4 above), and their interpretation of Scripture will depart from a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic in order to maintain their presuppositions. This may be due in part to a faulty epistemology that refuses to view truth in purely propositional terms, leaving room for nonpropositional, subjective elements in their definition of what is truth.

Another phenomenon related to authority seen widely within New Calvinist circles is an eager acceptance of the continuance of the charismatic gifts, especially prophecy. This is a significant departure from the historic Calvinist persuasion.

This dissertation will address the six points described above as the *sine qua non* of New Calvinism. The first point, “Dortian Calvinism,” will be addressed briefly as a conclusion to this introduction. Since to say, “New Calvinism is Dortian Calvinism,” is almost the same as saying, “Calvinism is Calvinism,” it may be somewhat redundant to devote an entire chapter to Dortian

Calvinism. Besides, the debate between Arminianism and Calvinism is of such enormous historic proportions that it has produced innumerable works critiquing Dortian Calvinism. There is not much new to say here, except to point out a few observations relative to Dortian Calvinism that characterize New Calvinism. The perseverance of the saints will, of course, have its own chapter (chapter 4), and limited atonement will receive close attention in the chapter on authority (chapter 5). The remaining five points will each receive attention as a separate chapter in the following pages with particular attention given to the ways in which New Calvinism offers a theology that is wanting in comparison with dispensationalism.

BRIEF WORD REGARDING DORTIAN CALVINISM

All New Calvinists subscribe to the so-called five points of Calvinism. However, there is no universal agreement on the definition of these five points, nor is there universal agreement among Reformed theologians that these five points define “Calvinism.” The five points of Calvinism are most frequently summarized by using the mnemonic TULIP. However, TULIP only represents labels for the subject matter covered in the Canons of the Synod of Dort (held in the Dutch city of Dordrecht, 1618–1619). Many Calvinists today, including some New Calvinists, are unhappy with this mnemonic. The origin of the use of TULIP is probably no earlier than the beginning of the twentieth century. The earliest extant printed record of its use is by Cleland Boyd McAfee in about 1905. Vail writes:

Some eight years ago I had the privilege of hearing a popular lecture by Dr. McAfee, of Brooklyn, upon the Five Points of Calvinism, given before the Presbyterian Union of Newark, New Jersey, which was most interesting as well as instructive. To aid the mind in remembering the Five Points, Dr. McAfee made use of the word Tulip, which,

possessing five letters, lends itself nicely to the subject in hand, especially as it ends with the letter P, as will be seen later.¹⁶

A major New Calvinist work promoting Dortian Calvinism is John Piper's book *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace*.¹⁷ Though expressing some dissatisfaction with the acronym, Piper nevertheless uses TULIP. In short, here is how he explains each of the points:

1. **Total Depravity:** Our sinful corruption is so deep and so strong as to make us slaves of sin and morally unable to overcome our own rebellion and blindness. This inability to save ourselves from ourselves is *total*. We are utterly dependent on God's grace to overcome our rebellion, give us eyes to see, and effectively draw us to the Savior.
2. **Unconditional Election:** God's election is an unconditional act of free grace that was given through His Son, Jesus, before the world began. By this act, God chose, before the foundation of the world, those who would be delivered from bondage to sin and brought to repentance and saving faith in Jesus.
3. **Limited Atonement:** The atonement of Christ is *sufficient* for all humans and *effective* for those who trust him. It is not limited in its worth or sufficiency to save all who believe. But the *full, saving effectiveness* of the atonement that Jesus accomplished is limited to those for whom that saving effect was prepared. The availability of the total sufficiency of the atonement is for all people. Whosoever will—whoever believes—will

¹⁶ Wayne Sparkman, "This Day in Presbyterian History," September 25, 2013, <http://www.thisday.pcahistory.org/tag/park-college> (accessed June 20, 2014). The reference is from William H. Vail, "The Five Points of Calvinism Historically Considered," *The New Outlook*, vol. 104 (1913), 394. Also, Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 79.

¹⁷ John Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace* (The Desiring God Foundation, 2013).

be covered by the blood of Christ. *And* there is a divine design in the death of Christ to accomplish the promises of the New Covenant for the chosen Bride of Christ. Thus Christ died for all people, but not for all in the same way.

4. **Irresistible Grace:** This means that the resistance that all human beings exert against God every day (Rom. 3:10–12; Acts 7:51) is wonderfully overcome at the proper time by God’s saving grace for undeserving rebels whom He chooses freely to save.
5. **Perseverance of the Saints:** All who are justified will win the fight of faith. They will persevere in faith and will not surrender finally to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the New Covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage our vigilance, so that we may say in the end, “I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (2 Timothy 4:7; 1 Corinthians 15:10).¹⁸

Other New Calvinist presentations of the five points can be found in the systematic theology books of Wayne Grudem¹⁹ and Michael Bird.²⁰

The acronym TULIP is coming under increasing criticism by various Reformed theologians. Dr. Timothy George proposes replacing TULIP with ROSES:

- **Radical Depravity:** Compared with total depravity, *radical depravity* agrees that every aspect of our being was damaged through the Fall and we can do nothing to save

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004).

²⁰ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

ourselves, but affirms that humans are not totally evil because we retain the image of God despite our fallenness.

- **Overcoming Grace:** Compared with irresistible grace, *overcoming grace* (or effectual calling) affirms that God accomplishes salvation, but differs in that rather than salvation being a mechanical and deterministic process, it allows for even sinful, obstinate humans to respond to God’s persistent wooing.
- **Sovereign Election:** In contrast to the double predestinarianism of unconditional election, God sovereignly elects those whom he foreknows will respond to him.
- **Eternal Life:** The phrase “perseverance of the saints” might suggest that although we are saved by grace, we are kept by our good works. The phrase “Once saved, always saved” could suggest that we could claim Christ as Savior without making Him Lord of our lives.
- **Singular Redemption:** Finally, unlike limited atonement, *singular redemption* communicates that Jesus’ death was sufficient to save everyone but is efficient only for those who repent and believe.²¹

A new book proposes the acronym PROOF, which stands for:

- **Planned Grace:** Before time began, God mapped out the plan of salvation from first to last. God planned to adopt particular people as His own children; Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for these people’s sins and as a substitute who satisfied God’s righteous requirements in their place (John 10:11–18; Ephesians 1:4–12).

²¹ Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God’s Initiative —Our Response* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2000), 71–83.

- **Resurrecting Grace:** Everyone is born spiritually dead. Left to ourselves, we will never choose God’s way. God enables people to respond freely to His grace by giving them spiritual life through the power of Christ’s resurrection (John 5:21; Ephesians 2:1–7).
- **Outrageous Grace:** God chose people to be saved on the basis of His own sovereign will. He didn’t base His choice to give us grace on anything that we did or might do (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8–9).
- **Overcoming Grace:** God works in the lives of His chosen people to transform their rebellion into surrender so that they freely repent and recognize Christ as the risen King (John 6:44, 65; Ephesians 2:4–10).
- **Forever Grace:** God seals His people with His Holy Spirit so that they are preserved and persevere in faith until the final restoration of God’s kingdom on the earth (John 10:27–29; Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30).²²

The canons of the Synod of Dort, themselves, were indeed divided into five “Heads,” with the third and fourth heads combined. All of the above attempts to summarize these heads by acronyms are necessarily based on some English translation. The original canons were composed in Latin. An English translation of the original Heads is as follows:

- First Head of Doctrine: Divine Election and Reprobation
- Second Head of Doctrine: The Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men
Thereby

²² Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones, *PROOF* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), chapter 1, “Calvin’s Comeback?” cited in the book review by J. Todd Billings, “Calvin’s Comeback?” *Christian Century* 126, no. 24 (December, 2009) 22–25.

- Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine: The Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof
- Fifth Head of Doctrine: The Perseverance of the Saints

It is not the purpose of this dissertation necessarily to dispute the five points of Calvinism per se. Of these, two deserve specific attention: limited atonement and perseverance of the saints. The perseverance of the saints will have its own chapter (chapter 4), and limited atonement will receive close attention in the chapter on authority (chapter 5).

Chapter 1

Eclecticism

The major part of this dissertation is concerned with theological matters. This chapter, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with practical matters. A major feature of New Calvinism is its widespread appeal, or eclectic nature. The attempt to form a broad coalition, or togetherness, based on Calvinistic teaching may ultimately be the feature that makes this movement short-lived. In a roundtable discussion sponsored by The Gospel Coalition, Kevin DeYoung, Al Mohler, and Ligon Duncan were discussing the characteristics of New Calvinism. Dr. Mohler commented, “I think there’s another word to use as kind of a distinguishing feature of the New Calvinism. And, for good or for ill, that word is ‘eclectic.’ I think this is a generation that by and large is taking a little from here and a little bit from there, but the overwhelming superstructure of their theology ends up being reformed.”¹

The membership of TGC’s [The Gospel Coalition’s] current Executive Council reveals the true diversity of this movement. Membership ranges from the more traditional Evangelical denominations to the truly left-wing postmodern Evangelicals. The traditionalists include Southern Baptists Albert Mohler, the reforming president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, and Mark Dever, pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C., and Drs. Ligon Duncan and Richard Phillips of the PCA. More moderate members include Charismatics with some Reformed sympathies such as C. J. Mahaney, Joshua Harris, and John Piper who spans both the Baptist and Charismatic flanks of the movement. Far left postmodern Evangelicals are represented by Tim Keller and Kevin DeYoung. With leaders such as these, one can only imagine the diversity of theological traditions that constitute TGC.²

¹ Kevin DeYoung, Albert Mohler, and Ligon Duncan, “What’s New about New Calvinism?” <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/what-s-new-about-the-new-calvinism> (accessed June 17, 2015). Quote begins at time stamp 4:30.

² <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=295> (accessed September 11, 2014).

Eclecticism is certainly one feature that distinguishes New Calvinism from traditional Calvinism. Jeremy Walker observes, “This is an eclectic movement, a spectrum not a monolith,”³ and he further cautions, “There is a pursuit of unity that may end up being at the expense of truth.”⁴ Historically, Calvinism has tended to be somewhat exclusive and narrow. In the same roundtable discussion referred to above, Kevin DeYoung contrasted the current eclecticism of New Calvinism with its past century-and-a-half history of exclusivity, “You could make an argument that it’s been the last 150 years . . . where Calvinism has been largely rooted in confessional traditions, sort of buried out there.”⁵ These observations about New Calvinism’s eclectic character beg several questions.

Is “Calvinism” Exclusivist?

In the nature of the case, any “-ism” is exclusivist. Calvinism is no exception. From its inception, Calvinism as part of the Reformation excluded Catholicism; and as refined at the Council of Dort it was intended to exclude Arminianism. Calvinist confessions and creeds, such as the Westminster Confession, Heidelberg Confession, and Belgic Confession, are all designed to exclude certain doctrinal positions.

The Gospel Coalition represents one of the best examples of the eclectic thrust of New Calvinism. In its founding document, “The Gospel for All of Life: Preamble,” The Gospel Coalition claims to be “a fellowship of evangelical churches[,] . . . gladly linking hearts with

³ Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered: A Personal and Pastoral Assessment* (Faverdale North Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013), 83.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ DeYoung, Mohler, and Duncan, at time stamp 5:40.

fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.”⁶ On the other hand, New Calvinists have been accused of isolationism. Jonathan Merritt has said:

One of the markers of the neo-Calvinist movement is isolationism. My Reformed friends consume Calvinist blogs and Calvinist books, attend Calvinist conferences, and join Calvinist churches with Calvinist preachers. They rarely learn from or engage with those outside their tradition.

Gregory Thornbury, a Calvinist and president of The King’s College in New York City, told me, “I think the ‘young, restless, and reformed’ are different than the Dutch stream in that they tend to stay with authors and leaders that they know. It does run the risk of being provincial, but I don’t think it is intentional. There are universes where people stay, and they read the things they know.”

Another troubling trend I see in the movement is tribalism. This is the kinship tendency within a group to protect insiders while combating outsiders.⁷

New Calvinists came under considerable criticism from the more traditional Reformed arena for the inclusion of such figures as T. D. Jakes—the well-known prosperity gospel preacher and outspoken modalist—and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.⁸ Calvinist author Jeremy Walker laments,

Unity and peace at the expense of truth and righteousness is a wicked and unconscionable trade-off. Those who dare to question or critique are often and quickly condemned, made to seem or feel profoundly unspiritual because this ecumenism has appropriated to itself a flag labelled “gospel” under which to sail its flotilla of ships, and who dares to fire a shot across the bows of the lead vessel?⁹

While Baptists, Presbyterians, and Charismatics are all welcomed into the fold of New Calvinism, one position routinely excluded is dispensationalism. Ligon Duncan says,

⁶ The Gospel Coalition, *Foundation Documents*, “The Gospel for All of Life: Preamble,” 2.

⁷ Jonathan Merritt, “The Troubling Trends in America’s ‘Calvinist Revival,’” *Jonathan Merritt on Faith & Culture*, <http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/05/20/troubling-trends-americas-calvinist-revival> (accessed October 30, 2014).

⁸ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 88–90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

“Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are . . . diametrically opposed.”¹⁰ And, despite the fact that Lewis Sperry Chafer clearly identified himself as a Calvinist,¹¹ Duncan is of the opinion that “there is still a great deal of fear and discomfort with Calvinism at Dallas Theological Seminary. . . . There are several similarities between Dispensationalism and the Arminian alternative to Covenant Theology.”¹² Al Mohler claims, “I’m not a dispensationalist. I have a hard time imagining two different comings, and I think the Bible is pretty clear about warning the church about how to live in a time of tribulation, so I don’t believe the church is out of—is taken away.”¹³ John Piper told a group of Christian journalists,

You wouldn’t find in this movement very many pretrib rapture people. The *Left Behind* series and the *Left Behind* movie that has sold, what, 15 million copies, what, each? I don’t know. It does not mark this movement. And it doesn’t mark the cutting edge of the expansion of Christianity in this country or around the world. There are other views of the end times, but they are very diverse in this movement.¹⁴

Notwithstanding New Calvinism’s claim to be a broad coalition, Calvinism has always been exclusivist and will always be. Despite the eclectic and inclusive rhetoric of New

¹⁰ Ligon Duncan, “Dispensationalism,” October 29, 1998, <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/classes-and-training/dispensationalism> (accessed June 24, 2015).

¹¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), III, 267. See also Thomas Ice, “The Calvinistic Heritage of Dispensationalism,” *The Thomas Ice Collection*, <http://www.raptureready.com/featured/ice/TheCalvinisticHeritageofDispensationalism.html> (accessed June 24, 2015).

¹² Duncan, “Dispensationalism.”

¹³ Albert Mohler, “Eschatology,” at Dauphin Way Baptist Church on March 29, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vPI8ZgIeg0>, time stamp at 1:15 (accessed June 24, 2015).

¹⁴ John Piper, “On the New Calvinists.” September 11, 2009, Religious Newswriters Association Annual Convention, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/on-the-new-calvinists> (accessed November 23, 2013). Quote begins at 5:45. Note: It is interesting that Piper made no mention of John MacArthur in this context. By this time (2009) Piper had already spoken approvingly of MacArthur’s *Gospel According to Jesus*, and had welcomed MacArthur as a fellow reformed theologian. But he did not refer to MacArthur, a pretrib rapturist, as one within the New Calvinist movement.

Calvinism's founders, and no doubt genuine desire on their part to be inclusive, Calvinism's inherent exclusivity will doubtless tear the coalition and togetherness apart in the end.

Can Puritanism and Grace Coexist?

One of the curious features of New Calvinism is the wide variety of criticisms leveled against it relative to legalism. New Calvinism has been criticized as being both legalistic and antinomian. Before his resignation as pastor of Mars Hill Church, popular New Calvinist speaker Mark Driscoll was frequently criticized for being the “cussing pastor.”¹⁵ Walker levels the charge of “incipient antinomianism” against New Calvinism. He says,

I call it incipient because it is there in seed form even if it is not yet fully broken out in doctrine or in practice. . . . It is becoming a casual and ill-considered mantra, repeated in endless blog discussions and trolled out in countless videos and articles, that we are no longer under law but that we are under grace. For many, what this means—and this is the corollary that is argued over—is that we follow Christ but that is not related to embracing and obeying the Ten Commandments. . . . A concern not to be or become legalists has driven some back toward antinomianism.¹⁶

On the other hand, the position that has come to be known popularly as lordship salvation has characterized the movement. Chapter 4 of this dissertation, “Perseverance of the Saints,” will examine this issue in greater detail. Suffice it here to say that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which includes lordship salvation, lays a heavy legalistic requirement on Christians.

¹⁵ “Mark Driscoll,” Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/d/mark-driscoll> (accessed June 25, 2015). Marsha West, “Profane Preachers Contribute to Killing the Conscience,” *Renew America* (September 27, 2012), <http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/mwest/120927> (accessed June 26, 2015). John MacArthur, “Grunge Christianity and Cussing Pastors? What Next?” *Crosswalk* (February 26, 2007), <http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/grunge-christianity-and-cussing-pastors-what-next-11530376.html> (accessed June 26, 2015).

¹⁶ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 74, 75, 76, 79. See also Peter Masters, “New Calvinism: The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, excerpt from *The Sword & Trowel* 2009, issue 2, <http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Christian-Article/New-Calvinism-Merger-of-Calvinism-and-Worldliness/Sword-and-Trowel-Magazine> (accessed October 30, 2014).

John MacArthur has been particularly influential in New Calvinist circles in this respect. Even though MacArthur identifies himself as a dispensationalist—albeit a “leaky dispensationalist”—he has formed alliances with many New Calvinists and has included numerous New Calvinists in his annual Shepherd’s Conference. In an interview with both MacArthur and John Piper conducted by Justin Taylor of Desiring God Ministries, MacArthur reflected on how he first came to know Piper. He said,

When I wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus*, I was so exercised because that “no lordship” theology was coming out of the heritage that was my heritage in a sense. When I wrote that book I didn’t know anybody outside of my circles really, and I didn’t know how this book would be received. But Jim Boice agreed to write the foreword, and John Piper wrote an endorsement that was absolutely stunning to me, because I was really not moving in Reformed circles at that time. I was a leaky dispensationalist. That was my world, and I realized that I was much more one of you than I was one of them.¹⁷

Another enthusiastic New Calvinist supporter of MacArthur’s lordship salvation books has been R. C. Sproul.¹⁸ This focus on lordship salvation seems to be at odds with the charge of antinomianism, but the incongruity is symptomatic of the problems related to eclecticism.

On the legalistic side of New Calvinism, there is a great admiration of the Puritans, particularly Jonathan Edwards. For example, there are some eighty-seven references to Jonathan Edwards in John Piper’s book *Desiring God*,¹⁹ and he is known frequently to cite Edwards in his other writings and sermons. Piper notes,

The New Calvinism puts a priority on pietism or piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of affections in Christian living, while esteeming the life of

¹⁷ Justin Taylor, John MacArthur, and John Piper, “A Conversation with John Piper and John MacArthur,” *Desiring God* (September 28, 2007), <http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/a-conversation-with-john-piper-and-john-macarthur> (accessed June 20, 2015).

¹⁸ Sproul wrote endorsements for the covers of both *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) and *Slave* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

¹⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003).

the mind and being very productive in it, and embracing the value of serious scholarship. Jonathan Edwards would be invoked as a model of this combination of the affections and the life of the mind more often than John Calvin, whether that's fair to Calvin or not.²⁰

This elevation of the Puritans, and particularly Jonathan Edwards, runs the risk of minimizing grace. Evans, noting Edwards' use of fear as a motivation, says:

Edwards sought to change man's state by an appeal to fear. He preached sermons in a terrible way because "he felt the state of the church life made it compulsory to preach the terror of the Lord." In this technique he did not seem to be much different from Stoddard who likewise put a heavy accent on fear in his appeals. The purpose of preaching, according to Stoddard, was not "to show our wit and eloquence, but to set the consciences of men on fire: . . . the word is as an hammer and we should use it to break the rocky hearts of men." This was fairly standard Puritan style.²¹

If it was paradoxical for Edwards to speak of delighting in God while breathing out fire and brimstone, is it any less paradoxical for the Christian hedonist (John Piper) to offer Jonathan Edwards as such a shining model of Christianity? Such alliances appear perhaps to be the mingling of iron with clay.

Another book written by Piper that reflects his tendency toward legalism is *What Jesus Demands from the World*.²² Piper claims that this book contains "the commands of Jesus Christ . . . which . . . derive from the Great Commission itself, where the purpose of Jesus' final commission is that his disciples teach people to 'obey' his teachings."²³ If fulfilling the Great Commission consists of teaching the nations Jesus' commands, one wonders how exactly to

²⁰ Jared Oliphint, "John Piper's Twelve Features of the New Calvinism," Reformed Forum, <http://reformedforum.org/john-pipers-twelve-features-new-calvinism> (accessed January 6, 2015). Video of Piper's message can be viewed at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2014/03/14/john-pipers-lecture-at-westminster-theological-seminary-on-new-calvinism-and-the-new-community>.

²¹ W. Glyn Evans, "Jonathan Edwards: Puritan Paradox," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, no. 493 (January 1967), 62.

²² John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

²³ Ralph D. Winter, "What Jesus Demands from the World" (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), book review, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 1 (January–March 2007), 44.

understand the gospel. What is the Great Commission? Is it preaching the gospel, or is it teaching Jesus' commands? There appears to be a confusion between evangelism and discipleship, between justification and sanctification. The same problem will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4 on perseverance of the saints. But let it be said here that New Calvinism's effort to champion Puritanism runs a great risk of confusing justification with sanctification and thus losing sight of grace. *What Jesus Demands from the World* places great emphasis on the Gospels and the Old Testament, with very slight emphasis on the New Testament Epistles. Winter notes the following statistics: "It's significant that the Scripture quotations throughout the book come mainly from the Gospels (although he cites over 200 passages from the Old Testament). There are almost 800 from the book of Matthew, over 100 from Mark, over 300 from Luke, almost 350 from John and only two from the rest of the New Testament."²⁴ Such an overreliance on the Old Testament and the Gospels biases this work toward the law and likely betrays its underlying covenant theology, which views the law merely as one expression of the covenant of grace.²⁵

The underlying covenant theology in *What Jesus Demands from the World* is also seen in the way Piper discusses the glory of God. In his introduction to the book, Piper discusses why he selected the fifty commands that he did. Obviously Piper does not include every command that Jesus gave (e.g., "Go not into the way of the Gentiles," "Pluck out your right eye," "Cut off your right hand," etc.). He says that the controlling feature was "the kind [of commandment] that keeps his glory at the center."²⁶ He then defines God's glory as that which is displayed in the

²⁴ Ibid. In fact, it is quite interesting that Piper has as many references to the Song of Solomon as he does to all the New Testament Epistles.

²⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIX.6.

²⁶ Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 18.

person and work of Jesus.²⁷ But his discussion of the person and work of Jesus betrays his prior commitment to covenant theology. Piper's very curious treatment of the title "Son of Man" is based on a clearly nonliteral interpretation of Daniel 7:13–14. He claims that the Jews of Jesus' day had misinterpreted this passage by assuming it taught that "the Messiah would conquer Rome and liberate Israel and set up his earthly kingdom."²⁸ Piper concludes that Jesus' use of the title "Son of Man" "was not making explicit claims to political power," and goes on to expound an already/not-yet concept of the kingdom.²⁹ Piper's desire to focus on the glory of God is admirable, but his limiting of the glory of God to soteriological features, to the exclusion of millennial and national ones, shows the clear influence of covenant theology on his thinking.

Can Baptists Be "Reformed"?

Several influential New Calvinists are Baptists: John Piper, Al Mohler, and Mark Dever. The relationship between Baptists and those of the Reformed faith has always been somewhat tenuous. From the outset of the Reformation, there were difficulties between the Reformers and the Anabaptists. For example, the *Belgic Confession* labeled the Anabaptist's view of the nature of Christ's humanity "heresy" (Article XVIII), their view of rebaptism as "error" (Article XXXIV), and their view of believers' relationship to civil authority as "detestable" and "seditious" (Article XXXVI). To be sure, history has known of many Baptists who held to Reformed (i.e., Calvinistic) soteriology; such English Baptists formulated the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), patterned in large degree after the Westminster Confession. Still,

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

those Calvinistic Baptists did formulate their own Confession so as to distinguish themselves from other Calvinists.

As recently as the mid-1980s, Kenneth Good expressed his alarm at a growing sovereign grace (i.e., Calvinistic) movement among Baptist churches. While expressing appreciation for Calvinistic soteriology, Good was concerned about those Sovereign Grace Baptists whose “Baptist convictions were at times offended because of collision with others whose views were not merely ‘Covenant’ in the classic sense, but often strongly anti-Baptist.”³⁰ Good identified three basic concepts on the basis of which Baptists would find themselves at odds with non-Baptists who otherwise held to Reformed theology:

- The nature of the church—by which he referred to what are commonly known as the Baptist distinctives.
- The nature of the kingdom—which involved his concern about the rise of theonomy or Christian reconstruction.
- The nature of the law—by which he referred specifically to what Reformed theology calls the “third use of the Law.”³¹

Many of the same concerns sounded by Good may be raised vis-à-vis Baptists who are involved in the New Calvinism. Baptists can run into difficulty when trying to explain their beliefs along the lines of covenant theology. For example, Piper attempts to explain baptism as the New Testament counterpart of circumcision while at the same time trying to avoid paedobaptist conclusions. He clearly believes that “there appears to be in the New Testament a correspondence between circumcision and baptism. Just as circumcision was given as a sign to

³⁰ Kenneth Good, *Are Baptists Reformed?* (Lorain, OH: Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, 1986), 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

the ‘children of the covenant’ in the Old Testament, so baptism—the new sign of the covenant—should be given to the ‘children of the covenant’ today.”³² And he understands the problem this connection creates for his commitment to believer’s baptism; he explains,

So you see what that means? If circumcision and baptism signify the same thing—namely, genuine faith—then you can’t use this meaning of baptism by itself as an argument against baptizing infants, because circumcision was given to infants. In other words, you can’t simply say, “Baptism is an expression and sign of faith; infants can’t have faith; therefore don’t baptize infants.” You can’t simply say this, because Romans 4:11 says that circumcision means the same thing—a sign of faith—and it was given to infants.³³

So, he is forced to adopt a hybridized view of Israel and the Church that borrows just enough of a distinction from dispensationalism to allow for some change between the recipients of circumcision and the recipients of baptism, while still retaining substantially a continuity between Israel and the Church.³⁴

Reformed/Presbyterian New Calvinist Kevin DeYoung, while admitting on the one hand that “John Piper is Reformed,” explains, on the other hand, “John Piper is not really Reformed. Reformed theology is defined by the Reformed confessions and finds its expression in Reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiastical structures, so clearly John Piper—as a credobaptist from the

³² John Piper, “How Do Circumcision and Baptism Correspond?” *Desiring God* (August 29, 1999), <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/how-do-circumcision-and-baptism-correspond> (accessed June 17, 2015).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* His attempted explanation is as follows: “The Church is not a replay of Israel. It is an advance on Israel. To administer the sign of the covenant as though this advance has not happened is a great mistake. We do not baptize our children according to the flesh, not because we don’t love them, but because we want to preserve for them the purity and the power of the spiritual community that God ordained for the believing church of the living Christ.”

Baptist General Conference—is not Reformed. Why should ‘Reformed Baptist’ sound any less strange than ‘Lutheran Baptist’?”³⁵ Michael Bird is in essential agreement with DeYoung.³⁶

Al Mohler’s attempt to hold a diverse Gospel Coalition together focuses around his delineation of what he calls a “theological triage,” a rating of doctrines based on their closeness to the gospel:

1. First-level theological issues are most central and essential to the Christian faith. These include the trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.
2. What distinguishes first-level and second-level doctrines is that evangelicals may disagree on the second-order issues, though this disagreement creates significant boundaries between believers. Such second-level doctrines include the meaning and mode of baptism, and the issue of women serving as pastors.
3. Third-order issues are doctrines over which evangelicals may disagree and yet remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations. This is where Mohler categorizes debates over eschatology.³⁷

While it may be helpful to think in terms of such a triage structure, there will be vast differences of opinion as to which doctrines belong to which level.

³⁵ Kevin DeYoung, “Is John Piper Really Reformed?” TGC (November 7, 2013), <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/11/07/is-john-piper-really-reformed> (accessed June 29, 2015).

³⁶ Michael F. Bird, “Who Is Reformed? Is John Piper Reformed?” Euangelion (November 7, 2013), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/2013/11/who-is-reformed-is-john-piper-reformed> (accessed November 8, 2013).

³⁷ Albert Mohler, “Confessional Evangelicalism,” ed., Kevin Bauder, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 78–80. Albert Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity” (July 12, 2005), <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity> (accessed June 29, 2015).

The eclecticism that New Calvinism seeks to maintain is a bit like a marriage between incompatible partners. Amos asks, “Can two walk together except they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3, NKJV). How much agreement is necessary in order to maintain a coalition? The days of New Calvinism’s togetherness may be numbered. Only time will tell.

Can Cessationists and Continuationists Coexist?

Chapter 5 of this dissertation (“Authority”) will examine extensively the issue of New Calvinism’s involvement in promoting the continuation of such spiritual gifts as tongues and prophecy. Many New Calvinists have departed from the traditional Calvinist commitment to cessationism and are now promoting continuationism. None has been more influential in this effort than Wayne Grudem. His *Systematic Theology*,³⁸ a text used widely on Christian college and seminary campuses, and his *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*³⁹ have had a tremendous impact on a young generation of Calvinistic students of theology. John Piper, without a doubt, the single most influential force in New Calvinism, enthusiastically endorses Grudem’s views on the spiritual gifts. And Mark Driscoll has described himself as “a Charismatic wearing a seatbelt.”⁴⁰ As C. Michael Patton has said,

There is a very strong charismatic openness in the New Calvinism that was not present before. Previously, practically all Calvinists were cessationists, believing that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit ceased in the first century. Now there are many who are continuationists, believing that the supernatural sign gifts are still in effect today. It is not necessary to be a tongue-speaking Calvinist to be a part of the New Calvinism, but you

³⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

³⁹ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

⁴⁰ Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered* (Faverdale North Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013),

probably wouldn't be offended by it either. Certainly, you would not be dogmatic about it either way.⁴¹

Yet there are others, such as Al Mohler, who maintain a cessationist interpretation, and John MacArthur, who in many ways identifies with New Calvinists but stirred not a few waves in 2013 with his "Strange Fire" conference strongly condemning continuationism. Tongues and prophecy have been contentious issues in the church ever since the rise of Montanism in the second century; and they continue to stir up controversy. Will the togetherness of New Calvinism's coalition have a strong enough glue to overcome such contention? As this dissertation will demonstrate in chapter 5, the issues of prophecy and tongues are not peripheral issues, but strike at the heart one's view of authority. It is doubtful that New Calvinists who are committed to the truth of God's Word and to the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* will be able to ignore their differences in this area of spiritual gifts.

Conclusion

Of all the features of New Calvinism, eclecticism is probably the most striking and the most characteristic. The rest of the features essentially amount in some way to a resurgence of Old Calvinism. But the Calvinism of the past was never eclectic. If someone had planned and conspired pragmatically to spread Calvinism effectively, then building eclecticism into the conspiracy would have been a brilliant idea. However, there is no evidence known to this writer that New Calvinism has spread through conspiracy and pragmatism. If anything, such efforts

⁴¹ C. Michael Patton, "What Is the 'New Calvinism'? . . . And Are You a Part of It?" Credo House (April 5, 2010), <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/04/what-is-the-new-calvinism-and-are-you-a-part-of-it> (accessed March 6, 2015).

dependent on humans will run utterly contrary to the ideals of Calvinism. The lack of eclecticism in Old Calvinism was no mistake, however. Theological underpinnings of Calvinism and covenant theology naturally tended to weed out such undesirable partners as those considered to be Arminians, Antinomians, Anti-credalists, and Charismatics. The history of Calvinism may point to the fact that the inclusion of many such Christians may constitute an unworkable and unsustainable coalition. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, already four high profile personalities have left The Gospel Coalition over matters of doctrinal differences or accusations of scandal.⁴² Only time can tell whether New Calvinism is here to stay or whether it is simply the latest fad to hit the Christian marketplace of –isms. This writer rather suspects that New Calvinism’s life span will be short-lived.

⁴² The four individuals referred to here are Mark Driscoll, Tullian Tchividjian, C. J. Mahaney, and Joshua Harris. Jeremy Weber, “Tim Keller, Don Carson Explain Why Tullian Tchividjian Was Asked to Leave Gospel Coalition,” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/may/tim-keller-don-carson-explain-why-tullian-tchividjian-tgc.html> (accessed July 4, 2015). Don Carson and Tim Keller, “Driscoll Steps Down from TGC Council,” <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/driscoll-steps-down-from-tgc-council> (accessed July 4, 2015).

Chapter 2

Soteriocentric Focus

Dispensationalism holds that the unifying principle of the Bible is doxological, meaning that God’s ultimate purpose in all His dealings with His creation is for His glory.¹ New Calvinist theologians, with others in the Reformed tradition, also claim to focus their theology on God’s glory. The Westminster Confession of Faith, highly respected by most New Calvinists, states about Scripture, “The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole . . . is, to give all glory to God,”² and in answer to the question, “What is the chief and highest end of man?” the Westminster Catechism answers, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”³ These are good statements with which both New Calvinists and dispensationalists can agree. But New Calvinism is inconsistent in adhering to its claim of a doxological purpose. In practice, New Calvinism maintains more of a soteriocentric⁴ focus than a doxological one. This soteriocentric focus makes the gospel the primary controlling purpose of God and the central message of the Bible. This shift from a doxological focus to a soteriocentric one results in a number of

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 40–41, 93–95. Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1990), 50–51.

² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.1.

³ *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 1.

⁴ The term “soteriocentric” is being used to mean that which is centered on the gospel message of salvation. This term is intended to be more focused than simply “soteriological.” The Bible is largely soteriological in that the primary, though not exclusive, message of God to man is the message of salvation. However, to say that the Bible is centered on the message of salvation (“soteriocentric”) implies that everything in the Bible has to do with the gospel message in some way. Bebbington uses the term “crucicentrism” in David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 1–17; cited in Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 20.

significant problems: a limited view of God’s purposes, a theology that is too man-centered, a biased interpretation of Scripture that results in eisegesis, a misunderstanding of the place of the law in the gospel (law-gospel continuum), a tendency toward the social gospel in missiology, and an unbalanced presentation of systematic theology.

A Limited View of God’s Purposes

For the New Calvinist, the gospel is the central and focal message of everything in Scripture. Bullmore explains it this way: “The gospel is a cause of scriptural revelation, and the gospel is an effect of scriptural revelation. In other words, God’s great, eternal purpose of redemption (what is expressed in the gospel) gives rise to the Bible, and the Bible serves to accomplish God’s purpose in the gospel.”⁵ Thus, according to Bullmore, the Bible’s message is exclusive:

If we think of the gospel, broadly speaking, as God’s eternal good purpose to redeem a people for himself (1 Pet. 2:9) and to restore his fallen creation (Rom. 8:19–21), then this “good news” precedes and gives rise to biblical revelation. All of Scripture is marked by this sense of being born out of some great divine initiative. In this sense, the gospel is a cause of biblical revelation. While Scripture itself is not the gospel, all Scripture is related to the gospel, and the gospel is Scripture’s reason for being. The gospel is the Bible’s main and unifying message.⁶

By explaining God’s purposes in terms of the centrality and overarching guidance of the gospel, in practice the New Calvinist makes the salvation of the elect, rather than the glory of God, the controlling purpose in God’s dealings with His creation—a soteriological purpose. This is essentially the same as covenant theology’s overarching principle of the Covenant of Grace.

⁵ Mike Bullmore, *The Gospel and Scripture: How to Read the Bible* (Crossway: The Gospel Coalition Booklets, Kindle Edition, 2011-08-02), Kindle Locations 44–46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 49–52.

Practically speaking, this results in New Calvinism's theology having too limited a view of God's purposes in such things as creation, the family, human government, angels, Israel, and the kingdom. Some New Calvinists have acknowledged the potential for this problem. Kevin DeYoung, when discussing the definition of New Calvinism, spoke of the "danger of minimizing important doctrines in an effort to promote gospel-centered unity."⁷ As with covenant theology, this approach attempts to force everything into a soteriological paradigm. When Ryrie identified the glory of God as the underlying purpose of God in the world, this was to serve as a corrective to covenant theology's restrictive soteriocentrism. Hebrews 5:8—6:12 associates an unwarranted focus on the gospel with a state of immaturity. While the gospel is of supreme importance to man because of our fallen condition, it is not of such central importance from God's perspective. God has other purposes in His creation besides salvation. God is glorified through the gospel, but He is also glorified through His other purposes in the universe. Some such non-soteriological purposes include His purposes for the nations, the angels, marriage and the family, and the orderly arrangement of the cosmos. The concept that there can be other purposes for God besides redemption seems to be lost on the New Calvinist. Bullmore states that "the Bible is more than a narrative, recounting human history. There is a larger story behind the story. The real biblical narrative is the unfolding of God's purpose and plan. The Bible is God's story, and its storyline is the gospel: God's plan to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation through Christ."⁸ But this sets up a false dichotomy. Bullmore implies that you can either view Scripture as "a narrative, recounting human history" or as "the gospel: God's plan to redeem a people for

⁷ Kevin DeYoung, "What Do You Think of When You Think of the New Calvinism?" Young, Restless, and Reformed blog, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/12/11/what-do-you-think-of-when-you-think-of-the-new-calvinism> (accessed December 12, 2013).

⁸ Bullmore, Kindle Locations 243–245.

himself.” But there are other issues that the Bible addresses. There can be no doubt that when viewed from man’s perspective, nothing could be more important than the salvation of man. But is it right to impose this same priority of importance onto God? All that God has done, is doing, and will yet do is for His glory. This includes the salvation of the elect, but it also includes many other things. The very first thing recorded in the Bible is the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:1). This was for God’s glory (Psalm 19:1–6) and had nothing to do directly with the salvation of the elect. God’s institution of the family occurred before the Fall (Genesis 1:26–28) and was designed for His glory. God also has a non-soteriological purpose for human government for His glory (Genesis 9:5–6; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 1:13–17). These other purposes are difficult for the New Calvinist theologian to explain under the rubric of either the gospel or the Covenant of Grace.

Man-Centered Theology

Not only does the soteriocentric focus of New Calvinism result in too limited a view of God’s purposes, it may also tend to make theology too man-centered.⁹ Doubtless, New Calvinist theologians would object to this criticism. And, indeed, Reformed theology (including New Calvinism) has always claimed to be God-centered and focused on the glory of God. But it might more truthfully be said that Reformed theology has a dual focus: one God-centered, the other man-centered. This is seen in the Westminster Catechism’s statement, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.” Which is more important? Glorifying God or enjoying Him? One is a God-centered focus; the other is a man-centered focus. John Piper rephrases the Westminster statement as follows: “The chief end of man is to glorify God *by*

⁹ Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered* (Faverdale North Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013), 102.

enjoying Him forever.”¹⁰ The man-centeredness of this edited version of Westminster is seen in the subtitle of the book it comes from: *Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Webster’s Dictionary defines “hedonism” as “the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life.” If the chief way one glorifies God is by enjoying Him, then one’s primary focus can too easily become human enjoyment. While there is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying God (Psalm 1:2; 37:4; 1 John 1:4), there are clearly times when it is right for God’s people to suffer and experience great sorrow in the process of God’s being glorified. Such was clearly the case for Job, and the apostle Paul describes the great sorrows and suffering he experienced for God’s glory (1 Corinthians 15:31–32; 2 Corinthians 1:8). There is much truth in the aphorism, “God is more interested in your holiness than in your happiness.”

Biased Hermeneutic Leading to Eisegesis

It is assumed both in covenant theology in general, and in New Calvinism in particular, that the gospel is the proper interpretive center for understanding the Bible. Bullmore claims,

The Bible in all its parts points to and explains Christ in some way. Therefore, the Bible in all its parts contributes not only to our understanding the gospel but to our “hearing” the gospel with the goal that we might believe and that God will fully accomplish his good purpose of redemption. This then requires that we appropriate Scripture in keeping with God’s good purpose.¹¹

This is what is sometimes referred to as the Christocentric principle of interpretation. This principle was promoted by Luther and is what forced him, contrary to his own convictions, to resort to a spiritualizing, or allegorical, interpretation. The idea that all of Scripture points to Christ is usually based on a misunderstanding of Luke 24:27. But this passage likely means only

¹⁰ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 111.

¹¹ Bullmore, Kindle Locations 103–105.

that in every major section of the Old Testament, there are significant passages that refer to Christ and His redemptive work, not, as Bullmore states, “Jesus understood the entire Old Testament as speaking in some real way of him.”¹² For details on the Christocentric principle of interpretation and Luke 24:27, please refer to Appendix 1, “The Christocentric Principle of Hermeneutics and Luke 24:27.” Bullmore clearly understands that his Christocentric interpretation involves a spiritualizing of the text. He states, “We come now to the matter of interpreting Scripture. The New Testament sets forth two key principles. Christ-Centeredness . . . Spiritual Interpretation.”¹³

While the Christocentric, or gospel-centered, principle may seem intuitively correct to Christians who have become recipients of God’s saving grace, it may in fact be a dangerously oversimplified way of viewing things. There can be no doubt that salvation is a subject most dear to the heart of God’s people. After all, the redeemed of God have been rescued from that which, apart from God’s sovereign intervention, was a hopeless and fearful fate. But to make salvation the sole, or overriding, purpose of God is to view things from man’s perspective, not necessarily from God’s perspective. One of the most significant catchphrases of New Calvinism is “gospel-centered.” This phrase shows up in a wide variety of contexts. Tim Challies observes:

Gospel-centeredness is all the rage today. We are told to live gospel-centered lives, to pray toward a gospel-centered faith, to have gospel-centered humility, to be gospel-centered parents, to form gospel-centered churches, to have gospel-centered marriages, to say goodbye at gospel-centered funerals. The gospel, we are told, must be central to all we are and all we do.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., Kindle Locations 194–195.

¹³ Ibid., Kindle Locations 184–186, 207.

¹⁴ “The Gospel Centered Everything,” Tim Challies blog (March 7, 2013), <http://www.challies.com/articles/the-gospel-centered-everything> (accessed December 11, 2013).

Similarly, Walker says, “If you read the books, follow the blogs, and listen to the conversations, you will hear ‘gospel-this’ and ‘gospel-that’ and ‘gospel-the-other,’ perhaps almost to the point of inanity.”¹⁵

A recent search of popular Christian books revealed the following titles:

- *The Gospel-Centered Life*
- *Gospel-Centered Teaching*
- *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*
- *Gospel Centered Leadership*
- *The Gospel-Centered Woman*
- *The Gospel-Centered Mom*
- *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*
- *The Gospel-Centered Community Participant’s Guide*
- *Living the Cross Centered Life*
- *Gospel-Centered Family*

God does have other purposes in His dealings with His creation, and these purposes all find their expression in His Word. Reading a redemptive purpose into passages dealing with such subjects as the angels, human families, the nations, and society runs the risk of eisegesis and may force the exegete either to unwarranted typology or to outright allegorism. Bullmore apparently believes that the interpretation of Scripture requires a different method of interpretation than is required for other literature. When discussing “spiritual interpretation” he says, “It is not sufficient merely to recognize that Christ-centeredness is essential for rightly interpreting Scripture. Our handling of Scripture must be accompanied by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is qualitatively different from every other book and requires that we read it in

¹⁵ Walker, *New Calvinism Considered*, 43.

keeping with its nature.”¹⁶ This leads him, contrary to literal grammatical-historical interpretation, to seeing a double meaning in Scripture: “With passage after passage, the effect of reading the Bible should be, at least, a doubly reinforced hearing of the gospel. In every passage there is, at least, a double emphasis on the gospel, one narrative and one thematic, each combining with the other to strengthen and make more vivid the truth and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ He does not clarify exactly how this principle of interpretation is to be employed in any given passage, but he clearly believes that in a narrative passage of Scripture, there can be both a narrative meaning and a separate thematic meaning, and that this double meaning is the interpretive tool used to find the gospel in “every passage.”

In addition to Luke 24:27, another passage sometimes adduced to support a gospel-centered interpretation of the Old Testament is Romans 15:4: “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”¹⁸ But Cranfield wisely exercises caution in the way he states the meaning this verse. He says that “the second part of the verse brings out what Paul sees as the aim of this instruction, and so the (or, at least, one very important) purpose of all the OT Scriptures.”¹⁹ Cranfield is reluctant to assign an exclusively soteriological aim to the Old Testament’s instruction, so he adds the clarifying phrase, “at least, one very important.” The believer’s instruction (διδασκαλία), even within the context of Romans, includes more than the gospel. He is instructed on how to be a good citizen (Romans 13:1–7), how to maintain a good

¹⁶ Bullmore, Kindle Locations 207–210.

¹⁷ Ibid., Kindle Locations 287–289.

¹⁸ Ibid., Kindle Locations 82–84.

¹⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 735.

marriage (Ephesians 5:21–33), how to manage his family affairs (Ephesians 6:1–4), etc. To be sure, the believer conducts himself in this way with a view to his “hope” (ἐλπίς, Romans 15:4), but this is far from saying that the “gospel” is central or foundational to the message of all Scripture. Hope is future focused with a view to coming judgment. The believer conducts himself in such a way as to meet with God’s approval at the Judgment Seat of Christ, whether that conduct has to do with gospel ministry, proper parenting, loving a spouse, or properly submitting to government.

The Place of the Law in the Gospel (Law-Gospel Continuum)

Forcing all things into a soteriological mold results, among other things, in confusing Israel and the Church. This is a problem generally afflicting Reformed theology, and is particularly notable in New Calvinism. More will be said on this topic in chapter 3, “A Supersessionist View of Israel and the Church.” But one area affecting the gospel message itself is how one views the relationship between the Law and the gospel. Strickland observed that “since the Reformation, the orthodox position of the Protestant church has been never to mix law and gospel. Despite this, [Daniel] Fuller argues that law and gospel are in a continuum.”²⁰ Piper was strongly influenced by Daniel P. Fuller. Indeed, Piper considers Fuller, a former professor of his, to have been his mentor.²¹ Fuller’s view of a “continuum of law and gospel”²² emerges in Piper’s exposition of Romans 9 as follows:

²⁰ Wayne G. Strickland, “Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller’s Law-Gospel Continuum,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 574 (1987): 182.

²¹ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 12. Piper extolled Fuller’s influence in the following words: “Everything I have preached or written is owing in great measure to the inspiration and exegetical discipline I absorbed from Daniel Fuller.”

²² Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

In spite of the widespread notion that the law and faith are contrary terms in Paul, in fact Christ is not the end of the law but its goal, and both Christ and the law teach faith not legalism. For this reason Paul can say, “through faith we establish the law” (Rom 3:31), and “those who walk according to the Spirit [i.e. by faith] fulfill the just requirement of the law” (Rom 8:4), and “the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom 2:13; cf. Cranfield, I, *Romans*, 155; see also Rom 2:26). And for this reason too Paul can argue in Rom 9:31f that the reason Israel did not attain to the righteousness which the law commends is that they pursued it οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ’ ἔργων—“not from faith but *as though* it were from works”—when in fact it is not from works, and the law never taught that it is.²³

Piper concludes that “both Christ and the law teach faith not legalism,”²⁴ and that the law “expressed his saving purpose of Israel . . . and taught the way to life through faith.”²⁵ This is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the law. God’s giving of the law to Israel was chiefly for administrative purposes, not soteriological ones. The framework of covenant theology that undergirds New Calvinism forces them to conclude that the law must be an expression of the Covenant of Grace. This is contrary to what the Bible itself teaches about the law’s purposes. The two great Biblical treatises on the law are the books of Romans and Galatians.²⁶ Romans states that the law “increases the trespass” (5:20), “arouses sinful passions” (7:5), and that “Christ is the end of the law” (10:4). Galatians is even more explicit, making the following statements:

- 2:16—A man is not justified by the works of the law.

²³ Piper, *Justification of God*, 37.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The term νόμος occurs a total of 194 times in the New Testament, 74 times in Romans, and 32 times in Galatians. It actually has a higher frequency of occurrence in Galatians, appearing on average over 5 times per chapter (in Romans on average 4.6 times per chapter). Νόμος occurs 14 times in Hebrews (avg. once per chapter) and 10 times in James (avg. 2 times per chapter). John’s Gospel has quite a few total occurrences (15), but on average less than once per chapter. Other books: Philippians, 3 times (.75 per chapter); Acts, 17 times (.61 per chapter); 1 Corinthians, 9 times (.56 per chapter); Luke, 9 times (.38 per chapter); 1 Timothy, 2 times (.33 per chapter); Matthew, 8 times (.29 per chapter); Ephesians, once (.17 per chapter). All other New Testament books have zero occurrences of the term νόμος.

- 2:21—If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly.
- 3:10—As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse.
- 3:11—No one is justified by the law before God.
- 3:12—The law is not of faith.
- 3:19—Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.
- 3:23—Before faith came, we were kept in custody [φρουρέω “hold in custody, detain, confine”] under the law, being shut up [συγκλείω “confine, imprison”] to the faith which was later to be revealed.
- 3:24–25—The law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ so that we may be justified by faith, but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.
- 5:4—You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

John Piper’s *The Justification of God* is an attempt to exegete Romans 9:1–23 in such a way as to demonstrate that this passage supports the individual election of people for salvation, rather than the corporate election of Israel as a nation. Such an exegesis is vitally important to those who adopt a Calvinistic soteriology, since there are few passages of Scripture that develop the doctrine of unconditional election (the other principal passage would be Ephesians 1:3–14). This issue is directly addressed in chapter 3, where Piper states,

The basic argument against seeing individual, eternal predestination in Rom 9:6–13 is that the two Old Testament references on which Paul builds his case do not in their Old Testament contexts refer to individuals or to eternal destiny, but rather to nations and historical tasks. The argument carries a good deal of force, especially when treated (as it

usually is) without reference to the logical development of Paul's argument in Rom 9:1–13.²⁷

Piper here admits the national/corporate force of the references to Genesis 21:12, 25:23, and Malachi 1:2–3, but suggests that their force is overridden by the local contextual argument. If one removes his presumption of a soteriological theme from the local context, his entire thesis disappears. The local context supports a view of God's plan for *national* Israel, thus, Piper's argument has no standing at all. Piper's entire argument amounts to this: the context of Romans 9 deals with personal salvation; therefore, Paul's citations from Genesis and Malachi must be understood in terms of an application to personal salvation, even though in their original contexts they do not. Piper's assumption that the context of Romans 9 deals with personal salvation is faulty to start with. This amounts to a faulty major premise in his syllogism, thus assuring a faulty conclusion. Rather, one should begin by seeing that the context of Romans 9—11 is dispensational/administrative, rather than soteriological.

Chapters 9—11 actually constitute a resumption of a subject that had been introduced at the beginning of chapter 3. Having established the equal guilt of both Jews and Gentiles in chapters 1 and 2, Paul asked, "What, then, is the advantage of the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?" (Romans 3:1). Paul began to answer this question by enumerating a list. He began the list by writing in Romans 3:2: "First, the oracles of God were entrusted to them."²⁸ But this list is interrupted by a discussion of righteousness by faith. This "digression" continues for

²⁷ Ibid., 58. Also, "We concluded in Chapter Three that in Rom 9:6–13 Paul teaches that God predestines individuals to their respective eternal destinies," p. 96.

²⁸ The ordinal numeral *πρῶτος* assumes that it will be followed by at least one more item. There is no second item listed in chapter 3. The remaining items are not mentioned until chapter 9. Chapter 11 is further tied together with this verse by the repetition of the term *ἀπιστία*, which occurs both in 3:3 and in 11:20, 23.

the next six chapters. Chapter 9 opens with a resumption of the enumerated list in Romans 9:4:²⁹ “Whose are the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the temple service, and the promises, from whom came the fathers, and from whom came the Messiah according to the flesh.” Thus, in all (including Romans 3:2), Paul enumerated nine items that describe “the advantage of the Jew.” In light of this exalted and privileged position of Israel, it seems an enigma that the Jews had rejected the Messiah at his first advent. Chapters 9—11 offer an explanation to this enigma. Chapter 9 explains that God’s election of Israel guarantees that they will eventually acknowledge that Jesus is their Messiah. Chapter 10 explains the means by which elect Israel will come to acknowledge that Jesus is their Messiah, namely through the preaching of the gospel. Chapter 11 explains how present-day Israel’s unbelief relates to the present age and what the believing Gentiles’ attitude toward national Israel should be.

The exegetical fault committed by Piper is his assumption that chapters 9—11 of Romans continue the same topic as chapters 3—8, namely, justification/sanctification. Rather, Romans 9—11 should be seen dispensationally as relating to the restoration of national Israel. But Piper explains Romans 9—11 as follows:

The purpose of Rom 9—11 must be explained in relation to the purpose of the whole letter. . . . Since the gospel that he proclaims in Rom 1—8 is the power of God unto salvation “to the Jews first” (1:16) and since the Christ is “descended from David according to the flesh” (1:3) and “there is great value in circumcision” (3:2) and “the faithlessness of the Jews does not nullify the faithfulness of God” (3:3) and a saving promise was made “to Abraham and his descendants” (4:13), the question of Israel’s destiny becomes acute. It grows necessarily out of the exposition of Rom 1—8.³⁰

²⁹ Cranfield, *Romans*, I:178; J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Hendrickson, 1995), 264; Douglas J. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 181–182; W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* ICC (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1901), 70.

³⁰ Piper, *Justification of God*, 18.

This failure to adequately distinguish between Israel and the Church is based on his presupposition of a law-gospel continuum, à la Fuller. This is a position that finds a comfortable place within the framework of reformed theology, with its “third use of the law” (*tertius usus legis*).³¹ But it is inconsistent with the New Testament’s clearly stated purposes of the law.

Impact of Soteriocentrism on Missiology

New Calvinism is not characterized by any one eschatological perspective. The movement has within its ranks amillennialists, postmillennialists, and premillennialists. However, one view that is almost entirely absent within New Calvinist circles is dispensational premillennialism. The premillennialism that does exist within New Calvinism’s enclave is almost exclusively what is referred to as “historical premillennialism.” Such historical premillennialists include Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and Albert Mohler. All the eschatological positions within New Calvinism have their share of a realized eschatology that sees the present Church as advancing some form of the kingdom. Thus, The Gospel Coalition’s founding documents see the fulfilling of the Great Commission as “a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling”³² and that “those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vii, 12. *The Institutes* was first published in 1536 when Calvin was only 27 years old, almost ten years before the Council of Trent (1545–1563). The Council of Trent laid a heavy accusation of antinomianism against the Reformers. In response, Calvin’s later editions of *The Institutes* had a more developed theology of the law. The last edition, published in 1559, contains the reference to the “third use of the law,” a concept Calvin borrowed from the Lutheran theologian Melancthon.

³² *The Gospel for All of Life: Preamble*, thegospelcoalition.org.

through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant.”³³ Postmillennial influence can be seen in the following statement:

Believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God’s kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God’s sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan’s dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.³⁴

Of particular note is the statement that the kingdom of God is “already present but not fully realized,” and that God is currently working sovereignly to bring about “the eventual redemption of all creation.” The wording of this statement is taken largely from postmillennialist Timothy Keller and the philosophy of his church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. Keller’s worldview is based on Augustine’s *City of God* and his contrast between the “City of Man” and the “City of God.”³⁵ Keller uses Jeremiah 29 to formulate a philosophy of mission that excludes either what he terms “assimilation” or “tribalism” and that requires a method of infiltration. This method of infiltration has Christians moving into cultures and societies, taking part in them without assimilating into them, and influencing them so as to redeem all aspects of society,

³³ *Confessional Statement*, 10, thegospelcoalition.org.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Timothy Keller, “The Meaning of the City,” http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sites/sermons2.redeemer.com/files/sermons/RPC-The_Meaning_of_the_City.mp3. (accessed July 4, 2015). Time stamp about 12:50. Keller identifies this message on “The Meaning of the City” based on Jeremiah 29 as central to the philosophy of Redeemer Presbyterian Church. He states, “Jeremiah 29 . . . is one of the most important texts in Redeemer’s history. This is one of the most formative passages of the Bible. Without it, Redeemer wouldn’t exist, or it wouldn’t exist in the shape that it’s in” (*Ibid.*, time stamp about 4:45).

including governments, the environment, economics, and culture, as well as peoples' souls. A summary statement of Keller's missiology can be seen in the following:

The purpose of Jesus' coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore the creation, not to escape it. It is not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and *shalom* to the world. God created both body and soul, and the resurrection of Jesus shows that he is going to redeem both body and soul. The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save souls but also to care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world.³⁶

In the absence of a dispensational premillennial perspective, what this means is a sort of realized eschatology where the Church is called on to institute some sort of "kingdom" in its external form, taking the form of environmentalism, social gospel, etc. In his sermon "The Meaning of the City," Keller explained what fulfilling the Great Commission means in terms of seeking *shalom* for the city (based on his understanding of Jeremiah 29). He said,

When Jeremiah says to seek the *shalom* of the city—I want you to think about this for a second—this word "*shalom*," translated "peace," is an incredibly rich Hebrew word. It does not mean just what the English word "peace" means. When you think of the English word "peace" all you're thinking of is cessation of hostility, right? . . . The Hebrew word "*shalom*" means total flourishing in every dimension: socially, economically, physically, and spiritually. Now here's what this means, and don't forget, this is God talking to His children: If you believe that you are connected to God, you believe that you're a child of God—this has got to be your attitude toward the earthly city in which you reside: God says, I want you to seek and pray for, root for that city, and pray for its Shalom. Now this means for example, number one, it means at least you have to be working for the social peace of your city. Social peace means that it's your job to try to help the different racial groups get along and live in harmony. Secondly, you're supposed to be working for the economic shalom of your city, which is to say you don't have a career here, if you're a Christian, just to feather your nest, or just even to bring up your ethnic group or just to bring up even the Christian Church, just your people. Your job is to work in the city to bring everyone in the city up. Your job is to seek the *shalom* of the whole city—everybody in it. To seek the prosperity of everyone in it.³⁷

³⁶ Glenn R. Kreider, review, Timothy Keller, "The reason for God: belief in an age of skepticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169, no. 673 (January 1, 2012): 108–110. Quotation taken from p. 233 of Keller's book.

³⁷ Keller, "Meaning of the City," time stamp about 20:15.

So, according to Keller, Christians are not preaching the gospel unless they are involved in social work seeking racial harmony, and in economic development seeking to improve the financial well-being of the poor.

Impact of Soteriocentrism on Systematic Theology

The nature of systematic theology is such that what one believes in one area necessarily affects what one believes about another area. The divisions of systematic theology are not neat compartments that are isolated from each other; rather, they are overlapping sets that impact each other. One's beliefs about the person and work of Christ will influence what one believes about soteriology; what one believes about the nature of the church will influence what one believes about eschatology; and so forth.³⁸ Because of this, New Calvinism's focus on soteriology affects their view both of individual areas of theology, as well as the way the entire web of systematic theology is viewed.

Michael Bird recently released a new systematic theology titled *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. His choice of the adjective "evangelical" to modify the noun "theology" was not intended to identify the segment of Christianity known as evangelical, so much as to identify the theological system as a gospel-centered approach. He says, "When I refer to *evangelicalism*, I am referring to a historic and global phenomenon that seeks to achieve renewal in Christian churches by bringing the church into conformity to the gospel and by

³⁸ David Anderson likened systematic theology to a spreadsheet where a change in the value of one cell may change the value of many other cells that are dependent on the value in the first cell. David R. Anderson, "The Soteriological Impact of Augustine's Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism Part Two," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15, no. 29 (2002): 23.

promoting the gospel in the mission of the church.”³⁹ In this volume, Bird seeks to understand all of systematic theology according to a gospel-centered paradigm. He states,

To set forth the gospel in our prolegomena is to establish the beginning, center, and boundary of evangelical theology. An evangelical theology begins with the gospel because the gospel establishes the hermeneutical horizons for its talk about God and constitutes the purpose or *raison d'être* of the church's existence.⁴⁰

But this approach leads to two problems: (1) a biased interpretation of Scripture; and (2) a diminishing of the importance of the Word of God. Regarding a diminishing of the importance of the Word of God, Bird states,

If the gospel is the anchor point for our study of God, we must start with the Trinity. . . . We do not open our theological project with bibliology [*sic*] or a doctrine of Scripture since that would make reasoning from Scripture our foundation, whereas the foundation for our knowledge of God is God himself as revealed in the gospel.⁴¹

In a footnote on the same page, he acknowledges his dependence on D. A. Carson and Tim Keller's *Gospel-Centered Ministry*.⁴² Carson and Keller are strongly opposed to beginning systematic theology with Bibliology on the alleged basis that doing so would be to engage in an enlightenment foundationalist approach to knowledge. A response to this allegation will be dealt with in detail in chapter 5, “Authority,” particularly in the section on epistemology. Suffice it to say here that traditional approaches to systematic theology have found that Bibliology was an appropriate subject to begin with, due to the primary place of authority given to the inerrant Word of God. To suggest that there is something fundamentally wrong with placing Bibliology at the head of systematic theology suggests a diminishing of the importance of the Word of God.

³⁹ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 19.

⁴⁰ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 41.

⁴¹ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 92–93.

⁴² D. A. Carson and Tim Keller, *Gospel-Centered Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 6.

The impact of soteriocentrism on hermeneutics has already been discussed above. This obviously affects the area of Bibliology. Whether one calls it “Christocentric,” “crucicentric,” or “soteriocentric,” the result is the same: when it is presumed that the central theme of Scripture is any one topic, other than broadly the glory of God, one has prejudiced the outcome of his interpretation. Even if it is a benign prejudice, it is a prejudice nevertheless. Bullmore says, “The apostolic authors are extremely careful that their readers not abstract any part of their writings from the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Bible is all about Jesus in some specific and God-intended way.”⁴³ This may be true, as long as one understands “the person and work of Jesus Christ” in the broad sense of the work of the Creator God. But Bullmore clearly means it only in the more limited sense of Christ as the redeemer. In discussing prolegomena, Bird suggests that there must be a starting point from which all other theological discussion progresses. He describes his starting point as follows: “The evangelical theological project is to construct and live out a theology that is defined by the good news of Jesus Christ. If we accept the premise that the gospel is the most significant story in the life of the church, then evangelical theology should accordingly be a theology of the gospel.”⁴⁴

The problem with Bird’s starting point should be evident: How can one understand the gospel without first having an authoritative word about it? If one does not start with an authoritative word from a sovereign God, there is no way of knowing whether your gospel is a firm starting point or a house built on sand. The apostle Paul cautioned the Galatians only to trust a gospel that was based on the previously revealed Word of God (Galatians 1:6–9). But New Calvinists insist on the gospel as a starting point, ending point, and focal point of all that is in the

⁴³ Mike Bullmore, *The Gospel and Scripture: How to Read the Bible* (The Gospel Coalition Booklets) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, August 2, 2011) Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 198–200.

⁴⁴ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 42.

Bible. Carson and Keller state, “Not only does the gospel of Jesus Christ gather into itself all the trajectories of Scripture, but under the terms of the New Covenant, all of Christian life and thought grow out of what Jesus has accomplished. This good news not only declares that God justifies sinners so that our status before him is secured but also that he regenerates us and establishes us.”⁴⁵ While one can admire the importance given to the gospel, this all-encompassing approach reflects the assumptions of covenant theology, whereby the Covenant of Grace is the feature that binds all things together. Though doubtless well-intentioned, it introduces a bias to the interpretation of God’s Word that is misleading in many passages, and it ultimately results in a diminishing of the importance of the Word of God, placing it in submission to a precedent theology.

Conclusion

Jesus’ final words to His disciples before returning to Heaven were a command to bring the gospel to all the world (Mark 16:15). New Calvinists are to be commended for their desire to obey this command. But a good thing may be taken too far. Nothing is more essential to biological life than water, yet one can consume toxic amounts of water, resulting in water intoxication, or dilutional hyponatremia. Likewise, while the gospel message and the Great Commission are vital to the existence and purpose of the Church, there can be such a thing as an unhealthy focus on the gospel that results in a limited view of God’s non-soteriological purposes, a man-centered theology, bias in Biblical interpretation, confusion between law and gospel, misplaced priorities in missiology, and an unbalanced systematic theology. At some points, New Calvinism has been guilty of all these. Dispensationalism’s focus on the glory of God is a more

⁴⁵ Carson and Keller, *Gospel Centered Ministry*, 14.

suitable focus for discussing the things of God and for interpreting the Bible. A doxological center will avoid the problems associated with a soteriocentric approach.

Chapter 3

Supersessionist View of Israel and the Church

Supersessionism, the view that “the New Testament church is the new Israel that has forever superseded national Israel as the people of God,” has been the majority position of Christianity from the time of Justin Martyr through most of the nineteenth century.¹ The twentieth century witnessed a significant change, due largely to two influences: (1) the popularity of dispensational teaching and (2) the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. Dispensationalism’s strong focus on a distinction between Israel and the Church and its belief in a literal fulfillment of both Old Testament and New Testament kingdom prophecies have resulted in a robust non-supersessionist position. It became increasingly popular to anticipate a literal fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel with a future restoration of national Israel under the rule of Jesus Christ as Messiah and King. In 2001 this change led Vlach to speculate, “It seems unlikely that supersessionism will dominate as the majority view any time soon.”² Since then New Calvinism has brought about a revival in supersessionist thought. Indeed, in 2009 Calvin Smith published his book, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*.³

¹ Michael J. Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism* (Frankfurt: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2009), 27, 202.

² Ibid., 203. Blaising says, “As Biblical scholarship makes ever more clear that Jesus and Paul taught a future for national Israel in the eschatological plan of God, the legitimacy of a supersessionist reading of Scripture grows ever more dim to the point of vanishing altogether” (Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 [2001]: 439). And Congdon confidently asserts, “Today this ‘replacement theology’ is fading fast” (Jim Congdon, Periodical Review of “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” by Ben L. Merkle, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 [December 2000]: 709–721, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16, no. 30 [2003]: 85).

³ Calvin L. Smith, ed., *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism* (Lampeter, UK: King’s Divinity Press, 2009, 2013). In Britain, the spelling “supersessionism” appears to be preferred over the American “supersessionism.” In 2002, Fowler White and Warren Gage, two faculty members at Knox Theological Seminary, posted on the seminary’s website a document titled “An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties:

Definition of Supersessionism

An alternate name for supersessionism is “replacement theology.” Recent literature has popularized the use of the phrase “replacement theology”; however, in this dissertation the more formal term “supersessionism” will be preferred.⁴ Vlach’s dissertation and book, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism*, is definitive on the subject. He defines supersessionism based on “two core beliefs: (1) national Israel has somehow completed or forfeited its status as the people of God and will never again possess a unique role or function apart from the church; and (2) the church is now the true Israel that has permanently replaced or superseded national Israel as the people of God.”⁵ While some supersessionists see a future salvation of ethnic Jews, their position is still supersessionist because of their denial of a future restoration of national Israel in the program of God. Vlach maintains, “The key dividing line between supersessionism and . . . non-supersessionism . . . is the issue of ‘restoration.’ Non-supersessionists hold to both a national salvation and a restoration of national Israel. While moderate forms of supersessionism affirm a national *salvation* of Israel, they do not affirm a *restoration* of national Israel.”⁶ Thus, Vlach defines supersessionism as “the view that the New

The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel” (currently accessible at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/openletter.html> [accessed February 26, 2015]), a “strongly worded and passionate criticism of dispensationalism along with a defense of replacement theology [i.e., supersessionism]” (Mike Stallard, “A Dispensational Response to the Knox Seminary Open Letter to Evangelicals” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 7, no. 2 [2003]: 5).

⁴ Some have deemed “replacement theology” to bear too pejorative a connotation. This may be true, but the term “supersessionism” is also generally considered to be pejorative. However, at least some Reformed theologians are willing to embrace the supersessionist terminology, even wearing it as a badge of honor; see, e.g., Peter Enns’ review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), where he says, “The label ‘supersessionism’ is far too visceral and imbalanced a term to be of much use. Although Christianity is born out of Second Temple Judaism, it is still a different religion, and one that claims in its own canon to, well, ‘supersede’ Judaism” (*Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 1 [2002]: 206).

⁵ Vlach, 27.

⁶ Vlach, 33, n.71. Emphasis Vlach’s.

Testament church is the new Israel that has forever superseded national Israel as the people of God.”⁷

In this chapter, a distinction will be made between strong supersessionism and mild supersessionism; however, both versions fit the above definition of supersessionism.⁸

1. Strong Supersessionism

Throughout most of church history, Christians have held that the church completely and forever replaces Israel and receives Israel’s Old Testament promises spiritually. According to this view, there are two possible explanations for Israel’s current status: (1) Israel so seriously violated God’s covenant in their rejection of Christ at His first coming that God has finally and forever condemned Israel punitively to rejection from the status of the people of God; or (2) Israel simply served in the Old Testament as a type of the church and now that the church has come into existence, Israel as a separate entity has simply become irrelevant.

2. Mild Supersessionism

Some supersessionists do acknowledge that the Bible tells of a future for Israel based on God’s promises. These supersessionists speak of a salvation for ethnic Israel but are either silent about or deny a future restoration of national Israel. They refer to a future work of salvation among the Jews, but they can generally be recognized as supersessionist by their appeal to the adjective “ethnic” as a qualifier of the noun “Israel,” as opposed to non-supersessionists who

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Vlach lists the following three major forms of supersessionism: (1) punitive supersessionism, (2) economic supersessionism, and (3) structural supersessionism (pp. 27–32); this threefold division was apparently first noted by Soulen (R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996] 30–34, 181n6, cited by Craig Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 [2001]: 436). But Vlach also refers to “moderate forms of supersessionism” (p. 33), which hold to a future salvation for ethnic Israel while denying a future restoration for national Israel. This dissertation will refer to Vlach’s “moderate forms” as “mild supersessionism.”

tend to use the adjective “national” to qualify the noun “Israel.” According to this view, the church replaces Israel and receives Israel’s Old Testament promises spiritually; however, the promise of Israel’s regathering will be fulfilled in the end times by a vast ingathering of ethnic Jews into the Church by conversion to Christianity.

The History of Supersessionism

1. Supersessionism in the Early Church

The nascent church of Acts 2 was composed entirely of believing Jews. These early believers, after receiving intensive instruction from the resurrected Lord Jesus for forty days, expected Christ to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:3–6).⁹ They perceived of the church as nothing more than the remnant of Israel who had placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They looked for the kingdom to be established soon through the raising up of David’s fallen tent (Acts 1:6; 15:15–18).¹⁰ This non-supersessionist view of the kingdom was also later affirmed by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (11:1–2, 11–12, 15, 25–32). As time progressed, however, with the influx of Gentiles into the church, and with the declining numbers of Jews, supersessionist views began to arise, perhaps as early as the first century. McAvoy sums up the attitude of the early church:

From the very first century, the church has been erroneously and tragically held in the grip of replacement theology. Primitively at first, but with more sophistication and more dreadful consequences as history unfolded. It was not only the development of doctrine or theology that was seriously perverted but the ecclesiastical traditions and forms of worship were based on supersessionism. Hostile and violent attitudes were taken against

⁹ Vlach, 144–145.

¹⁰ Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 484, 941.

the Jews due in no small part to replacement theology. By Origen's time this attitude of contempt towards Israel had become the rule.¹¹

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (ca. 110–165) is often considered the earliest explicit reference to supersessionism. He writes, "The true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ."¹² He also says, "As, therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelitic race."¹³ Justin's supersessionism was premillennial, but his millennium had no place for national Israel. For Justin, the promise of a millennium with Christ ruling for a literal thousand years from a literal Jerusalem was a promise for the church only.¹⁴ He reasoned that since the church is in Christ, and Christ is the true Israel, therefore, God can fulfill His promises to Israel by fulfilling them in the church. However, Vlach is undoubtedly correct in his estimation that "the rise and acceptance of supersessionism preceded Justin Martyr."¹⁵ It appears that some form of supersessionist thinking lay behind the anti-Semitism of some early Roman Christians as implied in Romans 11:18.¹⁶ The *Epistle of Barnabas*, which may have preceded Justin Martyr, charges,

¹¹ Steven L. McAvoy, "Posttribulationism's Appeal to Antiquity, Part I," *Conservative Theological Journal* 6, no. 17 (2002): 118–119.

¹² Justin Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew," ch. XI, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 200.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ch. CXXXV, 267.

¹⁴ Barry Horner, "A Parting of the Ways: Relations in the Post-Apostolic Period," Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 1069–1107.

¹⁵ Vlach, 42.

¹⁶ Cranfield comments, "It seems likely that he is reckoning with the possibility (or the actual existence?) of an anti-Semitic feeling within the Roman church reflecting the dislike of, and contempt for, the Jews which were common in the contemporary Roman world" (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, *International Critical Commentary* [London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004],

“I further beg of you . . . to take heed now to yourselves, and not to be like some, adding largely to your sins, and saying, ‘The covenant is both theirs and ours.’ But they thus finally lost it, after Moses had already received it.”¹⁷

The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, first in AD 70, then again in AD 135, lent further support to supersessionist thinking.¹⁸ The loss of a Jewish perspective on the Scriptures led to an increased influence of Greek philosophical dualism with its tendency to spiritualize the concept of the kingdom.¹⁹ Origen (ca. 185–254) held that, due to Israel’s rejection by God, all her promises had been spiritually transferred to the church. According to Origen, Israel had been “abandoned because of their sins,” and that “they will never be restored to their former condition, for they committed a crime of the most unhallowed kind, in conspiring against the Savior of the human race in that city where they offered up to God a worship containing the symbols of mighty mysteries.”²⁰ For Origen, the nation performing the fruits of the kingdom to

568). McAvoy writes, “Paul may very well have written Rom. 9—11 as a polemic against the infiltration of replacement theology” (Steven L. McAvoy, “Posttribulationism’s Appeal to Antiquity, Part II,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 6, no. 18 [2002]: 242 n22). See also Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 498–499.

¹⁷ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “The Epistle of Barnabas,” ch. IV, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 138. The expression, “The covenant is both theirs and ours” follows the Latin text. The Greek text simply has, “The covenant is ours,” which would actually turn this into a non-supersessionist admonition on the part of Barnabas. But the overall anti-Semitic tone of *The Epistle of Barnabas* lends strong internal evidence for the support of the supersessionist Latin reading.

¹⁸ Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 935–1041.

¹⁹ See Steve Maltz, “The Real Roots of Supersessionism,” chapter 1 in Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*.

²⁰ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.22, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 506.

whom the kingdom has been given (Matthew 21:43) was none other than “the converts from heathenism.”²¹

2. Supersessionism in the Middle Ages

Augustine was thoroughly supersessionistic. And it was his views on Israel that dominated the medieval church. Psalm 114 begins, “When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became His sanctuary, Israel, His dominion. The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back.” Augustine’s comment on this passage is telling: “Let us therefore consider what we are taught here; since both those deeds were typical of us, and these words exhort us to recognise [*sic*] ourselves. For if we hold with a firm heart the grace of God which hath been given us, we are Israel, the seed of Abraham.”²² This view essentially held sway throughout the Middle Ages, as is evident in Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas may be considered a mild supersessionist, for he saw a future conversion of Jews based on his understanding of Romans 11:25–26. According to Aquinas, “The blindness of the Jews will remain until the fullness of the Gentiles has come into faith. And this is in accord with what he says about the future healing of the Jews, when he says at that time, certainly when the fullness of the Gentiles will be reached, all Israel will be saved. Not every individual, but all Jews in a general sense.”²³ For Aquinas, though there was a future salvation of many Jews, there was not a restoration of the nation.

²¹ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 2.5, *Ibid.*, 431.

²² Augustine of Hippo, “Expositions on the Book of Psalms,” in *Saint Augustin: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 8, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 550.

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 11.4, translation and citation in Vlach, 58–59, n.92.

3. Supersessionism in the Reformers

Luther's views changed over time. His earliest statements regarding the Jews reflect Aquinas's mild supersessionism. According to Vlach, the early Luther "prayed for the Jews and called for their friendly treatment."²⁴ He saw a future salvation of Jews based on their descent from Abraham.²⁵ Apparently Luther felt that with the dawning of the Reformation, a final age for the Jews had dawned as well, and that their conversion to Christ was surely close at hand.²⁶ However, when the Jews did not respond favorably to the gospel as offered by the Reformers, Luther's attitude began to shift, eventually becoming excessively anti-Semitic. In 1543 he wrote a tract titled *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies*. According to the publishers of an English translation of this tract, "Luther's experience with the Jews was very disappointing. He spent many years trying to convert them. Like St. Paul, he gave the Jews the first chance at the gospel, but concluded in later years . . . that his efforts in this direction were futile."²⁷ Luther concluded, based on the destruction of Jerusalem, that "the Jews are certainly rejected by God and are not His people anymore, and He also is not their God anymore."²⁸ Thus Luther can be seen to have switched from mild supersessionism to strong supersessionism.

²⁴ Vlach, 59.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 60.

²⁷ Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* (Los Angeles: Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1948), 4.

²⁸ Ibid., 11. Luther further stated, "Even now they cannot give up their insane raving boast that they are the chosen people of God, after they have been dispersed and rejected for 1500 years! Still they hope to get back there because of their own merits. There is no promise for that on which they could lean for comfort, except what they smear into the Scriptures according to their own imagination" (pp. 24–25).

Contrary to VanGemerens opinion that “there is no clearly-defined position on Israel in Calvin’s writings,”²⁹ Calvin did clearly hold some mild supersessionist interpretations.

Commenting on Isaiah 59:20, Calvin writes:

Paul quotes this passage, (Rom. 11:26,) in order to shew that there is still some remaining hope among the Jews; although from their unconquerable obstinacy it might be inferred that they were altogether cast off and doomed to eternal death. But because God is continually mindful of his covenant, and “his gifts and calling are without repentance,” (Rom. 11:29,) Paul justly concludes that it is impossible that there shall not at length be some remnant that come to Christ, and obtain that salvation which he has procured. Thus the Jews must at length be collected along with the Gentiles, that out of both “there may be one fold” under Christ. (John 10:16.)³⁰

Of particular note in this quote are the phrases “along with the Gentiles” and “one fold.” This indicates that while Calvin saw a salvation of the Jews at some point in the future, he did not see a restoration of national Israel with any kind of distinction between Israel and the Church. On Luke 1:33, “He shall reign over the house of Jacob,” Calvin writes,

Christ’s throne was, therefore, erected among the people of Israel, that he might thence subdue the whole world. All whom he has joined by faith to the children of Abraham are accounted the true Israel. Though the Jews, by their revolt, have separated themselves from the church of God, yet the Lord will always preserve till the end some “remnant,” (Rom. 11:5;) for his “calling is without repentance,” (Rom. 11:29.)³¹

Calvin appears to have shared the mild supersessionism of both Aquinas and the early Luther.³²

²⁹ Willem A. VanGemerens, “Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1984), no. 253. Indeed, in the opinion of Vlach, Calvin made “significant statements concerning Israel and the church” (Vlach, 64).

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 4 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 269.

³¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 39.

³² Vlach, 63–64.

For the most part, a mild supersessionism tended to prevail among theologians of the reformation, including both Melanchthon and the translators of the *Geneva Bible*.³³ However, there were some exceptions. Among the Anabaptists, Menno Simons “affirmed a future for national Israel,”³⁴ and two groups in particular believed in a “restoration of the Jews”: English Puritans and the Dutch Reformed theologians.³⁵

4. Supersessionism and Dispensationalism

The nineteenth century witnessed increased attention on the part of many Christians in Zionism, Biblical prophecy, premillennialism, the Second Coming, and philo-Semitism.³⁶ Such attention began as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the writings of Sir Henry Finch (ca. 1558–1625) and John and Charles Wesley, but gained momentum in the nineteenth century writings and activities of James Bicheno, James Hatley Frere, George Stanley Faber, Robert Murray McCheyne (1813–1843), the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews (LSPCJ, founded in 1809), William Wilberforce, Lewis Way, Alexander McCaul, Charles Simeon, Hugh McNeile, J. C. Ryle, Alfred Edersheim, the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885), Dwight L. Moody, and William E. Blackstone (1841–1935).³⁷ But without a doubt, the most influential person in promoting non-

³³ Ibid., 64.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 65. Vlach makes specific mention of John Owen, Thomas Manton, John Flavel, David Dickson, George Hutcheson, Jeremiah Burroughs, William Greenhill, Elnathan Parr, James Durham, Increase Mather, Richard Sibbes, and N. I. Matar. Among the Dutch Reformed: Petrus Serrarius. But many of these simply held to a future conversion of Jews, not a restoration of the nation.

³⁶ Paul Richard Wilkinson, “Jealous for Zion: Evangelicals, Zionism and the Restoration of Israel,” Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel, and the New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 1910–2098. Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1990), 146–148.

³⁷ Wilkinson, “Jealous for Zion,” Kindle Locations 1919–2046.

supersessionist ideas in nineteenth-century Christianity was John Nelson Darby. Wilkinson, something of an authority on Darby, describes him as follows:

His legacy, though largely misunderstood and misrepresented by historians and churchmen to this day, is considerable, and is based on his unwavering devotion to Christ, his adherence to the authority of God's Word, his literal interpretation of the Scriptures, his futurist approach to prophecy, and his understanding of the distinction between Israel and the Church, all of which today underpin Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism.³⁸

It was Darby who laid the foundation for modern dispensationalism and who reasoned for Israel's future restoration based on a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.

Although Darby's understanding of Israel was rooted in Scripture, it was his devotion to Christ and his focus on the coming of Christ for the Church, which enabled him to set Israel in her proper theological, and eschatological, context. As he declared in 1828, "Let the almighty doctrine of the cross be testified to all men, and let the eye of the believer be directed to the coming of the Lord."³⁹

Maintaining a clear distinction between Israel and the Church removes any compulsion for the dispensationalist to have Israel's promises fulfilled in the Church. For this reason, dispensationalists have always been resistant to supersessionism. Rather, dispensationalists view unfulfilled promises to Israel as awaiting a still future fulfillment either in the Tribulation period or in the Millennium.

Supersessionism and New Calvinism

There is no specific eschatological position with respect to the Millennium associated with New Calvinism. Within the ranks of New Calvinism may be found premillennialists,

³⁸ Wilkinson, "Jealous for Zion," Kindle Locations 2105–2108. Based on research done for his thesis at Manchester University, Dr. Wilkinson authored what may be considered the authoritative work on Darby's life and accomplishments, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 2133–2135.

amillennialists, and postmillennialists. A position on the Millennium cannot be found in The Gospel Coalition's confessional statement,⁴⁰ the nine marks of 9Marks,⁴¹ the affirmation of faith of Desiring God,⁴² and the statement of faith of Ligonier Ministries.⁴³ Grudem, though he argues for a classical (i.e., historical) premillennial view, nevertheless grants a great deal of legitimacy to the other views. He writes,

Before examining the arguments for these three (or four) positions, it is important to realize that the interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors. Therefore the degree of certainty that attaches to our conclusions in this area will be less than with many other doctrines. Even though I will argue for one position (classical premillennialism), I also think it important for evangelicals to recognize that this area of study is complex and to extend a large measure of grace to others who hold different views regarding the millennium and the tribulation period.⁴⁴

Both amillennialism and postmillennialism are ipso facto supersessionist, since they view the church as fulfilling the kingdom promises made to Israel.⁴⁵ However, many New Calvinists, like Grudem, are premillennial, but their approach to premillennialism differs significantly from that of dispensational premillennialism in that their approach is built on the assumptions of a covenant theology. As such, the Millennium is viewed in terms of its place in God's soteriological program (i.e., the unfolding of the Covenant of Grace), rather than seeing the Millennium as fulfilling God's land and kingdom promises to national Israel. Premillennial

⁴⁰ The Gospel Coalition, "Foundation Documents," <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents> (accessed March 7, 2015).

⁴¹ <http://9marks.org/about> (accessed March 7, 2015).

⁴² http://www.desiringgod.org/about/affirmation-of-faith#0.1_14 (accessed March 7, 2015).

⁴³ <http://www.ligonier.org/about/who-we-are/what-we-believe> (accessed March 7, 2015).

⁴⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 1114.

⁴⁵ Smith, *New Supersessionism*, Kindle Locations 1221, 1315–1324, 3619.

New Calvinists include such well-known figures as John Piper, Al Mohler, Wayne Grudem, and Mark Driscoll. Amillennial New Calvinists include Sam Storms,⁴⁶ Matt Chandler,⁴⁷ and D. A. Carson.⁴⁸ Postmillennial New Calvinism can be found in the partial preterism of R. C. Sproul.⁴⁹ According to Thomason, “One of the key concepts in Calvinism is ‘Replacement Theology.’”⁵⁰

Critique of the Argument for Supersessionism

1. Scriptural Arguments

Ten principal Scripture references are used in support of supersessionism: Matthew 21:43; Romans 2:28–29; 9:6; 11:17–24; 11:26; Galatians 3:7; 3:29; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11–22; 1 Peter 2:9–10.

a. *Matthew 21:43*

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (ἔθνος, “nation”), producing the fruit of it.

⁴⁶ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Mentor, 2013). Storms claims to have switched his position from dispensational premillennialism to amillennialism.

⁴⁷ Matt Chandler, “Luke—Part 37: The Kingdom,” sermon preached at The Village Church, December 20, 2008. http://media.thevillagechurch.net/sermons/transcripts/200812201700HVWC21ASAAA_MattChandler_LukePt37-TheKingdom.pdf (accessed March 14, 2015). For Chandler, the kingdom arrived with the first coming of Christ. “The kingdom is here and has been fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant in nation after nation after nation after nation. We will not have a third testament, for all that was written in the Old was fulfilled in God in the flesh, Jesus Christ,” and “we are not looking to some far off hope that has not been fulfilled.”

⁴⁸ Carson’s amillennialism can be seen in his strong attachment to a realized eschatology; see “The SBJT Forum” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 104–113, and his sermon on Revelation 12 preached Trinity Baptist Church, “Rage, Rage Against the Church” (Revelation 12), August 30, 1994. In this sermon he identifies the woman of Revelation 12 as the church, the binding of Satan as taking place at the ascension of Christ, and the 1,260 days of Revelation 12 as referring to the three and a half years of the Maccabean revolt and also as symbolic of the church’s time of testing, opposition, and tribulation. In this case, Carson’s version of supersessionism not only transfers Israel’s blessings to the church, but also Israel’s testing and tribulation (<http://mp3.sa-media.com/filearea/214091219266/214091219266.mp3> [accessed March 13, 2015]).

⁴⁹ R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁵⁰ David S. Thomason, “Israelology,” <http://www.doctordavet.com/israelology.html> (accessed April 12, 2015).

Supersessionists take this verse to mean that because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus at His first coming, the kingdom has been taken away from Israel and given to the Gentiles (the Church). Piper, for example, says, “Israel’s trespass, in rejecting the Messiah, happened so that God might give the kingdom—the heritage of Israel—to those who follow him,”⁵¹ and “‘Therefore,’ he says—that is, ‘because’ you reject the son—the kingdom will pass over to the Gentiles who obey.”⁵² Piper is representative of most New Calvinists when he holds that the Abrahamic Covenant is conditional,⁵³ and that since the rejection of Jesus is “the ultimate act of covenant-breaking,”⁵⁴ Israel no longer has legal claim either to the land or to the kingdom.⁵⁵ Piper also reflects supersessionist thinking in his explanation of the origin of Christianity: “Christianity began, pushed out of Judaism by those who rejected Jesus as the Christ, but in God’s sight heirs of the promise and possessors of the kingdom (Matthew 21:43).”⁵⁶

i. Contextual Considerations

When Matthew 21:43 is read with supersessionist presuppositions, its meaning appears to be fairly straightforward, but the verse is not quite as straightforward as the supersessionist argument might purport. This verse should not be viewed apart from its context. The verse is Jesus’ conclusion to the parable of the wicked tenants found in verses 33–41. According to Fuhrmann, the parable of the wicked tenants is “one of the most controversial and misunderstood

⁵¹ John Piper, “Did Israel Stumble in Order That They Might Fall?” preached December 7, 2003, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2014)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2014).

⁵² John Piper, “God’s Design for History: The Glory of His Mercy,” preached March 14, 2004, *Ibid.*

⁵³ John Piper, “Land Divine?” *World*, May 11, 2002, 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ John Piper, “The Sacrifice of a Shared Life,” preached on September 24, 1989, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

of Jesus' parables. At nearly every point, there is significant disagreement."⁵⁷ Laying aside theological presupposition, there are several exegetical problems that need to be resolved regarding the understanding of this verse. At least three exegetical questions must be answered: (1) From whom is the kingdom taken? (2) To whom is it given? (3) For how long is it taken away?

From whom is the kingdom taken? According to the context, the kingdom is taken from the leaders of Israel, not the entire nation. The referent to the pronoun "you" ("The kingdom of God will be taken away from you") is clearly the chief priests and elders of the people. This parable is one in a series of parables addressed to the chief priests and elders. This group of Jewish leaders had confronted Jesus upon His entering into the temple the day following the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:23). They desired to know the authority that justified Jesus' actions and words. Jesus' reply consisted in a counter-question regarding the authority of John (21:24–27) followed by a series of three parables (the parable of the two sons, 21:28–32; the parable of the wicked tenants, 21:33–41; and the parable of the marriage feast, 22:1–14). All three of these parables are addressed to the same group of leaders (21:28, 33; 22:1). So, when Jesus said that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you," He was stating that the kingdom was being taken from the leaders of His day, not necessarily from the nation. Furthermore, the tenants in the parable cannot represent national Israel, since "Israel is represented by the vineyard, not by the farmers, who stand for the leaders of Israel."⁵⁸ Peters refers to this as "a collision between Jesus and the chief priests and elders (ch. 21:23, etc.), in

⁵⁷ Justin M. Fuhrmann, "The Use of Psalm 118:22–23 in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants," *Proceedings* 27 (Grand Rapids, MI, January 1, 2007): 67.

⁵⁸ David L. Turner, "Matthew 21:43 and the Future of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 633 (2002): 53.

which the latter question Christ's authority, and are silenced by the reply of Jesus." Peters continues,

The crisis is then nigh at hand, for He tells them (ch. 21:28–46) that they were *unrepentant*, and that the Kingdom so graciously offered to them, and in which they enjoyed *a covenanted right*, should be *taken from them* and given to others. Jesus speaks even more plainly (chs. 22 and 23), culminating in expressly predicting that *the desolate Davidic house*, the tabernacle in ruins, should *remain thus until His Second Coming*.⁵⁹

To whom is it given? It is given to a nation (ἔθνος). The question that must be addressed is whether ἔθνος is to be taken literally or metaphorically. The supersessionist position takes a metaphorical sense, making ἔθνος refer to the Church. On the other hand, if taken literally, then ἔθνος must refer either to national Israel or to one of the Gentile nations. As to the metaphorical meaning, nothing in the context suggests that the Church could have been conceptualized by Jesus' hearers as a "nation." Apart from His disciples, who heard a few brief words about the Church in Matthew 16 and 18, there was virtually no way for His hearers to conceive of the Church at all. And, though it is possible that Jesus may have spoken these words in anticipation of future readers being able to make sense of His words, it remains questionable whether the term "nation" is a suitable metaphor for the Church.⁶⁰ Regarding the literal sense of ἔθνος, absolutely no Biblical argument can possibly support the notion of the kingdom being given to any Gentile nation. But with respect to its being given to national Israel, there is conceptual support within the book of Matthew that a future generation of Israel will receive the kingdom (see the next subpoint, "For how long is it taken away?"). If this be the case, then one might

⁵⁹ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ*, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnall's, 1884), 351. Emphasis his.

⁶⁰ See further below under "Lexical Considerations."

understand the participle “producing” (ποιουῦντι) as conveying a temporal sense: “a nation when it produces its fruits.”

For how long is it taken away? A strong supersessionist approach would say that the kingdom is forever, irrevocably taken away from Israel. Even a mild supersessionist approach sees a permanent change in national Israel’s status vis-à-vis an earthly kingdom. However, both Matthew’s Gospel, the Old Testament prophets, and the New Testament epistles affirm that Israel’s status would be temporarily removed from them, only to be restored at a future date when the nation is spiritually revived. In the Old Testament, this is seen quite clearly in the message of Hosea (especially Hosea 1:10—2:23; also Isaiah 66:5–13 and Micah 4:6–8). The apostle Paul affirmed this same theme in Romans 11:11–15. Matthew also spoke of a future generation (γενεά) of Israel that will receive Jesus as her King (Matthew 24:34; 23:36–39).

Other contextual considerations tie the nation of verse 23 with Israel. Verse 43 begins with διὰ τοῦτο, which ties this logically to the preceding verse, a quote from Psalm 118:22–23. In its original context, this quote continued to verse 26: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus also quoted Psalm 118:26 in Matthew 23:37–39, where He foresees a future time when the nation will receive Him. Psalm 118 lies richly in the background of the context of Matthew 21. It is referred to earlier in the chapter in connection with the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:9, also quoting Psalm 118:25–26). These quotes, along with Isaiah 56:7 (quoted in Matthew 21:13), are prophetic verses describing the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. Similarly, Matthew 21:16 cites Psalm 8:2, which is identified by verses 5 and 6 as being a kingdom setting as well.

It is also helpful to note the progression of thought through Matthew 21: (1) verses 1–11, the triumphal entry—arrival of the kingdom announced; (2) verses 12–17, the cleansing of the

temple—necessary preparations for the kingdom; (3) verses 18–22, the cursing of the fig tree—symbol of a fruitless generation; (4) verses 23–27, Jesus’ authority challenged—evidence of the fruitless generation; (5) verses 28–32, the parable of the two sons—a future repentance foretold; (6) verses 33–46, the parable of the landowner—a future repentance foretold. The broad context of the chapter seems to point to a future national fulfillment of God’s kingdom program for national Israel.

ii. Lexical Considerations

ἄλλος “Other.” One possible lexical consideration involves the adjective “other.” Those to whom it was to be given were described as “other” farmers. The Greek word is ἄλλος, not ἕτερος. If the kingdom were to be taken from Israel and given to a non-Israelite nation, one might expect the word ἕτερος.

ἔθνος “Nation.” The main lexical objection to the supersessionist interpretation, however, involves the use of the term ἔθνος and whether this could be a suitable term to describe the Church. The term is used in Matthew 21:43 in the singular. Of the thirty-nine occurrences of the word ἔθνος in the Gospels, the plural form is always a reference to the Gentiles. However, when used in the singular (fourteen times), it nearly always refers to Israel (Matthew 21:43; Luke 7:5; 23:2; John 11:48, 50, 51, 52; 18:35). The only exception to this singular usage is in the grammatically singular expression, “Nation will rise against nation” (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10), which involves a plural sense when understood as a phrase. It is nearly inconceivable that Jesus would have referred to the kingdom being given to any nation other than Israel. His use of the singular ἔθνος almost certainly means that the kingdom is to be given to national Israel, but it is a future generation of Israel that will produce the fruits of the kingdom when it experiences the fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–33). Outside the

Gospels, there are at least six other New Testament references where ἔθνος refers to Israel (Acts 10:22; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4; 28:19).⁶¹

ἔθνος in 1 Peter 2:9

To turn this argument a different way, it might legitimately be questioned whether the term ἔθνος is a suitable term for the church. If it be countered that the term is so used in 1 Peter 2:9, there is a twofold response: (1) It is not without significance that 1 Peter is specifically addressed to Hebrew Christians. The expression “holy nation” is part of a quote taken from Exodus 19:6 (23:22 LXX), which directly addresses the nation of Israel. The recipients of 1 Peter were the elect of diaspora Israel (1 Peter 1:1), not saved Gentiles. So the term was more aptly used of them than it would have been in an epistle addressed to a church comprised mostly of Gentile believers. (2) First Peter 2:9 is not saying that the church is that holy nation referred to in Exodus 19:6; rather, Peter is applying a principle—namely, that God’s people should be a holy people (as in 1:16). The focus is on holiness, not nationhood. In the context of Exodus, the people referred to were in fact a nation. Whether or not Peter’s readers are a nation is somewhat beside the point. The point is that God’s people should be a holy people. The term ἔθνος is used, not as a reference to the church, but as a reference to national Israel.⁶²

Furthermore, to argue that the church is the nation that is now given the kingdom results in the absurdity that the church is no more successful in bearing the fruits of the kingdom than Israel ever was. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in Jesus’ letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2—3. Jesus’ condemnation of the church’s works is nearly as condemnatory

⁶¹ See also Gen. 25:23 (LXX); Ex. 19:6 (23:22 LXX); Jos. Ant. 12, 6; 12, 135; Philo, Decalogue, 96.

⁶² Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), 296.

as it was of the Scribes and Pharisees.⁶³ It would have been nearly impossible for Jesus' hearers to understand His use of ἔθνος to refer to any nation other than Israel. As Peters puts it,

It is a *logical sequence* from the premises laid down. For, so long as *one* nation is chosen from among all others (Prop. 24), and the Kingdom is covenanted *by oath* to *that* nation (Prop. 49), it is impossible for other nations . . . to be thus elected. It would be a violating of the *most solemnly* given covenants and assurances.⁶⁴

The nation to whom the kingdom of God will be given is none other than Israel, regathered in the last days, regenerated under the New Covenant, and reconstituted as a theocracy under the Messiah's rule.⁶⁵

MacArthur displays a mix of both non-supersessionist and supersessionist understanding of this verse. A non-supersessionist comment appears as follows: "Israel will one day return to God and bear fruit for His kingdom. 'God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew,' Paul assured his fellow Jews. And when 'the fullness of the Gentiles has come, . . . all Israel will be saved.'" But then he adds the following supersessionist comment: "The nation, or people, who produce the fruit of the kingdom is the church, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.'"⁶⁶

Gundry, who adopts a supersessionist interpretation, illustrates the predicaments one encounters when attempting to maintain the supersessionist view. Gundry encountered two contradictions that he could not reconcile. First, he believes that the nation (ἔθνεϊ) in view in

⁶³ I am indebted to Dr. David Olander in a private telephone conversation for this observation.

⁶⁴ Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1, 392. Emphasis his.

⁶⁵ John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 60.

⁶⁶ John MacArthur, *Matthew 16—23*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 299.

verse 43 “refers to the church.”⁶⁷ He admits, on the one hand, that Matthew’s use of ἔθνει comes from Daniel 2:44:

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

But this presents a dilemma: “Daniel predicts that the kingdom will *not* be passed on to another people, or nation; Matthew writes that it *will* be transferred.”⁶⁸ Gundry offers no solution for this apparent contradiction. But if Matthew’s nation is a future, repentant nation of Israel, the dilemma disappears.

The other contradiction involves a matter of timing:

On the one hand, the taking of the kingdom from the Jewish leaders and the fruit bearing of the church refer to the past and present. On the other hand, Matthew’s distinctive allusion to Jesus’ Parousia (“Therefore when the owner [‘Lord’] of the vineyard comes,” v 40) and the use of Daniel’s figures for the last judgment (v 44) point to the future.⁶⁹

Gundry can only reconcile this chronological conundrum by appealing to an “already and not yet” schema.⁷⁰ Gundry’s chronological problem disappears without having to resort to an “already and not yet” explanation when this verse is seen in the broader context of Matthew’s message. Peters observed in his Proposition 58, “Jesus, toward the close of His ministry, preached that the Kingdom was not nigh.”⁷¹ In other words, if the nation to whom the kingdom

⁶⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 430.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Emphasis his.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1, 379. There is an extended discussion in Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1, pp. 386–391, which is generally good, but he includes the church by virtue of its being grafted into Abraham’s seed. Yet he sees the kingdom as future. So Peters actually ends up with an already/not yet scenario due to his misunderstanding of the olive tree metaphor.

was given was the future eschatological nation of Israel, transformed by the implementation of the New Covenant, then there is no need to see any kind of a present kingdom fulfillment in the church.

b. Romans 2:28–29

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.⁷² But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

This passage is understood by supersessionists to mean that Gentiles may be considered “true Israel” by becoming Christians. For instance, Piper claims, “a Gentile (that’s what is meant by ‘the uncircumcised man’) who fulfils the requirements of the Law will be counted as a true Jew—a true member of God’s chosen people, Israel.”⁷² Piper then explains what he means by one “who fulfils the requirements of the Law”:

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes uncircumcised Gentiles into circumcised Jews, namely, by circumcising their hearts. . . . Paul has Christians in mind, because this is the way he talks about Christian conversion. . . . This promise shows that keeping the Law and fulfilling the Law are something that God promised when the Holy Spirit was given to his people in the fuller measure of the new covenant.⁷³

Thus, for Piper, every Gentile whose heart is circumcised by the Holy Spirit has fulfilled the requirement of the law and becomes a “true Jew.”

One of the problems with this view is that it involves a very confused view of what constitutes obedience to the law. Typical of Reformed theology, Piper must assume a strict distinction between the moral, civil, and ceremonial divisions of the law—a distinction that is

⁷² John Piper, “Who Is a True Jew? Part 1,” preached February 21, 1999, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007). Also, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 861.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

imposed upon the text. He states, “We know he [Paul] is talking about God’s moral law and not the ceremonial law, because circumcision is not included.”⁷⁴

A second problem is that it relies upon a redefinition of the terms “Jew” and “Israel,” requiring a departure from the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of the text. This departure from normal hermeneutics opens the door to a multitude of problems. Piper gleefully exclaims, “What a great thing it is to be able to go to the whole Bible, Old and New Testament, and know that ‘this is my book.’ I am a Jew. These are my promises.”⁷⁵ Exactly which promises does he have in mind? Are the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant to be claimed by Piper? Is he willing to take the curses of the Mosaic Covenant along with the blessings? Has he begun observing the Sabbath day from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday? Are these promises real and literal, or are they to be allegorized and changed into something more acceptable to a Gentile Christian?

Piper, Grudem, and other supersessionist New Calvinists have misunderstood the context of Romans 2. This entire chapter’s intended purpose is to show that justification cannot come from the law, and thus lays a foundation for the revelation in chapter 3 of “a righteousness of God apart from the law” (3:21). Paul’s point in chapter 2 is that by seeking to be justified by the law, the Jews were no better than the Gentiles, and, in fact, some Gentiles were even better law keepers than the Jews. But neither Jew nor Gentile could be justified by the law.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Marc Debanné, “Paul face au judaïsme de son temps et de son passé: l’émergence d’une nouvelle circoncision,” *Science Et Esprit* 60, no. 3 (2008): 266.

c. *Romans 9:6*

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.

This, and Galatians 6:16 (see below), are the two most often cited verses in an attempt to prove that the term “Israel” is used to refer to the Church.⁷⁷ Grudem takes this verse to mean that “the true children of Abraham, those who are in the most true sense ‘Israel,’ are not the nation of Israel by physical descent from Abraham but those who have believed in Christ,”⁷⁸ and that “when Jewish people according to the flesh are saved in large numbers at some time in the future, they will not constitute a separate people of God.”⁷⁹ Thus, Grudem exhibits a mild supersessionist position seeing a future salvation of ethnic Jews, but not a reconstituted nation that is in any way distinct from the Church. The supersessionist focus is sharpened even more acutely by the way Piper translates the Greek οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ as, “For all those from Israel, these are not Israel.”⁸⁰ Piper takes the negative οὐ with οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ (“these are not Israel”), rather than with πάντες (“not all who”). By doing so, though Piper elsewhere displays a mild supersessionist position,⁸¹ he has effectively excluded all of ethnic Israel from the elect company of God’s people.

⁷⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 67; Charles L. Feinberg, *Millennialism* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1985), 230; John F. Walvoord, “Eschatological Problems V: Is the Church the Israel of God?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101, no. 404 (October 1944): 411–412; Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 723; Vlach, 172; S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 42.

⁷⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 861.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 65.

⁸¹ Piper, *Justification of God*, 24–31.

At issue here is whether “Israel” in the first half of the sentence is used with the same sense as “Israel” in the second half of the sentence. Supersessionists generally see the first occurrence of “Israel” as referring to ethnic Israel, while the second occurrence refers to the church as the elect people of God. Thus, the supersessionist understanding of this verse might be paraphrased, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to the Church.”⁸²

Contextually, verse 6b forms part of the explanation as to why Paul’s sorrow of heart (verse 2) may be mitigated.⁸³ His sorrow was over the lost condition of his “kinsmen according to the flesh who are Israelites” (verses 3–4). The fact that lightens this burden is that not all of these kinsmen will be lost. To make the second occurrence of “Israel” refer to anything other than ethnic Jews would make no sense out of the context.

In the second occurrence of “Israel” there is not a replacement of ethnic Jews with non-Jews, but rather a narrowing of all ethnic Jews, to a believing remnant of Jews.⁸⁴ Sproul sets up a false dichotomy by claiming, “God’s promise is given sovereignly, not biologically.”⁸⁵ He makes no room for the possibility that God’s promise to Abraham could be both sovereign and biological. But the two are not mutually exclusive. Cranfield described it as “the Israel within Israel, which is the company of those who are willing, obedient, grateful witnesses to that grace

⁸² Andy Cheung, “Who Is the ‘Israel’ of Romans 11:26?” Calvin Smith, *The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism*, New Revised and Expanded Edition (King’s Divinity Press, Kindle Edition, 2013), Kindle Locations 2462–2463.

⁸³ The explanatory γάρ coupled with adversative δέ in verse 6 make this syntactical connection with verse 2. The adversative relationship is expressed thus: “I have continual sorrow in my heart . . . *but* it is not such that the word of God has failed.” The explanatory relationship is expressed as, “It is not that the word of God has failed, *for* not all who are descended from Israel, these are Israel.”

⁸⁴ Cheung, “Who Is the ‘Israel’ of Romans 11:26?” Kindle Location 2467. In support of this view, see also: William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 240; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 574; S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God,’” 49; and Cranfield (cited below).

⁸⁵ R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 164.

and truth.”⁸⁶ According to Cheung, “[Romans] 9:7–13 focuses on God’s winnowing process whereby through successive generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God narrows His chosen people to a spiritual remnant. This winnowing, a theme of the remnant, fits perfectly with the idea that Israel in 9:6 refers to a spiritual remnant of Israel within the larger ethnic group of Jews generally.”⁸⁷

d. Romans 11:17–24

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

This passage is frequently referred to in an effort to show that the Church has been grafted into Israel’s place of soteriological blessing. Piper’s explanation of Gentile salvation is that they receive salvation by being grafted into Israel’s promises. He says, “By being grafted into the cultivated olive tree . . . the Gentiles become heirs of the promise (Rom 11:17). Therefore the salvation which Gentile believers enjoy as beneficiaries of the promises of God is a salvation which belongs to Israel because ‘theirs are the promises’ (Rom 9:4b).”⁸⁸ Sam Storms,

⁸⁶ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 474. Cranfield describes the supersessionist view of this verse as “a charter of Christian anti-semitism.”

⁸⁷ Cheung, “Who Is the ‘Israel’ of Romans 11:26?” Kindle Locations 2475–2476.

⁸⁸ Piper, *Justification of God*, 40.

member of the Bethlehem College and Seminary board of directors, identifies the root of the olive tree in Romans 11 as the true Israel: “There is but one olive tree, rooted in the promises given to the patriarchs. In this one tree (i.e., in this one people of God) there are both believing Jews (natural branches) and believing Gentiles (unnatural branches). Together they constitute the one people of God, the true Israel in and for whom the promises will be fulfilled. This one people is, of course, the Church.”⁸⁹ For Storms, “the Church [is] the ‘one new man,’ the true Israel of God in and for whom all the promises will be fulfilled. The promises will not be fulfilled exclusively in and for a separate ‘nation’ of ethnic Israelites.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Carson and Moo see in this engrafting metaphor “a transfer of covenant privileges from Israel to the church.”⁹¹

To argue on the basis of this passage that the church has superseded Israel is to miss the entire point of the passage. What Paul is saying here is that while some Gentiles have been grafted in and some Jews have been broken off, Gentiles may in fact be removed and the Jews will most certainly be grafted back in again. The most that can be said on behalf of Gentiles is that they have obtained a temporary place of privilege. The supersessionist argument based on this passage amounts to special pleading, completely ignoring both the caution against Gentiles boasting arrogantly against the Jews (verse 18) and the possibility of Gentiles being cut off from the root at some point in the future (verse 22b).

In verse 19 it almost seems that Paul was directly addressing supersessionists when he states, “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’” The

⁸⁹ Sam Storms, “The Church, Israel, and ‘Replacement Theology’—Part 1,” Sam Storms: Enjoying God, March 18, 2007, <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-church--israel--and--replacement--theology---part-1> (accessed June 3, 2015).

⁹⁰ Storms, “The Church, Israel, and ‘Replacement Theology’—Part 1.”

⁹¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 392.

apostle's reply was a stern rebuke: "Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either." Cranfield's comment is apropos:

[Paul's statement] exposes the logic behind such Gentile Christian boasting. 'Branches were broken off in order that I might be grafted in'—that is how a self-complacent egotism sees the matter. And to such an egotist this half-truth seems a conclusive proof of his own superior importance and a sufficient justification for his contemptuous attitude.⁹²

Cranfield's charge of egotism against the supersessionist ideas forming in the minds of those first-century Roman Gentile believers might equally well apply to twenty-first-century supersessionists. As was noted in the comments on Matthew 21:43 above, Gentile Christians are no more worthy of God's blessings than were the Jews, as is proven by Christ's letters to the churches of Asia (Revelation 2—3).

Another serious difficulty the supersessionist view faces is the possibility that the engrafted Gentiles may one day be cut off (verse 22b). The interpretation of the clause "otherwise you also will be cut off" is difficult, and commentators struggle to explain it. In particular, Calvinistic commentators are faced with the problem of how this relates to eternal security. Moo, for example, comments, "If God so judged the Jews, who had a natural connection to the tree and its sustaining root, he will surely judge those who have been grafted in as alien branches."⁹³ Moo similarly states, "If the believer does not continue in the goodness of God—the believer will, like the Jew, be 'cut off'—severed forever from the people of God and eternally condemned. . . . Salvation is dependent on continuing faith; therefore, the person who

⁹² Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 568.

⁹³ Douglas Moo, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 706. Moo does not describe what sort of "judgment" will be visited against "those who have been grafted in," but Paul's clear statement is that "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

ceases to believe forfeits any hope of salvation.”⁹⁴ This conclusion is so surprising that Moo finds it necessary to issue a lengthy and confusing caveat in a footnote.⁹⁵ Whatever verse 22 does mean, it cannot mean that the church has forever replaced Israel.

e. Romans 11:26

And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

A strong supersessionist interpretation of this verse might argue that if all Israel will be saved, then Israel must be a designation of all the saved, namely the Church.⁹⁶ This would simply be faulty logic. But more prevalent is the mild supersessionist argument of Piper, “The day is coming when the nation of Israel will be brought back to her Messiah and be saved and become one with the Christian Church in the Covenant of Grace established with Abraham (Romans 11:25–26).”⁹⁷ In Piper’s view, there is no national distinction for Israel in the kingdom; rather, Israel’s salvation simply brings a number of Jews into the Church through mass conversion.

It is clear from verse 27 that Paul had in mind the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, as well as Isaiah 59:20–21, when he wrote that “all Israel will be saved.”⁹⁸ Both of these Old Testament

⁹⁴ Ibid., 706–7. Similarly, Stifler states, “The Gentile is responsible for his conduct, and if he fails to honor God he will fall as did the Jew” (193). These statements, from men who would consider themselves to be Calvinistic in doctrine, are quite amazing.

⁹⁵ Ibid. n57.

⁹⁶ This view is mentioned by Vlach in *The Church as a Replacement of Israel*, 168, but he does not refer to any proponents of the view.

⁹⁷ John Piper, “Things Are Worse Than and Better Than They Seem: Revelation 2:8–11,” preached June 6, 1993, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007). Also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1098; D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed., (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1149.

⁹⁸ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 578–579; Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 225; Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, vol. 6, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 344;

passages express the hope of national restoration as well as spiritual salvation. The “salvation” envisioned in Isaiah 59 is one in which Yahweh repays “wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies . . . so they will fear the name of Yahweh from the west and His glory from the rising of the sun” (59:18–19). This is a salvation in which Israel's national enemies to the east and the west are brought into subjection to Yahweh’s rule and authority. And in Jeremiah 31 the salvation of Israel is depicted as a time when “they will speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes: ‘May Yahweh bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy hill!’ Judah and its cities will dwell together in it, the farmer and they who go about with flocks. For I satisfy the weary ones and refresh everyone who languishes.” This is a description of restored cities, villages, and farms for Judah. This is a national promise of restoration for Israel and Judah in the Messiah’s kingdom. It is in no way a description of the Church. The Church is simply not in view in Isaiah 59, Jeremiah 31, or Romans 11:26.

f. Galatians 3:7

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

Grudem’s interpretation of this verse is based on the presupposition of covenant theology. To be a son of Abraham in the sense of Galatians 3:7 means for Grudem to realize the fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants inasmuch as these are equivalent to the Covenant of Grace.⁹⁹ And Piper makes baptism the equivalent of circumcision in the Old Testament, making the church the new spiritual Israel. He argues as follows:

John A. Witmer, “Romans,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 486; Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 538.

⁹⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 521–522.

Just as circumcision was administered to all the physical sons of Abraham who made up the physical Israel, so baptism should be administered to all the spiritual sons of Abraham who make up the spiritual Israel, the church. . . . But who are these spiritual sons of Abraham who constitute the people of God in our age? Galatians 3:7 says, “Know then that it is those of *faith* who are the sons of Abraham.” The new thing, since Jesus has come, is that the covenant people of God are no longer a political, ethnic nation, but a body of believers.¹⁰⁰

Piper understands the expression “sons of Abraham” to mean that the spiritual sons of Abraham have now taken the place of the physical sons of Abraham, as he argues elsewhere, “Aren’t verses 7 and 9 [of Gal. 3] referring to the same group of people? Verse 7 says that ‘those of faith are sons of Abraham.’ And verse 9 says that ‘those of faith are blessed with Abraham.’ Surely, these are the same people: sons of Abraham, who will, therefore, enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham and his children.”¹⁰¹ Both Piper and Grudem ignore two important distinctions: (1) between the literal sense of “son” and the figurative sense of “son”; and (2) between parties to a covenant and promises of the covenant that may extend beyond the parties themselves.

There is both a literal sense and a figurative sense of the term “son.” As Bruce explains, “ὄιοι Ἀβραάμ [sons of Abraham] is an instance of the idiomatic Hebrew use of ‘sons’ (*bēnê*) with a following genitive to denote character.”¹⁰² Abraham and his physical descendants were party to a covenant with Yahweh. The Gentiles were never a party to this covenant. Yes, Gentiles would be blessed through relationship with covenanted national Israel, but this is not to say that the Gentiles were ever intended to be a party to the covenant itself. Abraham and his descendants were given both a covenant and promises (Romans 9:4). The promised blessings of the covenant

¹⁰⁰ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 134.

¹⁰¹ John Piper, *A Holy Ambition: To Preach Where Christ Has Not Been Named* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2011).

¹⁰² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 155.

extend to the Gentiles (Genesis 12:3) without the Gentiles becoming party to the covenant. So there are “sons of Abraham” who physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and who are parties to the Abrahamic Covenant. There are also “sons of Abraham” in the sense that, like Abraham, they are believers, they are related to God by faith.¹⁰³ They are blessed with an Abraham-like relationship to God based on faith. It is significant that Abraham’s justification by faith (Genesis 15:6) preceded the ratification of the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:9–21). In any given context, the meaning of the expression “son of” must be determined by that context. The overall argument in Galatians is that justification is by faith, not the law. Paul’s reference to sons of Abraham, both here and in Romans 4:11–12, is according to the Hebrew idiom and speaks of those who, like Abraham, are related to God by faith, whether physically descended from Abraham or not. But it does not mean that these replace the covenanted party.

Linking spiritual descent from Abraham with covenant participation neglects the distinction Paul made in Romans 9:4 between covenants and promises. According to Cranfield, by “covenants,”

Paul probably has in mind the covenants made with Abraham (Gen 15:17ff; 17:1ff: cf. Exod 2:24), with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:5; 24:1ff), in the plains of Moab (Deut 29:1ff), and at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (Josh 8:30ff), and possibly also the covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:3f, 28f; 132:11f).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 144.

¹⁰⁴ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 462.

Whereas, by “promises,”

In view of 4:13–22 and Gal 3:16–29 it is natural to assume that Paul had in mind in the first place the promises made to Abraham (Gen 12:7; 13:14–17; 12:1–17; 22:16–18; also the related promise in 21:12 –cf. Rom 9:7f) and repeated to Isaac (Gen 26:3f) and to Jacob (Gen 28:13f); but 2 Cor 1:20 and 7:1 (see also the concluding verses of the previous chapter) suggest the probability that he also had in mind many other OT promises, particularly the eschatological and messianic promises.¹⁰⁵

Both covenants and promises belong to ethnic and national Israel, namely the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the covenants belong exclusively to ethnic/national Israel. The promises, on the other hand, belong to believers, both Jewish and Gentile; that is, the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

g. Galatians 3:29

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

The supersessionist argument from this verse is not essentially different from that of the previous verse, Galatians 3:7. For a response, the reader is referred to the discussion above.

h. Galatians 6:16

And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

As noted above, this, and Romans 9:6, are the two most often cited verses in an attempt to prove that the term “Israel” is used to refer to the Church. John Piper, addressing Bethlehem Baptist Church on December 7, 2003, could claim, “Bethlehem, ‘the Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16)! All the covenants, all the promises belong to us—and all who will one day trust the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 464.

Messiah.”¹⁰⁶ But at best, this verse, while possibly allowing for such a sense, does not prove it. The crucial exegetical issue in this verse is whether the conjunction καί should be understood as connective (“and”), which would suggest that two groups of people are referred to (“those who will walk by this rule” and “the Israel of God”), or whether it should be understood as explicative (“even”), which would suggest a single group of people (“those who will walk by this rule, even the Israel of God”). Nevertheless, New Calvinists generally simply claim that this verse identifies the Church as the Israel of God, without offering much exegesis to support that claim.¹⁰⁷ Michael Bird makes a valiant effort at defending the supersessionist position,¹⁰⁸ and a response will be given here to his line of argumentation. Bird offers three arguments as to “why Paul must mean that the ‘Israel of God’ is the church.”¹⁰⁹

Bird first argues, “It is incredibly difficult to imagine Paul arguing so passionately in Galatians for the unity of Jews and Gentiles in one church, united in Christ, with everyone as equal sons and daughters of Abraham, and then at the very end of that pronouncing a benediction that serves to separate groups within his churches according ethnic categories.”¹¹⁰ But this is simply begging the question. Bird assumes that a future national Israel has no distinct place and, therefore, there can be no distinction in Galatians 6:16.¹¹¹ A dispensational approach to this

¹⁰⁶ John Piper, “Did Israel Stumble in Order That They Might Fall?” Preached December 7, 2003, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2014)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God,’” 44–45. See, for example, Piper, *Justification of God*, 26; R. E. Ciampa, “Galatians,” T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 312; Thomas R., “Election,” Alexander and Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 451.

¹⁰⁸ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 724. Earlier, in a discussion criticizing dispensational theology, he simply asserts his conclusion without offering an exegesis or other argumentation (p. 221).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 724.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Johnson writes, “I cannot help but think that dogmatic considerations loom large in the interpretation of Gal 6:16. The tenacity with which this application of the Israel of God to the church is held in spite of a mass of

verse acknowledges a present dispensation in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, while there is yet a future dispensation¹¹² in which such a distinction will be observed. Zechariah foresaw a future day in which “ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zechariah 8:23). Zechariah clearly presents a view of the kingdom in which there is a distinction between Jewish and Gentile worshipers of the Lord. In addition, many other Old Testament passages affirm a preeminence of Israel over the Gentiles in the kingdom (e.g., Isaiah 60:1–4; 62:1–12; Micah 4:1–5; Haggai 2:1–7; Zechariah 14:16–21). If by “the Israel of God” Paul was referring to the future Israel that would receive Jesus as Messiah in the kingdom,¹¹³ there would be nothing contradictory at all in his wishing God’s peace and mercy on them, as well as on the church of the present dispensation. The fact that Paul has not explicitly addressed the issue of eschatological Israel in Galatians does not rule out the possibility, or even likelihood, of his making a closing comment about them. Paul does this very thing in the epistle to the Romans. In Romans, having argued that the Jew has no advantage over the Gentile when it comes to judicial

evidence to the contrary leads one to think that the supporters of the view believe their eschatological system, usually an amillennial scheme, hangs on the reference of the term to the people of God, composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles. Amillennialism does not hang on this interpretation, but the view does appear to have a treasured place in amillennial exegesis.” S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘The Israel of God,’” 42.

¹¹² Johnson, 53. For a non-dispensational interpreter who understands this as referring to eschatological Israel, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, *The New International Greek Text Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 275.

¹¹³ Some dispensationalists understand the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 to be referring to the remnant of Israel (i.e., elect Jews) in the present dispensation, as distinct from saved Gentiles (e.g., Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1989], 389 n78). While this view is possible, it does seem to run contrary to Paul’s focus on the removal of distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Church. If it does indeed refer to such remnant Jews in the Church, the point would be that Paul was praying for God’s mercy and peace on such remnant Jews in contradistinction to the Judaizers (Enns, 521n12; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1999], 462–463). Some significant non-dispensational interpreters hold to this view as well: Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 320–323; Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, (Andover, Mass: Draper, 1880), 154; Walter Gutbrod, “C. Ἰουδαῖος, Ἰσραήλ, Ἑβραῖος in Greek Hellenistic Literature,” ed., Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,” 3:387–388. For a helpful discussion of the major views, see S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and ‘the Israel of God,’” 41–55.

standing before God (Romans 1—2), Paul asks, “Then what advantage has the Jew?” (Romans 3:1). He begins to develop the answer to this question in Romans 3:2 and concludes in chapters 9—11 by discussing eschatological national Israel. This demonstrates that for Paul a discussion of eschatological national Israel implicitly follows a discussion of equal-judicial standing of Jew and Gentile before God. Galatians, being an earlier epistle than Romans, shows Paul’s thought in its less developed form. As he contemplates the equality of Jew and Gentile before God in the present dispensation, his mind naturally projects itself forward to a consideration of eschatological national Israel that shall be restored in the kingdom, and he prays for God’s mercy and peace upon them. In essence, Paul is simply praying that petition in the Lord’s Prayer that asks, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Bird’s second argument is,

Paul elsewhere takes language ordinarily used to describe Israel, like “circumcision” (Phil 3:3), “Jew” (Rom 2:28–29), and “God’s chosen people” (Col 3:12), to designate Christians. These are prestige terms that demonstrate the incorporation of the church into a heritage that was once thought to be the exclusive property of ethnic Jews. Furthermore, in Romans Paul says that “a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit” (Rom 2:29), which essentially redefines the identity of God’s people around a new set of symbolic markers defined by Spirit, new creation, and obedience. Paul can also use Israel/Israelite in a fluid religious sense designating a privileged religious identity that is no longer defined ethnically (Eph 2:13; 3:6), and he even speaks of an Israel within Israel (Rom 9:6). Paul knows of two covenantal people: Israel “according to the flesh” and Israel “by the power of the Spirit” (Gal 4:29). The “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) as an honorific title for God’s people irrespective of ethnicity naturally contrasts with Israel “according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3 ESV) as a general designation for nonbelieving Jews.¹¹⁴

This argument gives the surface appearance of being Biblical by including multiple Bible references, but it is a flawed argument. Bird’s argument can be expressed in summary form in this way: Since Paul elsewhere uses language that ordinarily describes Israel to designate

¹¹⁴ Bird, 724.

Christians, he must be doing so in Galatians 6:16 as well. This is a very curious argument for Bird to make in light of the fact that only one paragraph earlier in the same volume, he made the following observation regarding Romans 11:26: “While several scholars try to take Romans 11:26 (‘And in this way all Israel will be saved’) as designating the church as the ‘Israel’ who will be rescued at the end of history, it seems clear from the wider context of Romans 9–11 (9:4, 6, 27, 31; 10:19, 21; 11:2, 7, 11, 25) that Paul is looking ahead to the eschatological salvation of national Israel.”¹¹⁵ It seems odd that in Romans 11:26 it is clear to Bird that the term “Israel” refers to “the eschatological salvation of national Israel,” but in the very next paragraph, it cannot mean this in Galatians 6:16, based on Paul’s use of terms related to Israel elsewhere.

To argue that a term must mean something in one context because similar terms are used this way in other contexts is linguistically unsound. Word meanings are determined in large measure by the context in which they are found, not by how they are used in other contexts. Bird, in fact, acknowledged this principle when the context of Romans 11:26 forced him to depart from the traditional supersessionist understanding of the term “Israel.” But nothing in the context of Galatians 6 requires that the term “Israel” be taken in any way other than its normal meaning. So it is best taken to refer to eschatological national Israel.

It is also important to note that just because similar imagery is used to describe both Israel and non-Israelites does not necessarily require that the two groups be the same. A clear example of this is found in Isaiah 19:24–25. Vlach explains, “There are occasions in Scripture in which ‘Israel’ imagery is applied to non-Israelites without these non-Israelites becoming Israel. Isa 19:24–25, for instance, predicts that Egypt would someday be called ‘my people.’ Yet, the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 723.

context makes clear that Egypt is distinct from Israel since Egypt is mentioned alongside ‘Israel my inheritance.’”¹¹⁶

Bird’s third argument is,

We might compare the benediction of Galatians 6:16 with the benediction in 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!” For Paul, there is no blessing for people *irrespective* of their relationship to Christ. The grace, peace, and mercy of God are from Christ for the elect in Christ. For this reason, I concur with Calvin: “In a word, he gives the appellation *the Israel of God* to those whom he formerly denominated the children of Abraham by faith, (Gal. 3:29,) and thus includes all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church.”¹¹⁷

This argument shows a total misunderstanding of the dispensational view of the Israel of God. The dispensational view in no way believes that the Israel of God is related to God in any other way than respective of their relationship to Christ. Bird has presented a straw man argument. His syllogism could be represented this way:

- Major Premise: Only those related to God respective of their relationship to Christ may be blessed.
- Minor Premise: The dispensational view of the Israel of God has Israel related to God irrespective of their relationship to Christ.
- Conclusion: God cannot bless the Israel of God, as they are defined by dispensationalism.

But Bird’s minor premise is flawed. He has substituted a definition of the Israel of God that is not held by dispensationalism. The dispensational view would see the Israel of God as a future Israel that is saved due to their recognition of Jesus as their Messiah. Thus, granting Bird’s major

¹¹⁶ Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement for Israel*, 178.

¹¹⁷ Bird, 724.

premise, one should conclude that God can bless the Israel of God as defined by dispensationalism. And this is precisely what Paul prays for.

In addition to these criticisms of Bird's arguments, at least two other reasons for rejecting the supersessionist position should be mentioned.¹¹⁸ First, no other place in Scripture uses the term "Israel" to refer to the Church. To take it in such a way in Galatians 6:16 would seem to require some compelling contextual indicators. Lacking such compelling indicators, one would understand Israel in its normal ethnic/national sense.¹¹⁹

Second, a benediction at the close of an epistle is an extremely unlikely place for Paul to "make a statement of such great theological significance."¹²⁰ Calvinist theologian Timothy George comments, "It is strange that if Paul intended simply to equate the Gentile believers with the people of Israel that he would make this crucial identification here at the end of the letter and not in the main body where he developed at length his argument for justification by faith."¹²¹

In summary, actual exegetical and theological support for the supersessionist view of Galatians 6:16 is lacking. To take the term "Israel" in any way that departs from the normal usage of that term would require strong support from the context. In view of the great focus that

¹¹⁸ A less compelling, yet nevertheless interesting, observation is that the future tense στοιχήσουσιν ("they shall walk") is used. This is unusual for a benediction. One would expect a present tense. This may explain the textual variant στηχουσιν (A C* D F G 1739, 1881 *pc* it; Ambst). But the future (κ* B D F G ψ 0278) is the preferred text "both as having somewhat higher support and as being slightly more difficult" (J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957; orig. 1865], 224). The future tense "may carry, by analogy, its future idea over into the benediction regarding mercy. In other words, it may point to Israel's future belief," Johnson, 53.

¹¹⁹ Vlach, 174; Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 358; S. Lewis Johnson, "Paul and 'The Israel of God,'" 42, 47–48.

¹²⁰ Vlach, 174.

¹²¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 440.

supersessionists place on this verse, lack of such support removes a nearly essential pillar of the supersessionist position.

i. Ephesians 2:11–22

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Two features characterize the supersessionist position: (1) the Church has now been made a party to Israel’s covenants by being brought near; and (2) the resultant elimination of any distinction between Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ is a permanent condition that cannot be altered in a future millennium.

Piper expressed a mild supersessionist position based on verse 19 in a missionary sermon preached in October of 2004.

You Uzbeks, you Maninka, you Kachin, you Shandai, you Swedes, you Germans, you Russians, you British—you who trust Christ are now part of the covenant made with Israel. You are fellow citizens. You are members of the household of God. You will inherit every promise ever made if you believe in Christ. All of them are yes to you in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). You will inherit the earth.¹²²

¹²² John Piper, *A Holy Ambition: To Preach Where Christ Has Not Been Named* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2011).

He further claims that Gentile believers are “full partners in the ‘covenants of promise’ (Ephesians 2:12),”¹²³ so that “the hope and joy and glory of Zechariah is our hope and our joy and our glory, as children of Abraham and citizens of the new Jerusalem.”¹²⁴

Biblical support for the supersessionist position comes from the observation that Paul’s language of “far” and “near” comes from Isaiah 57:19: “‘Creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will heal him.’” Supersessionists claim that “Paul saw the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise in the Gospel of Christ.”¹²⁵ But the problem with seeing a fulfillment of Isaiah 57:19 is that the fulfillment of that passage is set in a context in which “he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land, and will possess My holy mountain” (Isaiah 57:13). The fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy is tied to a restoration of national Israel to the land and temple worship in God’s holy mountain. Unless one resorts to a spiritualizing interpretation, this cannot be fulfilled in the Church. Paul may have been using language from Isaiah 57, but this does not mean that he saw the church as fulfilling that particular prophecy. New Testament authors frequently use Old Testament language when they are not referring to a fulfillment of some prediction.¹²⁶

Paul’s point in referring to Isaiah 57 seems to be that just as there were Jews in Isaiah’s day who were both far from God and near to God, so in Paul’s own day, some Gentiles were far from God but could be brought near through faith. In Isaiah’s day, those who were far from God

¹²³ John Piper, “There Shall Be a Fountain Opened,” preached December 5, 1982, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)*, (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ “Third Millennium Study Bible Notes on Ephesians 2:14–18,” Third Millennium Ministries, <http://thirdmill.org/studybible/note.asp/id/41394> (accessed May 28, 2015).

¹²⁶ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 261–270.

were nevertheless members of the covenant community. Paul is not saying that believing Gentiles are now made to be parties to the covenant, but simply that they are brought near to God.

Supersessionists misunderstand Ephesians 2 by asserting that believing Gentiles are brought into the covenants. Ephesians 2 does not explicitly state that believing Gentiles are brought into the covenants. The covenants are only mentioned relative to their having been far. They were far from God because they were strangers from the covenants; that was the position of Gentiles under the previous dispensations. But now they are near to God because they are in Christ by faith. It is the “new man” and the “one body” that express the principle of union between believing Jew and believing Gentile, and provide the doctrinal basis for the Ephesian believers giving diligence to preserve their unity (4:2–6), not inclusion in the covenants.

New Calvinist Matt Chandler makes an observation about verse 15 that actually should run counter to supersessionist conclusions. He observes that “the Greek word in this text for new is the Greek word *kainos*. Properly defined, *kainos* means ‘of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of.’ It doesn’t imply a new version of what was old but rather something brand new. God has taken what was many and has created what is one. From many people, He has made for Himself one new people.”¹²⁷ Chandler is essentially correct. In Christ, Jews and Gentiles are made one. This is not Israel becoming the church, nor is it the church becoming Israel; this oneness is a “new man” (καὶνὸς ἄνθρωπος, v. 15); it is also the “one body [sc. of Christ]” (εἰς σῶμα, v.16). The Church could not be true Israel; it must be something other than Israel.

¹²⁷ Matt Chandler, “The Dividing Wall Is Gone,” The Village Church (September 18, 2014), <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/the-dividing-wall-is-gone> (accessed May 28, 2015). This message was an antiracism message.

j. 1 Peter 2:9–10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This passage is used to defend the idea that the Church is a nation and can, therefore, fulfill Christ’s statement of Matthew 21:43 that the kingdom would be given to another “nation.”¹²⁸ But three facts must be kept in mind regarding the interpretation of this passage: (1) This verse is a quote from Exodus 19:5–6. In its original context, it was addressed to national Israel, not the Church. (2) First Peter is addressed not to all Christians in general but specifically to Hebrew Christians of the diaspora. They were Jews who had believed in Jesus as their Messiah. As Jews, they had their own ethnic connection with the nation of Israel, and these verses from Exodus were especially meaningful to them. It is unlikely that these verses would have been quoted to a Church composed largely of Gentile believers. (3) Peter’s point in quoting these verses was to say that as God’s people, they ought to be holy. In other words, these verses were quoted to focus on holiness, not nationhood. As chosen priests, they were to be holy. The fact that Exodus referred to them as a “nation” is incidental to Peter’s purpose in focusing on holiness. Peter was not saying that the Church is a nation. He was saying that Christians, as God’s people in the New Testament era, are to be holy, just as God had called Israel to be holy in the Old Testament era. No other verse in the New Testament even comes close to suggesting that the Church could be considered a nation.

¹²⁸ See discussion above on Matthew 21:43.

2. Spiritual, or True, Israel vs. Ethnic Israel vs. National Israel

Supersessionists have invented the notion of a “true Israel.” The expression does not occur in any English translation of the Scriptures and appears to have arisen first in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*.¹²⁹ The very use of the term implies the illegitimacy of historic, ethnic/national Israel. If “true Israel” meant the believing remnant of Israel, a narrowing sense that referred to a believing portion of ethnic Israelites, there would be no great problem. But that is not what New Calvinists mean when they use the expression “true Israel.” They use it to refer to all believing people of God, whether in the Old Testament, the present-day Church, or the future.

The other problematic use of terminology involves the expression “ethnic Israel.” The Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants were made with an ethnic people, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, but they involve fulfillment with more than merely an ethnic people; they involve fulfillment with a nation. When speaking of the fulfillment of these covenants, the appropriate adjective to accompany Israel should often be “national,” rather than “ethnic.” While it is not inappropriate to refer to God’s future dealings with ethnic Israel, it is more precise to speak of national Israel. However, one almost never encounters the phrase “national Israel” in the writings, sermons, and blogs of New Calvinists.¹³⁰ There is no place in New Calvinist theology for a national Israel. There may be salvation for ethnic Jews, bringing them into the Church (their “true Israel”), but there is no place for a future, national Israel uniquely favored by God.

¹²⁹ *Dialogue*, ch. XI.

¹³⁰ The phrase “national Israel” does not occur even once in Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. In Piper’s *Justification of God*, “national Israel” occurs only once, in a quote from Hodge’s commentary on Romans.

The Relation of Supersessionism to the Doctrine of Election

Romans 9:10–24 is a passage deemed of great importance to the Calvinistic doctrines of supersessionism and election. Olson calls it “the lynchpin in their case for determinism in salvation.”¹³¹ Without this passage, many of the nuances Calvinists attach to election would be lacking in Scriptural support.¹³² However, it may be justly questioned whether this passage is really speaking of individual election.¹³³ That it speaks of the corporate election of national Israel as opposed to the Gentile nations appears to be an inescapable conclusion, but does it also speak implicitly of individual election?¹³⁴ John Piper’s *The Justification of God* was written in large measure to justify understanding Romans 9 as referring to individual election. Bird insists, “Romans 9—11 is intractably connected to Romans 8.”¹³⁵ But linking Romans 9 with Romans 8 fails to appreciate the connection of Romans 9 with Romans 3:1–2. Mounce has correctly caught

¹³¹ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism* (Lynchburg: Global Gospel Publishers, 2012), 346.

¹³² John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 68, 346–47. Michael Bird writes, “If Romans is the arena of the predestination debate, then Romans 9 is the cage that the gladiators get locked in for their combat” (Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013], 519. See also, Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, 166; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (March 1993): 25.

¹³³ For a bibliography of sources arguing for either corporate or individual election in Romans 9, see Brian J. Abasciano, “Corporate Election in Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schriener,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 351n2.

¹³⁴ Sproul entertains this possibility: “Some have tried to get around this position by saying that Jacob and Esau were representatives of nations. On this interpretation Paul is not talking about the election of individuals but of nations. Even if that were the case, all the questions that surround the problem of predestination of individuals would still apply to the predestination of nations, only on a higher scale.” But then he goes on simply to conclude without any exegetical support, “But the apostle is clearly writing of the selection of individuals” (Sproul, *The Gospel of God*, 165).

¹³⁵ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 519. Bird makes this assertion without offering any exegetical justification. On the contrary, Cranfield writes, “One stubborn problem is that of the relation of these three chapters [i.e., 9—11] to the rest of Romans” (Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 445).

the significance of the connection between Romans 3:1–2 and Romans 9.¹³⁶ Mounce concludes, “Chapters 9–11 discuss the subject of God’s righteousness in view of his apparent rejection of the Jewish nation.”¹³⁷ The entire context of Romans 9—11 has moved on from a discussion of individual salvation (chapters 3—8) to the matter of God’s dealings with national Israel. While His election of Israel as a nation involves salvation (Romans 11:26), it has to do primarily with Israel’s national status vis-à-vis the future Messianic Kingdom. New Calvinism’s prior commitment to supersessionism blinds them to the connection between Romans 3 and Romans 9, forcing them to wrestle Paul’s line of thinking into one that links Romans 8 with Romans 9, thus neglecting a major discourse division in the epistle.

Covenant Premillennialism versus Dispensational Premillennialism

New Calvinism’s supersessionist approach also affects the way some of them view the Millennium. There is no characteristic eschatology in New Calvinism. The ranks of New Calvinism have within them amillennialists, postmillennialists, and premillennialists. However, several high-profile New Calvinists are premillennial, including John Piper, Al Mohler, and Wayne Grudem. But supersessionism robs premillennialism of its richness and Biblical significance. If the church inherits Israel’s promises, then what purpose can be served by a millennium? Piper, Mohler, and Grudem all see a future for Israel on the basis of Romans 11, but their supersessionism keeps them from seeing a future restoration of national Israel. Al Mohler classifies himself as a “historical premillennialist,” though he is careful to qualify that he is “not

¹³⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 194–195.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

a dispensationalist.”¹³⁸ His view of the Millennium is simply that it is “Christ reigning with the saints for that one thousand years, which is a period of time in which the rightness of His reign exists as judgment upon the wrongness of human rule and misrule.”¹³⁹ But there is no place in Mohler’s millennial rule for a national Israel. In his view, the significance of present-day national Israel is that “Israel is best seen as a vessel for the protection of the Jewish people until the dawning of the eschatological age in its fullness and the turning of Jews to Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁰ Once the Jews turn to Christ in the eschatological age, there will be no need for a nationally distinct entity known as Israel in Mohler’s Millennium. Likewise, Grudem’s historical premillennialism is based “on the conviction that Romans 9—11 teaches a future large-scale conversion of the Jewish people.”¹⁴¹ These quotations show that covenant premillennialists who believe that the Church is the true Israel, while holding to a large-scale conversion of the Jews, nevertheless “do not see this salvation as inferring any special role for Israel apart from the church.”¹⁴²

Dispensational premillennialism, on the other hand, affirms that the Old Testament promises of a national restoration for Israel in the end times (Deuteronomy 30:3–10; Isaiah 10:20–27; 11:1–16; Ezekiel 37:1–10; etc.) will be fulfilled literally. The rule of Christ fulfills

¹³⁸ Albert Mohler, “Dr. Albert at Dauphin Way Baptist Church on March 29, 2009,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vPI8ZgIeg0> (accessed June 16, 2015).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Michael Foust, “Theologians Tackle Question of Israel and Biblical Prophecy,” Baptist Press (May 6, 2002), <http://www.bpnews.net/13306/theologians-tackle-question-of-israel--biblical-prophecy> (accessed June 16, 2015).

¹⁴¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 861.

¹⁴² Vlach, 36–37.

literally not only the promise of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89) but also the promise of national restoration. The two cannot be divorced from each other.

A further distinction between covenant premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism has to do with the concept of a pretribulational rapture. Supersessionism's failure to discern a legitimate future program for national Israel results in failure to see any significance for a special purpose of God with respect to Israel in the tribulation period. This results in New Calvinists looking with disdain on the doctrine of a pretribulational rapture. At the 2009 Religion Newswriters Association Annual Convention, "On the New Calvinists," one journalist asked, "Is anybody trying to fuse the rest of reformed theology with the pretrib rapture vision of the world? Or is that possible to do?" John Piper replied as follows:

It's not impossible, but it's not being tried, broadly. I think you could find a lot of pretrib rapture—you're all aware of that, I'm sure—who are Calvinists. But you wouldn't find in this movement very many pretrib rapture people. The *Left Behind* series and the *Left Behind* movie that has sold, what, fifteen million copies, what, each? I don't know. It does not mark this movement. And it doesn't mark the cutting edge of the expansion of Christianity in this country or around the world. There are other views of the end times, but they are very diverse in this movement.¹⁴³

Al Mohler likewise rejects pretribulationism. He stated,

I'm a historical premillennialist. I believe the most natural interpretation of Scripture is that the millennium. . . . You have Christ reigning with the saints for that one thousand years, which is a period of time in which the rightness of his reign exists as judgment upon the wrongness of human rule and misrule. I'm not a dispensationalist. I have a hard time imagining two different comings. I think the Bible is pretty clear about warning the

¹⁴³ John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/on-the-new-calvinists> (accessed November 23, 2013). From September 11, 2009, Religion Newswriters Association Annual Convention, "On the New Calvinists." Quote begins at 5:45. Note: It is interesting that Piper made no mention of John MacArthur in this context. By this time (2009) Piper had already spoken approvingly of MacArthur's *Gospel According to Jesus*, and had welcomed MacArthur as a fellow Reformed theologian. But he did not refer to MacArthur, a pretribulation rapturist, as one within the New Calvinist movement.

Church about how to live in a time of tribulation, and so I don't believe the church is taken away.¹⁴⁴

Dispensational premillennialism, on the other hand, seeing that God has a specific purpose vis-à-vis Israel in the tribulation period, requires the removal of the Church via a pretribulational rapture. This removal allows God to work in the world through His people Israel (e.g., Daniel 9:24–27; the 144,000 of Revelation 7; the temple of Revelation 11:1–2; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Daniel 9:26–27; the two witness of Revelation 11:3–14) without employing a double standard.

Conclusion

Supersessionism has dominated most of Christian theology since at least the third century. The early church's premillennialism and belief in a national restoration of Israel was brought back into the realm of Christian theology through the teachings of dispensationalism. But New Calvinism's focus on the theology of the Reformers and Puritans has resulted in a resurgence of supersessionist teaching, even among those who claim to be premillennialists. This is an unfortunate and potentially dangerous development. In the words of Leighton and Arian, "The legacy of supersessionism disfigures the ethical and theological core of Christianity. When Christian affirmations are built upon the negation of Judaism and the Jewish people, the moral content of the gospel is betrayed."¹⁴⁵ New Calvinism, while commended for its enthusiasm about the gospel, is nevertheless tainted by its commitment to supersessionism. Supersessionist presuppositions lead New Calvinists to misinterpret key passages of Scripture, denigrate the

¹⁴⁴ Mohler at Dauphin Way Baptist Church on March 29, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher M. Leighton and Charles Arian, "Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999–2003), 59.

legitimacy of present and future national Israel, and lose sight of the blessed hope of a pretribulational rapture of the church.

Chapter 4

Perseverance of the Saints

The fifth head of the Canons of the Synod of Dort gives expression to the Calvinistic doctrine known as the perseverance of the saints. Tragically, inappropriate appeal to this doctrine has led many believers to a lack of assurance in their salvation. This doctrine is dear to all Calvinists, including New Calvinists. And, though Scriptural support for the doctrine is debatable, the primary motivation behind its eager support is commendable, namely a desire to see holiness exhibited in the lives of those who profess faith in Jesus.

Despite its being defined clearly in the Canons, the understanding of this doctrine has undergone development over its history, resulting in confusion over just what it means today. Whatever definition New Calvinists accept—and they are not univocal on this—it becomes a theological presupposition that predetermines their exegesis of certain Scriptures.

Definition (Security and Perseverance)

Confusion exists in literature over the definition of the perseverance of the saints. Two distinct concepts are comprehended under the broad umbrella of perseverance of the saints. For the sake of discussion, these two concepts will be labeled as “security” and “perseverance.”¹ Several “Calvinistic” dispensational scholars define “perseverance of the saints” as synonymous with “eternal security,” while most Reformed theologians see it as having more to do with the elect’s persisting in holiness until death. Charles Ryrie hints at this confusion in the introduction

¹ Some have preferred to label these two categories as “perseverance” and “preservation,” e.g., Anthony B. Badger, “TULIP: A Free Grace Perspective Part 5: Perseverance of the Saints,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 18 (2005), 16, 20, 31ff.

to his chapter on “The Security of the Believer” when he says, “The title of this chapter was not chosen indiscriminately. In some theologies or dictionaries it would have been entitled Assurance; in others, Perseverance; in a few, Preservation.”² Paul Enns, introducing the doctrine of eternal security, writes, “The Calvinist says that the true believer will persevere in his faith. This doctrine is sometimes called ‘perseverance of the saints,’ which is not a proper title since it places the emphasis on man’s ability to persevere rather than on God’s ability to keep the believer. A better title might be ‘perseverance of the Lord.’”³ Lewis Sperry Chafer likewise identified “perseverance of the saints” with “The Eternal Security of the Believer”:

This aspect of Soteriology, commonly styled by earlier theologians *the perseverance of the saints*, contends that no individual once the recipient of the saving grace of God will ever fall totally and finally from that estate, but that he shall be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5). The doctrine of security is one of the five points of the Calvinistic system, but it is more distinguished by the fact that it is set forth in the New Testament in the most absolute terms and is there seen to be an indivisible feature of that which God undertakes when a soul is saved. This major doctrine is well stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which declares: “They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”⁴

Truly Reformed theologians, including New Calvinists, usually differ from the dispensational understanding of “perseverance of the saints.” Ryrie elaborates on the difference:

Perseverance, the term generally used in Calvinism, labels the fifth point in Calvin’s theology, the “final perseverance” of the saints. It means that believers “can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (Westminster Confession, XVII, I). It seems to focus on the believer—it is the believer who perseveres (albeit through the decree and power of

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 379.

³ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 340.

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press), III:267. In his volume on *Doctrinal Summarization*, Chafer relates the work of security to “twelve undertakings of God for His people, four of which are related to the Father, four to the Son, and four to the Spirit,” *Systematic Theology*, VII:286.

God). Security focuses on God—it is God who secures our salvation. It does not deny that there may be times of backsliding, but it stresses the need for demonstrable fruit throughout the Christian life. Sometimes those who approach this doctrine from the viewpoint of perseverance deny the possibility of a Christian’s being carnal.⁵

In the following discussion, the terms “security” and “perseverance” will be used to distinguish two facets of this issue.

- The term “security” will be used to speak of the guarantee that God will ultimately save all those who have been born again through faith in Christ; i.e., that the believer can never lose his salvation.
- The term “perseverance” will be used to speak of the notion that the believer will persevere in faithfulness and holy conduct throughout his Christian life until death.

One caveat should be observed here. Among Reformed theologians is a difference of opinion regarding the extent to which believers persevere throughout life. Some maintain that the genuine believer will necessarily persist throughout life in faithfulness to God; others allow that a believer might temporarily fall away, even into a gross, sinful lifestyle, but that eventually he will return to the faith at some point before death.⁶

Perseverance of the saints, as understood by mainstream Reformed theology, refers both to the security of the believer’s position and to the continuance of the believer in holiness throughout his life. The standard Calvinistic systematic theologies by Hodge and Berkhof define the Reformed position clearly. Hodge:

⁵ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 379.

⁶ Of these two variant positions on perseverance, the former is typical of the Puritans, while the latter was actually the position expressed in the canons of the Synod of Dort.

A fourth inference from the principles of Augustine was the perseverance of the saints. If God of his own good pleasure elects some to eternal life, they cannot fail of salvation.⁷

Hodge's definition of "the Augustinian scheme" includes "all those whom God has thus chosen to life, and for whom Christ specially gave Himself in the covenant of redemption, shall certainly (unless they die in infancy), be brought to the knowledge of the truth, to the exercise of faith, and to perseverance in holy living unto the end."⁸ Hodge also states as his own view, "It must be remembered that what the Apostle argues to prove is not merely the certainty of the salvation of those that believe; but their certain perseverance in holiness."⁹

Berkhof:

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is to the effect that they whom God has regenerated and effectually called to a state of grace, can neither totally nor finally fall away from that state, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.¹⁰

It is maintained that the life of regeneration and the habits that develop out of it in the way of sanctification can never entirely disappear.¹¹

The Reformed, however, do not consider the perseverance of the saints as being, first of all, a disposition or activity of the believer, though they certainly believe that man co-operates in it just as he does in sanctification. They even stress the fact that the believer would fall away, if he were left to himself. It is, strictly speaking, not man but God who perseveres. Perseverance may be defined as *that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion*. It is because God never forsakes His work that believers continue to stand to the very end.¹²

⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 545.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 546.

¹² *Ibid.*

It should be noted that perseverance was not even a point that distinguished Calvinism from Arminianism. The Arminians, in the Remonstrance, Article One, affirmed:

That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and *shall persevere* in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, *even to the end*.¹³

Wayne Grudem represents the New Calvinist understanding of perseverance when he writes, “One evidence of genuine faith is continuing in his word, that is, continuing to believe what he says and living a life of obedience to his commands,”¹⁴ and “those who do not continue in the faith show that there was no genuine faith in their hearts in the first place.”¹⁵ This insistence of continuing in obedience (or “living as a Christian”) has led to a lack of assurance among many who hold to the traditional Reformed view of perseverance of the saints. The linking of assurance to obedience, rather than to the promises of God,¹⁶ can be found in Murray: “It is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always respective* of holiness and fidelity.”¹⁷ Such a lack of assurance is seen in the deathbed statement of the nineteenth-century

¹³ Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 792–793.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 793.

¹⁶ Badger, “TULIP,” 35.

¹⁷ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 154. Emphasis his.

Calvinistic evangelical preacher Asahel Nettleton, “The most that I have ventured to say concerning myself is, that I think it possible I may get to heaven.”¹⁸

History of the Doctrine and Matthew 24:13

1. The Canons of the Synod of Dort

The Canons of the Synod of Dort expounded on perseverance of the saints in the fifth head. The Canons are at odds in some points with some modern-day representations of the doctrine. For example, the Canons reject the notion that the elect will necessarily persevere in holiness throughout life. The point affirmed by the Canons is that, though the elect believer may descend into gross sin in his life, he will return to the faith before he dies; this is hardly “persevering unto the end.” The Canons state that God “does not deliver them altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh,” and that “the daily sins of infirmity, and blemishes cleave even to the best works of the saints.”¹⁹ By such “daily sins” the authors of the Canons did not mean minor deviations from God’s will, but even gross sin, as is seen in Articles 4 and 5:

Converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and to comply with the lusts of the flesh. . . . When these are great and heinous sins by the flesh, the world, and Satan, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually are drawn into these evils. This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates.

By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God’s favor.

¹⁸ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, 3rd edition (Lynchburg: Global Gospel Publishers, 2012), 186.

¹⁹ Canons of the Synod of Dort, Fifth Head of Doctrine, “Perseverance of the Saints,” Articles 1 and 2.

According to the Canons, this carnality in the experience of the elect can cause great uncertainty of salvation. As stated in Article 11, “The Scripture moreover testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various carnal doubts, and that under grievous temptations they do not always feel this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering.”

The authors of the Canons did not view backsliding as evidence of lack of salvation. They caution those who are in a backslidden condition that they may “fall into more grievous torments of conscience,”²⁰ but not that they are not genuine believers.

An insistence that the perseverance of the saints renders assurance of salvation impossible until the end of life was considered a false doctrine to be rejected by the Canons. “Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 6” states:

The Synod rejects the errors of those who teach . . . that the doctrine of the certainty of perseverance and of salvation from its own character and nature is a cause of indolence and is injurious to godliness, good morals, prayers, and other holy exercises, but that on the contrary it is praiseworthy to doubt. For these show that they do not know the power of divine grace and the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And they contradict the apostle John, who teaches that opposite with express words in his first epistle: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2–3).”

2. Augustine and Matthew 24:13

Hodge referred to the “principles of Augustine” as a source for understanding the doctrine of perseverance of the saints.²¹ John Davis asserts that “the first extensive discussion of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is found in Augustine’s *Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance*, written in A.D. 428 or 429 in the context of the controversies with Pelagius on the

²⁰ Ibid., Article 13.

²¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

issues of grace, original sin, and predestination.”²² However, David Anderson places the context as a controversy involving the Donatists, rather than the Pelagians.²³ Augustine confronted both groups, but Anderson contends that the Donatist controversy had a far greater influence on Augustine’s thinking and lay behind his change in interpretation. The Donatists were committed chiliasts, and it was Augustine’s opposition to chiliasm that led him not only to oppose the Donatists, but also to reinterpret the Olivet Discourse in a way that did not presume premillennialism. Specifically, Augustine’s development of this doctrine appears to have been based on an erroneous exegesis of Matthew 24:13:²⁴ “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” Late fourth-century understanding of this verse corresponded with a modern dispensational interpretation; namely, that the context is eschatological, and that the reference is to those who physically survive the persecutions of the tribulation period. This late fourth-century interpretation is seen, for example, in Chrysostom (ca. 386–388²⁵):

But mark, I pray thee, the exceeding greatness of the ills, when not only compared with the time before, they appear more grievous, but also with all the time to come. For not in all the world, neither in all time that is past, and that is to come, shall any one be able to say such ills have been. And very naturally; for neither had any man perpetrated, not of those that ever have been, nor of those to come hereafter, a deed so wicked and horrible. Therefore He saith, “there shall be tribulation such as never was, nor shall be.”

“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” By these things He shows them to be deserving of a more grievous punishment than had been mentioned, speaking now of the days of the war and of that siege. But what He saith is like this. If, saith He, the war of

²² John Jefferson Davis, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 2 (1991): 212.

²³ David R. Anderson, “The Soteriological Impact of Augustine’s Change from Premillennialism to Amillennialism: Part One,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 (2002).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25–36.

²⁵ Philip Schaff, ed., “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel According to St. Matthew,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), ix.

the Romans against the city had prevailed further, all the Jews had perished (for by “no flesh” here, He meaneth no Jewish flesh), both those abroad, and those at home. . . .

For if God had permitted the war to be protracted, not so much as a remnant of the Jews had remained, but lest those of them who had become believers should perish together with the unbelieving Jews, He quickly put down the fighting, and gave an end to the war. Therefore He saith, “But for the elect’s sake they shall be shortened.” But these things He said to leave an encouragement to those of them who were shut up in the midst of them, and to allow them to take breath, that they might not be in fear, as though they were to perish with them.²⁶

Augustine (ca. 354–430) in his earlier days was by his own admission a premillennialist²⁷ and, although influenced by the Alexandrian school of interpretation, would have agreed with (Antiochian) Chrysostom’s interpretation of Matthew 24:13. Fredriksen affirms that “an uncomplicated millenarianism figured prominently in this [North African] culture. Late fourth-century North African Christians, as Christians elsewhere, continued to look forward to the approaching Kingdom on earth.”²⁸ However, due to his opposition to the chiliastic Donatists, and under the influence of the typological hermeneutics of Tyconius, Augustine adopted the amillennial position reflected in his later writings and with it a different understanding of Matthew 24:13.²⁹ For Augustine, to “endure unto the end” underwent a twofold change. First, “to endure” (Greek ὑπομένω) meant not “to remain, stay” but “to persevere [in holy living]”; second, “unto the end” meant not the end of the tribulation period, but to the end of one’s life.³⁰

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homily LXXVI, “Homilies,” 457–458. David incorrectly attributed this quote to Augustine, on David Anderson, “Soteriological Impact,” 33.

²⁷ *City of God*, XX.7.

²⁸ Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity from John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 156.

²⁹ Anderson, “Soteriological Impact;” Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and Redemption,” 157–159.

³⁰ Initially, Augustine’s view was that this meant the end of life for a Christian martyr, “to whom it is given to suffer for Christ, or, to speak more distinctly, to whom it is given to die for Christ” (Augustine, “On the Gift of Perseverance,” ch. 2). Later, this idea was broadened to include the end of life for all the elect.

Thus, Augustine includes among those damned in the second death those who “have not persevered to the end in their renewed life”:

“But they that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment,”—these are they who shall not live, for they shall die in the second death. They have done evil because their life has been evil; and their life has been evil because it has not been renewed in the first or spiritual resurrection which now is, or because they have not persevered to the end in their renewed life.³¹

So the expression to “persevere to the end” becomes a regularly repeated phrase in many of Augustine’s writings for persevering in holiness to the end of one’s life;³² whereas, the original Scriptural usage of the term, both in Matthew 10:22 and in 24:13, spoke of the tribulation saint who remains alive until the end of the tribulation period.

New Calvinists and Perseverance

New Calvinists hold to a view of perseverance of the saints that is more in keeping with the standard Reformed position (i.e., persevering in holiness) than with the dispensationalist position (i.e., eternal security). Grudem defines perseverance of the saints as follows: “The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”³³ Then he adds, “The second half of the definition makes it clear that continuing in the Christian life is one of the evidences that a person is truly born again. It is important to keep this aspect of the doctrine in mind as well, lest false

³¹ Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God,” in *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 426.

³² E.g., *De bono viduit*, 20.25; *De dono persev.*, 6.10, 11, 8.20, 13.32; *On the Psalms* 31.20, 57.5, 60.14, 61.5, 62.7, 139.10.

³³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 788.

assurance be given to people who were never really believers in the first place.”³⁴ John Piper notes, “It does imply that one can be called a ‘brother’ on the basis of appearances but in the end prove not to be a brother because of failing to persevere in the end.”³⁵

This linking of assurance to behavior (“continuing in the Christian life”) runs the risk of coming very close to Arminian theology. This paradoxical tendency on the part of New Calvinists to sound very Arminian is reflected in a comment made by John Piper. At a conference for pastors and church leaders sponsored by Together for the Gospel, John Piper commented, “Election is unconditional and glorification is conditional.”³⁶ He then added the following anecdote:

I looked at a girl in the face one time, who was livin’ with her boyfriend, and I said, “If you don’t stop that, you’ll go to hell.” She was a missionary daughter. To this day I cry every time I get it; she sends me a Christmas card—this has been 30 years—she sends me a Christmas card every year thanking me for that, thanking me that I told her that if you don’t get out of that relationship, you’re gonna go to Hell. Because nobody had ever told this missionary daughter that her salvation might be imperiled by unrepentant sin.³⁷

New Calvinists and the Text

New Calvinists cite numerous Scripture references in support of the doctrine of perseverance. In the following discussion, Scripture references listed in Wayne Grudem’s

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 110.

³⁶ Matt Chandler, Derek Thomas, Kenneth Young, and John Piper, 2014 biennial conference for pastors and church leaders, <http://t4g.org/media/2014/04/preaching-sanctification> (accessed April 12, 2014). A panel discussion with Matt Chandler, Derek Thomas, Kenneth Young, and John Piper on the topic, “Holiness and Sanctification”; citation begins about 04:48. Not all reformed theologians are as eager as New Calvinists to link works with glorification. Norman Shepherd was dismissed from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) in 1982 following a seven-year-long controversy over his teaching that works necessarily follow justification, and that the believer’s glorification will be judged according to these works; see Robert W. Anderson, *Fire in the Haymow: Justification by Faith Alone* (Charlotte, NC: Redeeming the Time, 2014), 4–12.

³⁷ Chandler, Thomas, Young and Piper, citation about 11:00.

Systematic Theology will be addressed.³⁸ Grudem divides these references into two groups; the first group is given in support of security (John 6:38–40; 10:27–29; Ephesians 1:13–14; Philippians 1:6), while the second group is given in support of perseverance (1 Peter 1:5; John 8:31–32; Matthew 10:22; Colossians 1:22–23; Hebrews 3:14). Because of the importance of perseverance to their theological system, the exegesis of these supporting Scriptures is sometimes strained and forced into logical/theological constraints that exceed the bounds of sound exegesis. In part, this appears to be due to a reluctance to accept theological antinomy between holiness and carnality in the believer’s life and to a failure to distinguish adequately between positional salvation and progressive sanctification.

1. John 6:38–40

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given (δέδωκεν) Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

This reference supports eternal security;³⁹ however, Grudem insists on seeing a reference to perseverance here as well. He says, “It seems hard to avoid the conclusion that everyone who truly believes in Christ will remain a Christian up to the day of final resurrection into the

³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 788ff. See also, Michael F. Bird, “5.5.2 The Security of Salvation,” *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 595–605; John Piper, “The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Earnest Pursuit of Assurance,” April 17, 1988, and “The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Future of a Fruitless Field,” April 24, 1988, in *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)*, (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

³⁹ “Mental assent proceeds to security . . . guaranteed resurrection,” Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 125. “Not one member of the body would be lost,” William MacDonald. *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1503. “This passage is strong in affirming the eternal security of the believer,” Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 296.

blessings of life in the presence of God.”⁴⁰ What Grudem means by the phrase “remain as a Christian,” based on his definition of “perseverance of the saints” cited above, is clearly the notion of perseverance. This is simply eisegesis based on theological presupposition. The perfect tense δέδωκεν (“has given”) strongly supports the doctrine of security. There is reference here to the past act of the Father’s having “given” and to the future act of the Son’s “raising him [i.e., the believer] up on the last day,” but nothing of the intervening life, “living as a Christian,” or persevering in holiness. Borchert presents a more balanced approach to this passage:

This text is undoubtedly one of the strongest assurance texts in the Gospel and is clearly parallel to 17:12, where Jesus indicates that while he was on earth he “protected” and “safeguarded” all those who were given to him (cf. Rom 9:6), except the devil man Judas (John 6:70–71; 17:12). The great Christian doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not based merely on human effort but on the confidence that God is active both in the saving as well as in the preserving of those who commit themselves to serve God in Christ.⁴¹

Borchert sees primarily security, though he mentions perseverance. However, he is careful to provide the following clarification with regard to his comment on perseverance:

The subject of the preservation of the saints has been a strongly debated issue in Christian theology. As I have indicated in my comments at 3:16–18, the tendency among Christians is to choose either an overemphasis upon God or humanity and lose the dynamic tension in the biblical texts concerning this matter. In maintaining the tension the interpreter must always maintain the commitment to the fact that it is God who does the saving but that human responsiveness to God’s actions is not inconsequential.⁴²

Calvin was careful to guard against any insecurity that may come from unduly focusing on the sinful life of those believers “who miserably groan under so great weakness of the

⁴⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 789.

⁴¹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 265.

⁴² *Ibid.*, n96.

flesh.”⁴³ Rather, says Calvin, “Christ has stretched out his hand to us, that he may not desert us in the midst of the course, but that, relying on his goodness, we may boldly raise our eyes to the last day.”⁴⁴ And, continuing in this same vein, Calvin remarks in the following comment that believers in this life are “like dead men” and do not “differ from wicked men”:

There is also another reason why he mentions the resurrection. It is because, so long as *our life is hidden*, (Colos. 3:3,) we are like dead men. For in what respect do believers differ from wicked men, but that, overwhelmed with afflictions, and *like sheep destined for the slaughter*, (Rom. 8:36,) they have always one foot in the grave, and, indeed, are not far from being continually swallowed up by death? Thus there remains no other support of our faith and patience but this, that we keep out of view the condition of the present life, and apply our minds and our senses to the last day, and pass through the obstructions of the world, until the fruit of our faith at length appear.⁴⁵

Yet in his zeal to defend perseverance, even where it cannot be legitimately found, Grudem maintains on the basis of this verse that “it is hard to avoid the conclusion that everyone who truly believes in Christ will remain a Christian up to the day of final resurrection.” It appears that theological presupposition has led Grudem to eisegesis.

2. John 10:27–29

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

⁴³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 253.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 253–254.

As with the preceding passage, this one affirms eternal security but makes no overt reference to perseverance. For this passage, Grudem affirms that it is indeed speaking of eternal security, rather than persevering in holiness.⁴⁶

3. Ephesians 1:13–14

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Grudem affirms that this passage as well, in addition to John 10:27-29, speaks of eternal security, not persevering in holiness. He says, “This ‘seal’ is the Holy Spirit within us, who also acts as God’s ‘guarantee’ that we will receive the inheritance promised to us.”⁴⁷

4. Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Grudem makes little comment on this verse, other than to state that it is an “assurance that believers will persevere to the end.”⁴⁸ The language he has chosen to characterize the meaning of this verse comes directly from Matthew 10:22 and 24:13. Matthew 24:13 was discussed above. Matthew 10:22 will be discussed further below. Here, let it simply be said that the language of “persevering to the end” comes from these two Matthean passages and is contextually suitable only to describing the physical survival of tribulation saints for entrance into the Millennium, not to present-day believers persevering in holiness until death. This again shows the influence of theological presupposition on Grudem’s interpretation. On the other hand,

⁴⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 789–790.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 790–791.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 791.

this verse is likely a fitting verse to use to defend the notion of perseverance, but it is really the perseverance of God, not the perseverance of the saints.⁴⁹ There appears to be a promise here that God will continue working in the life of the believer until the “day of Christ Jesus.”⁵⁰

The extent to which one will “persevere” based on this promise may be questioned. Indeed, it seems that Calvin had great reservations about how far the believer would persevere throughout life. His comment on this verse is insightful: “Paul, assuredly, did not derive this confidence from the steadfastness or excellence of men, but simply from the fact, that God had manifested his love to the Philippians.”⁵¹

5. 1 Peter 1:5

Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Grudem writes:

The word *guarded* (Gk. φρουρέω, G5864) can mean both “kept from escaping” and “protected from attack,” and perhaps both kinds of guarding are intended here: God is preserving believers from escaping out of his kingdom, and he is protecting them from external attacks.⁵²

This instance of illegitimate totality transfer appears to be due to Grudem’s desire to see perseverance where only security is intended by the author. Peter’s use of the term φρουρέω was

⁴⁹ As also in Philippians 2:12, 13, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1913), 84.

⁵⁰ An alternate view, however, is that “it may mean their active financial participation in the furtherance of the gospel,” William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1960. Also, Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 84; Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 58.

⁵¹ John Calvin and John Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 25.

⁵² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 791.

intended to convey a single idea. The observation that φρουρέω “*can* mean both ‘kept from escaping’ and ‘protected from attack,’” should not lead to the conclusion that in this particular contextual usage, “both kinds of guarding *are* intended.” This kind of exegetical fallacy has been labeled “Illegitimate Totality Transfer.”⁵³

Commentaries on 1 Peter generally see here a promise of security, but say nothing about perseverance. For example, MacDonald, while acknowledging both the divine and human sides seen in this verse, comments:

Those who were chosen in eternity past are saved in time now and kept for eternity to come. The believer in Christ is eternally secure. But there is a human as well as a divine side to eternal security. We **are kept by the power of God**—that is the divine side, but it is **through faith**—that is the human side. This does not mean that a person is saved only as long as he exercises faith. Where there is true **faith**, there will be continuance. Saving faith *always* has the quality of permanence.⁵⁴

Though acknowledging that the principal force of this verse points in the direction of security, Grudem adds, “God’s power continually works ‘through’ [διὰ with the genitive] their faith. Do they wish to know whether God is guarding them? If they continue to trust God through Christ, God is working and guarding them, and he should be thanked.”⁵⁵ Once again, apparently

⁵³ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218. Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 66.

⁵⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 2251. Emphasis his.

⁵⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 792. Grudem’s view is also reflected in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 64. Schreiner is certainly sympathetic towards New Calvinism. He is described as “Reformationally-theological” by Guy Waters in a favorable review of his commentary on Galatians on the New Calvinist “Reformation 21” site, <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/review-galatians-zondervan-exegetical-commentary-on-the-nt.php> (accessed May 23, 2014). But Schreiner presents a much more balanced approach, citing E. Best: “E. Best rightly discerns that the ultimate reason for our preservation must be God’s gift rather than our faith since otherwise ‘the reference to God’s power’ is ‘unnecessary and provides no assurance to the believer since what he doubts is his own power to cling to God in trial.’” Schreiner also wrestles with whether “faith” in 1 Peter 1:5 is the causative faith by which we were initially saved or whether it is continuing faith by which we live a faithful life in Thomas R. Schreiner, “Perseverance and Assurance: A Survey and a Proposal,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (1998): 41–42.

due to a desire to see perseverance here where Peter's intention is to convey security, Grudem has engaged in eisegesis. The expression "through faith" (διὰ πίστεως) modifies "protected" (φρουρουμένου). Grudem argues that since φρουρουμένου is in the present tense, the faith referred to must also be a continuous faith expressed throughout the believer's life. Grudem puts it this way: "The believer's personal faith or trust in God is the means God uses to guard his people."⁵⁶ While this is a possible conclusion, it is not a necessary conclusion. The faith through which the believer is guarded may alternately refer to the initial act of faith by which salvation was received. Διά with the genitive in this context may express either instrument⁵⁷ or cause.⁵⁸ The believer may be kept *through* faith, or *because of* faith. If instrumental, then the faith referred to is more likely to be contemporaneous with the guarding, but if causal, the faith is more likely to be antecedent to the guarding. Either meaning may legitimately reflect Peter's intention here. Grudem's insistence that it could only mean a continuing life of faithfulness exhibits eisegesis based on theological presupposition.

An additional theological issue relates to the way Grudem understands "faith" in this verse. He says,

The parallel examples of God working "through" someone or something in Peter's writings (1 Peter 1:3, 23; 2 Peter 1:4, and probably also 1 Peter 1:12; 2:14; 3:1) suggest that the believer's personal faith or trust in God is the means God uses to guard his people. Thus we might give the sense of the verse by saying that "God is continually using his power to guard his people by means of their faith," a statement that seems to

⁵⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 792.

⁵⁷ BDAG, διά A.3. Annang Asumang, "'Resist him' (1 Pet 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory Responses to Unjust Suffering as 'Holy War' in 1 Peter," *Conspectus* 11 (2011): 30.

⁵⁸ BDAG, διά A.5. For example, "Faith [is] the cause of, or reason for, the effectiveness of this protection. ... through faith may be expressed as a contributing cause, for example, 'because you trust' or 'because you trust in Christ,'" Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 19–20.

imply that God’s power in fact energizes and continually sustains individual, personal faith.⁵⁹

This would seem to suggest a synergism in the way God carries out His work of salvation—a concept loathed by many New Calvinists.

6. John 8:31–32

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

By the acknowledgment of many scholars, this passage presents many difficulties. The United Bible Societies’ Translator’s Handbook titles verse 31 “problematic.”⁶⁰ Verse 30 affirms that these Jews had believed in Jesus, while the remainder of the chapter presents them as opponents of Christ. Borchert cites R. Brown as stating that “v. 30 seems to be directly contradictory to v. 31 in the matter of believing.”⁶¹ Yet, despite the problems associated with this passage, Grudem cites it as a proof text for the doctrine of perseverance.

The point Grudem is making by citing this passage is that one who has “genuine faith” (i.e., saving faith) will necessarily give evidence of that faith by “living a life of obedience to his commands.”⁶² Calvin also used John 8:31 to support the notion of perseverance. “It is not enough for any one to have begun well, if their progress to the end do not correspond to it; and for this reason he exhorts to perseverance in the faith those who have tasted of his doctrine. . . . believers persevere constantly to the end. If therefore, we wish that Christ should reckon us to be

⁵⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 792.

⁶⁰ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 278.

⁶¹ Borchert, *John 1–11*, 301n182, citing R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB, Garden City: Doubleday), 1966.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 792–793.

his disciples, we must endeavor to persevere.”⁶³ Grudem’s theological presupposition here is that being a “disciple” is to be equated with having “genuine faith.” When he references John 8:31–32, he curiously omits reference to verse 30, which says, “As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.” The doctrine of perseverance of the saints closely connects regeneration, justification, and progressive sanctification. In so doing, the Biblical distinction between justification and sanctification is often blurred. John 8:30 has already identified these Jewish subjects as believers; they “came to believe in him” (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν). The phrase πιστεύειν εἰς is consistently used in the Gospel of John to signify the way of obtaining salvation and eternal life⁶⁴ (1:12; 2:11, 23; 3:16,18, 36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:31, 38, 39; 8:30; 9:35–36; 10:42; 11:25, 26a, 45; 12:11, 36, 42, 44, 46; 17:20). John 8:31, therefore, affirms that these Jews had already received eternal life. Verse 31, then, adds an additional requirement as a condition for becoming a “disciple.” It appears that not all who possess eternal life through faith qualify as “disciples.” Discipleship is more closely related to progressive sanctification. New Calvinist soteriology, however, does not distinguish discipleship from salvation. Rather, a distinction is made by New Calvinist between “profession” and “possession”: one may “profess” belief in Jesus without truly “possessing” salvation.⁶⁵ New Calvinists see this false profession as having

⁶³ Calvin, *Gospel According to John*, 340–341.

⁶⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott and Arthur Westcott, eds. *The Gospel According to St. John Introduction and Notes on the Authorized Version*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: J. Murray, 1908), 132–133. Saving faith is also sometimes expressed by πιστεύειν [ἐν] τινί 3:15; 5:24, 46; 8:31; and occasionally πιστεύειν used absolutely, 4:41, 42, 53; 6:47, 69; 8:38; 11:40; 19:35; 20:31b; or followed by a direct object ὅτι clause, 8:24; 11:27, 42; 16:27; 17:8,21; 20:31a. Westcott is incorrect in assuming that “this energy of faith in a person (πιστεύειν εἰς, ‘to believe in any one’) is to be carefully distinguished from the simple acceptance of a person’s statements as true (πιστεύειν τινί, ‘to believe any one’),” Ibid.

⁶⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 506, 793–807. New Calvinists are not the only ones to make this distinction. Calvinism has been a major influence in dispensational circles, and many dispensationalists make the same distinction between profession and possession, genuine faith and spurious faith, e.g., Blum, “John,” 304–305. Calvin, commenting on verse 31, said, “many profess to be *disciples* who yet are not so in reality, and have no right to be accounted such,” *Commentary on John*, 341.

been brought about by a spurious faith that is not “genuine” faith. But the Gospel of John does make a distinction between discipleship and salvation. Bing notes that “the immature faith of ‘untrustworthy believers’ is a subtle motif in John (9:22; 12:42–43; 19:38); . . . [t]hat is, true believers whom the Lord finds yet unworthy of His trust.”⁶⁶ For Grudem to read the notion of a spurious faith into John 8:31 entirely neglects this motif in John and imports a theological presupposition of perseverance into the text. The perceived contrast between belief in verse 30 and Jesus’ presumed apprehension in verse 31 actually led Calvin to accuse John of inaccuracy: “The Evangelist inaccurately gives the name of *faith* to that which was only a sort of preparation for *faith*.”⁶⁷ Such an opinion is inconsistent with inerrancy and falls short of the reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

7. Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

The last clause of this verse is identical to the parallel saying in Matthew 24:13. Grudem cites Matthew 10:22 in support of perseverance, but omits reference to Matthew 24:13. This may be due to the fact that Matthew 24:13 is clearly talking about tribulation saints surviving the Tribulation period, whereas an eschatological setting is perhaps less clear in Matthew 10:22. Grudem claims, “Jesus says, ‘*He who endures to the end* will be saved’ (Matt. 10:22), as a means of warning people not to fall away in times of persecution.”⁶⁸ But what is the intended setting of

⁶⁶ Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*, 2nd ed. (Camarillo, CA: Xulon Press, 2010), 49. Bing references “an excellent development of this use” in Zane C. Hodges, “Untrustworthy Believers: John 2:23–25,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 135 (April–June 1978): 139–152; Robert Bryant, “The Secret Believer in the Gospel of John” (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975).

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 340.

⁶⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793.

Matthew 10:22? First, one should exercise caution regarding any assumption that Matthew 10 contains exhortations intended to address believers in the present age. For example, consider the following statements:

- “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans,” verse 5.
- “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons,” verse 8.
- “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff,” verses 9–10.
- “Do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say,” verse 19.

It appears that Matthew 10 is set in some kind of a specialized context, not a general description of the Great Commission. According to Louis Barbieri Jr., “These words [i.e., Matt. 10:22] will find their fullest manifestation in the days of the Tribulation when the gospel will be carried throughout the entire world before Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to establish His kingdom on the earth (Matt. 24:14).”⁶⁹ Contextual evidence appears to support Barbieri’s conclusion. There are, in fact, clear eschatological pointers in Matthew 10. Jesus spoke of great peril that the disciples would face on this mission, as “sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt. 10:16ff.). Yet, as M’Neile observed, “There is no evidence that the apostles during their short tour were ever in peril; in Mt. ix. 36, x. 6 their hearers are πρόβατα [sheep]; they did not become

⁶⁹ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 42. Also Richard Shalom Yates, “The Identity of the Tribulation Saints,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 649 (January 2006): 91–92; Richard Shalom Yates, “The Function of the Tribulation Saints,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 650 (April–June 2006): 218; Thomas Ice, “Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled?” *Conservative Theological Journal* 4, no. 12 (2000): 173–174, 175.

wolves till the Lord's death."⁷⁰ This commissioning of the twelve was specifically an offer of the kingdom to Israel (verses 5–7). To the Jewish mind, schooled in the teachings of the Tanak, the kingdom could only come according to a specific calendar of events. Toussaint summarizes this calendar as follows:

According to the Hebrew Scriptures the Messiah, after He appeared, was to suffer, die, and be raised again (Daniel 9:26; Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:1–11; Psalm 16:10). Following the death and resurrection of the Christ there was to be a time of trouble (Daniel 9:26–27; Jeremiah 30:4–6). The Messiah was then to return to the earth to end this tribulation and to judge the world (Daniel 7:9–13, 16–26; 9:27; 12:1; Zechariah 14:1–5). Finally, the Messiah as King would establish His kingdom with Israel as the head nation (Daniel 7:11–27; 12:1–2; Isaiah 53:11–12; Zechariah 14:6–11, 20–21).⁷¹

Further evidence of this eschatological context comes from Jesus' reference to Himself as "Son of Man," an expression associating Jesus with His rule in the Messianic kingdom.

Toussaint comments:

The next great event on the program of the Messiah was His death and resurrection. This is shown in Matthew 10:23 where Jesus says He is to come as the Son of Man. Daniel 7:13, the Old Testament Scripture on which the Messianic concept of the Son of Man is founded, refers to the Son of Man as coming "with the clouds of heaven." Therefore when Jesus says that the Son of Man should come, He must have had in mind His death and resurrection so that He could come in the manner described in Daniel 7:13.⁷²

The necessity of a period of tribulation for Israel preceding the kingdom was first prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 29:22—30:9. If the leaders of Israel had accepted the offer of the kingdom made by the twelve, the eschatological "Tribulation period" (or "Day of the

⁷⁰ Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 142. Also, Ice, "Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled?" 173.

⁷¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), 140. Similarly, Walvoord says, "These prophecies go beyond their immediate experience and were to be fulfilled after Pentecost . . . and view the entire present church age as a parenthesis not taken into consideration in this prophecy," John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 76.

⁷² Ibid.

Lord”) would necessarily have ensued. Even New Calvinist D. A. Carson (an amillennialist) admits the possible eschatological context for Matthew 10:22. Commenting on the expression “to the end” (εἰς τέλος), Carson observes that “because of the frequent association of *telos* (‘end’) and cognates with the eschatological end, [the phrase may refer] ‘to the end of the age.’”⁷³ The parallel between Matthew 10 and 24 appears to be that these chapters refer to two parallel generations of Israel—the generations to whom the kingdom is presented. The offer in chapter 10 was a bona fide offer, but it was rejected (as clearly seen in chapters 12—13), so the Tribulation period and the following kingdom did not immediately follow. On the other hand, the prophetic offer in chapter 24 will coincide with the actual Tribulation period and return of Messiah. For this reason, the two verses, Matthew 10:22 and 24:13, actually refer to the same eschatological context of the Tribulation period. Yet, despite this specifically eschatological context, New Calvinists insist on applying Matthew 10:22 generally to the characterization of believers in the present age. Carson says, “The one who ‘stands firm’—the verb *hypomenō* does not signify active resistance so much as patient endurance (cf. LXX Dan 12:12; Mark 13:13; Rom 12:12; 1 Peter 2:20)—will be saved; but he must stand firm *eis telos* (‘to the end’),”⁷⁴ and says that it is “likely” that “to the end” refers “to the end of one’s life.”⁷⁵ John MacArthur concurs with these New Calvinist authors, commenting on Matthew 10:22,

Endurance of persecution is the hallmark of genuine salvation: **It is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.** Endurance does not produce or protect salvation,

⁷³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 250; cf. M. Eugene Boring, “The Historical-Critical Method’s ‘Criteria of Authenticity’: The Beatitudes in Q and Thomas as a Test Case,” *Semeia* 44 (1988), 28. Carson’s views on Matthew 10 are complicated, due to his view that the discourse is a compilation of sources redacted by Matthew, rather than a single discourse delivered in toto by Jesus; cf. Robert L. Thomas, “Evangelical Responses to the Jesus Seminar” *The Master’s Journal* 7, no. 1, (1998): 89–90.

⁷⁴ Carson, “Matthew,” 250.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

which is totally the work of God’s grace. But endurance is *evidence* of salvation, proof that a person is truly redeemed and a child of God. God gives eternal life “to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality,” Paul says (Rom. 2:7). The writer of Hebrews expresses the same truth in these words: “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (3:14). We do not earn our salvation by endurance, but prove it. Continuance is a verification of being a real Christian. Theologians call this the perseverance of the saints. The following Scriptures also emphasize perseverance: Matthew 24:13; John 8:31; 1 Corinthians 15:1–2; Colossians 1:21–23; Hebrews 2:1–3; 4:14; 6:11–12; 10:39; 12:14; 2 Peter 1:10.⁷⁶

If the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is to be supported Scripturally, its support must come from passages other than Matthew 10:23. Mayhue’s observation on this passage is to the point: “About this passage, D. A. Carson comments, ‘This verse is among the most difficult in the New Testament canon.’ Certainly, the verse should not be among the *sine qua non* features of any major doctrine.”⁷⁷ But Matthew 10:23 and 24:13 are the only Scriptural references to the phrase “endure to the end” so beloved by Calvinistic supporters of this doctrine. Theological presupposition has clearly influenced the interpretation of these two passages in New Calvinist writings.

8. Colossians 1:22–23

Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

This passage puts forth the contingency, “If indeed you continue in the faith.” This has been cited by both Arminians and Calvinists in support of their soteriologies, thus undermining

⁷⁶ John MacArthur, Jr. *Matthew 8–15* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 210. Emphasis his.

⁷⁷ Richard L Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist?” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 14, no. 1 (2003): 15.

“the idea that the Christian can know with certainty that he or she is saved forever.”⁷⁸ It is taken by Grudem to make the Colossians’ ultimate salvation contingent on their perseverance.

Paul and the other New Testament writers . . . [were] addressing groups of people who profess to be Christians, without being able to know the actual state of every person’s heart. There may have been people at Colossae who had joined in the fellowship of the church, and perhaps even professed that they had faith in Christ and had been baptized into membership of the church, but who never had true saving faith. How is Paul to distinguish such people from true believers? How can he avoid giving them false assurance, assurance that they will be saved eternally when in fact they will not, unless they come to true repentance and faith? Paul knows that those whose faith is not real will eventually fall away from participation in the fellowship of the church. Therefore he tells his readers that they will ultimately be saved, “*provided that you continue in the faith*” (Col. 1:23). Those who continue show thereby that they are genuine believers. But those who do not continue in the faith show that there was no genuine faith in their hearts in the first place.⁷⁹

However, the exegesis of the text is not quite as straightforward as Grudem supposes.

The identity of the apodosis for this conditional clause is subject to debate. Verse 22 consists of two clauses:

- “He has now reconciled [ἀποκατήλλαξεν] you in His fleshly body through death”
- “in order to present [παραστήσαι] you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach [ἀνεγκλήτους]”

The exegetical question is whether the protasis (verse 23) depends on the first or second of these clauses. The first clause, unarguably, refers to the salvation that comes to the sinner who believes in Jesus. The second clause is a purpose clause pointing to the future judgment of believers.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Charles C. Bing, “The Warning in Colossians 1:21–23,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, no. 653 (January–March 2007): 74.

⁷⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793.

⁸⁰ παραστήσαι is an infinitive of purpose (T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897], 226). It is used in a judicial sense

Apart from some compelling reason from the context, one would normally understand the conditional clause as dependent on the nearer (παραστήσαι, “to present”), rather than on the more distant (ἀποκατήλλαξεν, “reconciled”), clause.⁸¹ The judicial “presenting” (παρίστημι) as holy, blameless, and beyond reproach is very likely the same as referred to in Romans 14:10 (“we must all appear [παρίστημι] before the judgment seat of God,” πάντες παραστησόμεθα τῷ βήματι τοῦ θεοῦ) and is describing the granting of rewards, not salvation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10).⁸² But for the New Calvinist, there exists a complex relationship between “initial salvation” (justification by faith) and “ultimate salvation” (entrance into Heaven at the final judgment). On the one hand, the New Calvinist regards all of salvation to be the monergistic work of a sovereign God. But on the other hand, ultimate salvation is at times conveniently separated from initial salvation and made to be a synergistic work dependent upon man’s faithfulness. This is why John Piper can refer to “election” as “unconditional” and “glorification” as “conditional” and can argue that a believer can be in danger of going to Hell, “because nobody had ever told this missionary daughter that her salvation might be imperiled by unrepentant sin.”⁸³ Failure to make a proper distinction between salvation and rewards causes the New Calvinist to read his

(Abbott, 226, 227); pointing to the *parousia* (F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 212), or the βῆμα of Christ (Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1982), 68–69). The expression “beyond reproach” (ἀνέγκλητος) meaning “without accusation” is also a judicial term (Walter Grundmann, “ἀνέγκλητος,” Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], I:357; Norman Geisler, “Colossians,” eds. John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985], 674.). Bing, “The Warning in Colossians 1:21–23,” 77.

⁸¹ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1977 reprint, orig. Richard Griffin, 1856), 84; Max Anders, *Galatians–Colossians*, vol. 8. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 284; Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 8th ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 160.

⁸² Bing, “The Warning in Colossians 1:21–23,” 85–87.

⁸³ Chandler et al, 2014 biennial conference, citation begins about 04:48.

theological presupposition regarding the perseverance of the saints into Colossians 1:23, understanding it as a warning that failure to live a life of holiness is evidence that “that there was no genuine faith in their hearts in the first place.”⁸⁴

The subject of rewards for the believer that are contingent on his conduct is a prominent theme in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Corinthians 3:12–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Many, if not all, of the Scriptures that exhort believers to perseverance in good works relate to such rewards, not to salvation. Bing has noted, “Perseverance is not for salvation but for rewards, as seen . . . in 2 Timothy 2:11–13.”⁸⁵ New Calvinists fail to make this important Scriptural distinction and attempt to squeeze passages that speak of rewards into the theological mold of perseverance.

It should also be observed that the conditional clause of verse 23 introduced by εἴ γε expresses confidence, rather than doubt.⁸⁶ It was Paul’s confident assumption that the Colossian believers would be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. However, New Calvinists prefer to understand this verse as a warning to potential unbelievers (i.e., those who did not possess “genuine faith in their hearts”). This results in a position that is curiously close to Arminianism. Indeed, Dunn cites Arminian R. W. Wall’s comment on this verse, “Paul does not teach a ‘once saved, always saved’ kind of religion; nor does he understand faith as a ‘once for all’ decision for Christ.”⁸⁷ How does this differ from Piper’s conditional glorification that threatens a believing missionary daughter with eternal Hell?

⁸⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793.

⁸⁵ Charles C. Bing, “Perseverance Versus Preservation,” *GraceNotes* No. 49, <http://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=49> (accessed June 12, 2014).

⁸⁶ Eadie, 84; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110; O’Brien, 110; Geisler, “Colossians,” 674; Anders, *Galatians–Colossians*, 284.

⁸⁷ Dunnfein, 110 n8, citing R.W. Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 81.

Because this passage likely refers not to salvation but to believers' rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, it cannot be relied on for ironclad proof of the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Unqualified appeal to Colossians 1:21–23 as proof of this doctrine betrays the influence of theological presupposition on the part of those who thus use it.

9. Hebrews 3:14

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.

This verse appears on the surface to be similar to Colossians 1:22–23 in two ways: first, by its use of a conditional clause to express the contingency of the expressed outcome; and second, by its use of the phrase “until the end,” which is so similar to the expression found in Matthew 24:13 and 10:22. However, both of these features bear marked differences in the original Greek. As for the conditional clause, Colossians 1:22–23 had a first-class condition (εἰ with the indicative mood), but Hebrew 3:14 uses ἐάνπερ, a conditional particle found only in Hebrews in the New Testament. And as for the expression “until the end,” the Matthean expression was εἰς τέλος; whereas in Hebrews it is μέχρι τέλους.

Grudem understands Hebrews 3:14 in terms of how believers can have assurance that they possess “genuine faith” and as a warning to those who do not persevere in holiness that they “were never saved in the first place.” He puts it as follows:

One way in which we know that we have come to genuine faith in Christ is if we continue in faith until the end of our lives. . . . The purpose is always *to warn those who are thinking of falling away or have fallen away* that if they do this it is a strong indication that they were never saved in the first place. Thus, the necessity for continuing in faith should just be used as a warning against falling away, a warning that those who fall away give evidence that their faith was never real.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793–794.

Or, as MacArthur puts it:

If we really believe the gospel, if we have committed our life to Jesus Christ, then at the end of the day, the end of the year, the end of life, our commitment will still stand. . . . When someone departs from the gospel, backs away from the faith, we can only conclude that this person never believed. . . . Staying with the Lord marks the difference between possession and profession.⁸⁹

Grudem goes on to issue this important caveat: “We must remember that there are other evidences elsewhere in Scripture that give Christians assurance of salvation, so *we should not think that assurance that we belong to Christ is impossible until we die.*”⁹⁰ Yet, if assurance that we belong to Christ is dependent upon “continuing in faith until the end of our lives,” then it seems obvious that one could *never* have assurance until the moment of death. Based upon clear evidence from other Scriptures (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 6:11; 10:22; Colossians 2:2; 1 John 5:13), assurance is the norm for the believer. Grudem no doubt senses the weight of this point, but his interpretation of Hebrews 3:14 runs contrary to the evidence of other Scriptures relating to assurance, requiring his caveat. This indicates a violation of the analogy of faith.

It is important to pay attention to the immediate context. In Hebrews 3, the author is likening the condition of the epistle’s recipients to that of the Israelites who came out of Egypt. Through unbelief, those Israelites, with few exceptions, did not inherit the land of Canaan. Becoming a “partaker of Christ” in verse 14 is parallel to the Israelites’ entering rest (or entrance into the land of Canaan) in verses 11 and 18. The New Calvinist explanation makes inheriting the land of Canaan parallel to salvation. If this were the case, then we must assume that among those who left Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua were saved, for only they gave evidence of their

⁸⁹ John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 93–94.

⁹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793. Emphasis his.

faith through obedient perseverance. Among the entirety of those who left Egypt, only two men would have been saved. Even Moses would have to be regarded as unsaved, for he also died in the wilderness without entering into God's rest. Rather, it seems better to understand inheriting the land of Canaan parallel to receiving either temporal blessings or rewards. Thus Fruchtenbaum remarks,

The Jewish generation that left Egypt . . . had reached the point of no return and their decision was now irrevocable. The judgment was one of physical death outside the Land.

The application of this section is that these believers (the readers of the Book of Hebrews) are in a similar danger. They could make an irrevocable decision and also be subjected to physical death. . . . This judgment is physical, not spiritual; it does not mean loss of salvation. In fact, Numbers 14:20 does say that the people repented; it even goes on to say that God forgave the sin. It did not affect anyone's individual salvation. . . . Even Moses had to die outside the Land because of a specific sin he committed. Although this did not affect his individual salvation, he had to pay the physical consequences of his sin. Here, again, the correlation is: in the Old Testament, the issue is physical death and loss of temporal blessings but not loss of salvation.⁹¹

As with Matthew 10:22 and 24:13, the phrase "unto the end" must be explained. Grudem understands this phrase to mean "the end of our lives."⁹² But Hebrews does not specify explicitly what "end" (τέλος) is in view. Indeed, the UBS Bible Translator's Handbook for Hebrews acknowledges this very problem: "In a number of languages one cannot say *to the end*, since it is necessary to specify what end is involved."⁹³ The Matthean expression (εἰς τέλος) was seen to refer to the end of the Tribulation period as a time of judgment and testing. If one keeps in mind that the context in Hebrews 3 makes reference to the Israelites' wilderness wanderings, it appears

⁹¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude," *Ariel's Bible Commentary* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 43; see also pp. 46, 48.

⁹² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 793; MacArthur, *Hebrews*, 93.

⁹³ Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 67. The authors of this handbook unwisely offer that "the most satisfactory rendering is 'to the end of our lives' or 'as long as we live.'"

to be significant that the wilderness generation was to persevere obediently until the nation entered the Promised Land. They were experiencing a period of testing and difficulty, but there would come an *end* to this period of time. This sense appears somewhat parallel to the Matthean sense in that it describes the endurance of a national entity until the end of a specific period of testing or judgment, not the endurance of individuals until the end of their lives. For the Hebrew Christian recipients of this epistle, written shortly before AD 70, the specific end in view may have been the end of the period prophesied by Jesus in Luke 21:20–24. Their reward would come upon the condition that they would “hold fast” to their commitment to Christ, and not give in to the temptation to go back to Jerusalem, the temple, the offerings, the priesthood, to defend it from the Romans. Jesus in fact had commanded His people to flee from the city (Luke 21:21).⁹⁴ The phrase μέχρι τέλους occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.⁹⁵ It does occur three times, however, in the LXX (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Wisdom of Solomon 16:5; 19:1). Both occurrences in the Wisdom of Solomon use the phrase μέχρι τέλους in reference to the end of the period of testing in the wilderness wanderings.

10. Hebrews 3:6

But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

⁹⁴ Eusebius reported that the Hebrew Christian community immediately before AD 70 had received a revelation commanding them to leave Judea and flee to Pella; Eusebius of Caesarea, “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 138.

⁹⁵ Its appearance in some mss. of Hebrews 3:6 lacks the confidence of most textual critics. “After ἐλπίδος the Textus Receptus adds μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν, with ⱼ A C D K P 33 81 629 1739 it vg *al*. It is probable, however, that the phrase is an interpolation from ver. 14, especially since not βεβαίαν but βέβαιον is the gender that one would have expected the author to use, qualifying the nearer substantive τὸ καύχημα.” Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 595.

Grudem refers to Hebrews 3:6 in a parenthetical addition to his perseverance texts.⁹⁶ However, there is textual uncertainty over the phrase “until the end” (μέχρι τέλους).⁹⁷ Nevertheless, it is the only reference he lists to support his contention that the author of Hebrews “implies that if they fall away it would show that they never were Christ’s people in the first place.”⁹⁸ But the notion of “falling away” is found in this verse only if the phrase “until the end” is authentic. It appears that theological presupposition trumps over textual criticism when it comes to Grudem’s interpretation of Hebrews 3:6. What Hebrews 3:6 *does* say is that belonging to God’s house is dependent upon holding a profession of faith in Christ, but it says nothing about one’s conduct, lifestyle, or the length of endurance.

Matthew 24:13 in New Calvinist Preaching

It is encouraging to see that modern-day promoters of Calvinism have largely ceased using overt references to Matthew 24:13 as a proof text for the perseverance of the saints. Nevertheless, this verse continues to provide support for the doctrine in a more covert way. The actual phrase, “persevere [or endure] to the end” is found only in the two Matthean passages (and the parallel in Mark 13:13) describing physical survival in the Tribulation period. Nevertheless, in commentaries and sermons this phrase is worked into the explanation of non-eschatological, soteriological texts. For example, in sermons of John Piper that exhort Christians to persevere, he makes the following statements:

⁹⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 800.

⁹⁷ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 595. Though found in the Textus Receptus and other Byzantine texts, the phrase is omitted in the critical editions of Nestle-Aland and the United Bible Societies, as well as in the following versions: HCSB, ESV, NIV, NRSV, RSV. Westcott-Hort places it in square brackets. Its retention in NASB, NASB95, and ASV is surprising.

⁹⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 800.

Ought not a pastor believe that his message from this text [Gal. 6:8–9] may be the divinely appointed means of causing God’s children *to persevere to the end* in well-doing and so inherit eternal life?⁹⁹

The means appointed by God to enable the saints *to persevere to the end* is daily exhortation from other saints [Heb. 13:12]. It is written that *the saints will persevere to the end* and be saved.¹⁰⁰

For those who have eyes to see and for those who are willing to engage, you know that we are in a warfare just that serious right here in Minneapolis. Jesus said, “The love of many will grow cold. And those who *persevere to the end* will be saved.” And our text sees this coming and says in [Hebrews 10:24] “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love [how to keep it from becoming cold] and to good works [the expression of love].”¹⁰¹

If the sinner turns back from his slide into sin, he will escape death and will be in a relationship with Christ that covers all his sins. But if he does not turn back, then he will die, and his sins will not be covered. He will perish forever. This is utterly crucial to see. The New Testament writers do not assume that everyone in the church is necessarily going to *persevere to the end* and be saved. . . . The final proof of who is a brother and who is not is perseverance of faith, not profession of faith.¹⁰²

And as we come to the end of the book he delights to bless us and remind us that the strength to *persevere to the end* is not our own, but God’s. This is the point of Hebrews 13:21.¹⁰³

Did they do what this whole letter of Hebrews is written to help us do—*persevere to the end* and be saved?¹⁰⁴

“Keep watch over your souls” [Hebrews 13:17] . . . means that the benefit that matters most to leaders in the church should be the benefit of the soul. And I argued that we exist

⁹⁹ John Piper, “Do Not Grow Weary in Well-Doing,” preached August 21, 1983, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ John Piper, “Helping Each Other Endure to the End,” preached January 15, 1984, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰¹ John Piper, “The Fulness of Hope and the Fellowship of Love,” preached September 8, 1991, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰² John Piper, “Preserving the Covenant Community in Spite of Sickness and Sin,” preached February 28, 1993, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰³ John Piper, “Do Not Harden Your Heart in the Day of Trouble,” preached August 11, 1996, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ John Piper, “Be Strengthened by Grace,” preached September 21, 1997, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

to save the souls of the saints. Not just to get people converted to Christ, but to help you *persevere to the end*.¹⁰⁵

We all know that in our war with sin we do not win often enough to have peace in our consciences. So if our life hangs on perfect winning in the war with sin, we are going to despair and not *persevere to the end*.¹⁰⁶

The reason we have a gospel—good news for sinners—is that God’s gracious, saving purposes in election and new birth and faith and justification and reconciliation and *perseverance to the end* cannot be finally frustrated.¹⁰⁷

And we pray like Jesus: O Father, don’t let my faith fail; keep me [Luke 22:32]. Prayer is the means of grace that God uses to keep us secure and cause us to *persevere to the end* in faith.¹⁰⁸

The Bible teaches that God will cause his elect people to *persevere to the end* in faith (not perfect faith, and not without struggles); *and* the Bible threatens Christians in general that if they make shipwreck of their faith they will be lost.¹⁰⁹

[In First John 2:19] John says to protect us from misunderstanding. . . . Those who are truly born again (“of us”) will *persevere to the end* in faith. Verse 19b: “For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.”¹¹⁰

See how this theological presupposition regarding the perseverance of the saints

influences Piper’s interpretation of 2 Timothy 4:17–18:

“So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom.”

Notice very carefully what this rescue means. “He will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom.” What evil would threaten to keep Paul out of God’s

¹⁰⁵ John Piper, “Obey Your Joyful Leaders, Part 2,” preached August 12, 1997, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ John Piper, “How Does the Gospel Save Believers, Part 3,” preached August 23, 1997, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁰⁷ John Piper, “I Am the Lord, and Besides Me There Is No Savior,” preached January 30, 2000, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ John Piper, “Learning to Pray in the Spirit and the Word, Part 2,” preached January 7, 2001, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ John Piper, “You Stand Fast Through Faith, So Do Not Become Proud, But Fear,” preached February 8, 2004, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

¹¹⁰ John Piper, “Everyone Who Has Been Born of God Overcomes the World,” preached February 24, 2008, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

heavenly kingdom? What evil must the Lord rescue Paul from in order that he make it to heaven? Not death. Death will be a doorway to the heavenly kingdom. Paul isn't saying that the Lord will rescue him from death. He says in verse 6 that he fully expects to die in the near future: "the time of my departure has come." What then will the Lord rescue him from? What can threaten his entrance into the heavenly kingdom?

The answer is: The evil work of unbelief can threaten his entrance into the heavenly kingdom. When Peter says (in 1 Peter 5:8) that "Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour," he means that Satan threatens to destroy professing Christians by attacking their faith. When Paul says that he was rescued from the lion's mouth and that he will be rescued from every evil work, he does not mean that he escaped death and will escape death. He means he was saved from unbelief; he was saved from apostasy; he was saved from loving the world like Demas (v. 10); he was saved from cowardice; he was saved from throwing it all away for a few more years of freedom and comfort.

This is the great preciousness of having the Lord standing by us. It means that the Lord will cause us to *persevere to the end* and save us for his heavenly kingdom.¹¹¹

In a similar fashion, New Calvinist D. A. Carson (amillennial) sees Matthew 24:13 as describing present-day believers persevering in holiness until death:

Professing believers are either included in this description or are the focus of interest; but only those who endure—in love (v. 12) and despite persecution (vv. 9–11; cf. Rev 2:10)—will be saved (v. 13); They must "stand firm" [endure] to the *end*"; individual responsibility persists to the end of life, but corporate responsibility to the final consummation. Part of the effect of this "tribulation," therefore, is to purify the body of professed disciples: those who endure are saved, as in Daniel 1:32, 34–35, and elsewhere in Matthew (see on 12:32; 13:32, 41; cf. 2 Tim 2:3, 10–13; 3:11; Heb 10:32; 11:27; 12:2–3; James 1:12; 5:11).¹¹²

Final Apostasy

The phrase "until the end" (Matthew 24:13; 10:22) is particularly problematic when taken to mean "the end of one's life" in the context of the perseverance of the saints. Those who promote the doctrine of perseverance of the saints (both New Calvinists and more traditional Calvinists) understand this to mean that though the elect believer might backslide at some point

¹¹¹ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper* (1990–1999) (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹¹² Carson, "Matthew," 498–499.

during his life, he will not fail to return to the faith before death. This poses two problems for the doctrine. First, the normal way of understanding “until the end” (whether εἰς τέλος of Matthew 24:13; 10:22, or μέχρι τέλους of Hebrews 3:14) should not allow for any period of backsliding. If one is to “persevere,” “endure,” or “hold fast” until the end, one ought not to backslide at all.

The second problem with the phrase “until the end,” when taken to mean the end of one’s life, is that it is taken to rule out the possibility of a truly elect individual being in a state of apostasy (or a backslidden condition¹¹³) at the time of death, or “final apostasy.”¹¹⁴ As John Piper explains,

God keeps his elect from final apostasy and unbelief. The new covenant promise for all God’s people is this: “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (Jeremiah 32:40). There may be many stumblings and wanderings, but if you are his, you will be brought back.¹¹⁵

This application of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is particularly egregious because it obliterates any assurance of salvation prior to one’s deathbed. The New Calvinist understanding of final apostasy seems to be at odds with the Biblical description of numerous people, apparently elect, who died in a state of apostasy. Four such Biblical examples follow.

¹¹³ The Council of Dort did not actually use the word “apostasy,” but rather referred to “backsliding.” In the Fifth Head, Art. 8, they say that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints guarantees that elect believers cannot “perish finally in their backslidings.”

¹¹⁴ The expression “final apostasy” is used in at least two distinct ways theologically: soteriologically and eschatologically. Soteriologically, it refers to apostasy in an individual’s life that leads either to loss of salvation (Lutheran [Davis, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 216] and Arminian [John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893) 254, 269.] theologies), or to the state of apostasy at the end of an individual’s life, proving that he was never truly elect (Calvinistic Theology [James R. White, “The Newness of the New Covenant: Better Covenant, Better Mediator, Better Sacrifice, Better Ministry, Better Hope, Better Promises (Part II)” *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (2005): 95]). Eschatologically, “final apostasy” refers to the condition of either the professing church or of the world in general at the end of the age, just preceding the Second Coming. This eschatological reference is supported by such Scriptures as Matthew 24:10–14; 1 Timothy 4:1–5; 2 Timothy 3:1–9; Revelation 17–18.

¹¹⁵ John Piper, “Inseparable from God While ‘Going Without Going,’” preached September 15, 2002, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

1. Asa

King Asa is described in 1 Kings 15:11 as one who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father,” and whose heart was “wholly devoted to the LORD all his days” (1 Kings 15:14). “[H]e was a god-fearing man who led the way for his people in public dedication to God.”¹¹⁶ Paul House sums up Asa’s career:

Besides serving God himself, Asa attempts to end the pagan practices Rehoboam and Abijah allowed, even encouraged. He rids the land of the sacred prostitutes that his father and grandfather had ignored (cf. 14:25–28; 15:3) and removes “the idols his father had made.” Asherah poles are forbidden to the extent that Asa deposes his grandmother “from her position as queen mother” because she worshiped one of these idols. He also supports the temple, for he collects gold and silver for its maintenance. Only two other kings (Hezekiah and Josiah) receive higher commendations than Asa.¹¹⁷

Yet Asa is one whose life ended in final apostasy. His alliance with Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, brought Yahweh’s condemnation through the prophet Hanani (2 Chronicles 16:7–9). Hanani’s condemnation of Asa is strong, yet he includes Asa among those “whose heart is completely His” (verse 9). The New Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints would expect Asa to repent at the preaching of Hanani, but the Biblical record is otherwise. Asa imprisoned the prophet and remained recalcitrant. In response to his apostasy, Asa was severely disciplined by Yahweh and stricken with disease in his feet that eventuated in his death (2 Chronicles 16:12). Asa is clearly an anomaly vis-à-vis the New Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints.

2. Joash

Joash, the boy king, rescued from destruction at the hand of his grandmother Athaliah, was one who “did what was right in the sight of Yahweh all the days of Jehoiada the priest” for

¹¹⁶ R. D. Patterson, Herman J. Austel, “1, 2 Kings,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 129.

¹¹⁷ Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 8, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 197.

over twenty years (2 Kings 12:2; 2 Chronicles 24:2).¹¹⁸ He faithfully carried out repairs to the temple in Jerusalem and led the people in the worship of Yahweh. Nevertheless, at the end of his life he apostatized, murdering the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20–22), and died at the hands of the Arameans and his own servants as a judgment from Yahweh (2 Chronicles 24:24–25; 2 Kings 12:20–21).

Some maintain that it was Jehoiada, not Joash, who is portrayed as the elect individual in this narrative.¹¹⁹ Joash's obedience is qualified by the phrases "all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chronicles 24:2) and "all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him" (2 Kings 12:2). This has brought such comments as the following: "As dependent as Joash was on Jehoiada, there is little evidence that he ever established a real dependence on the God Jehoiada obeyed. Like many children, Joash's knowledge of God was secondhand. It was a start, but the king needed to establish his own relationship with God that would outlast and overrule the changes in the advise [*sic*] he received."¹²⁰ Spurgeon was so influenced by the doctrine of perseverance of the saints that he had no hesitation in declaring Joash's lost condition:

In appearance, Joash was all that we could wish. Yet, had he really been what he seemed to be, he would have continued so! If there had been that work of Grace within his soul which there appeared to be in his life, he would not have turned aside as he did, for where a work of Grace is real and true, it is known by its abiding influence throughout the

¹¹⁸ James E. Smith, *The Books of History*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 2 Ki 12:1–16.

¹¹⁹ On relationship between Jehoiada and Joash, see David Nichols, "The Ancient Near East, 853–745 B.C.," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 248–249; Raymond Dillard, "The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14—16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 3 (September 1980): 210–211.

¹²⁰ <http://www.heavenscross.com/Joash.html> (accessed July 17, 2014).

whole of life. . . . He turned aside from God because he had never truly known the Lord at all! . . . All that Joash had done was to give his heart to Jehoiada, not to Jehovah.¹²¹

When considering Joash's spiritual condition, however, it should be noted that the account in 2 Kings 12 records no apostasy at all with respect to Joash. From the 2 Kings account one is left only with the conclusion that Joash was a man fully in favor with Yahweh. Furthermore, the account in 2 Chronicles appears to mitigate the favorable opinion of Jehoiada over Joash by recording Joash's rebuke of the priest with regard to Jehoiada's neglect in seeing to the repairs of the temple (24:5–6; also 2 Kings 12:7). Thus, it appears that Joash's faith was his own genuine personal faith, not merely childhood obedience to a father figure. J. Barton Payne depicts Joash's rule as "a characterization in miniature for the historical course of his entire nation."¹²² Granting Payne's typological view, just as Israel, the elect nation, was chastised by God while remaining elect so Joash should be seen as an elect individual under chastisement by God.

On the face of it, Joash appears to be among the elect. He is described as one who "did what was right in the sight of the Lord." Strict adherence to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints would dictate that Joash had only temporary faith, but not saving faith. Though this is a possible explanation, it requires reading into the text theological presuppositions regarding perseverance. More likely, Joash was put to death as a matter of chastisement. Darby is likely correct when he states, "The immediate government of a God of judgment is in exercise, because

¹²¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "Goodness, as a Morning Cloud," Sermon No. 2365, preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, March 25, 1888, <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols40-42/chs2365.pdf>, (accessed July 17, 2014).

¹²² J. Barton Payne, "2 Chronicles," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, ed. Frank E. Gabelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 513.

those whom He judges were in close connection with Himself.”¹²³ Like Asa, Joash is an exception to the New Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints.

3. The “Many Who Sleep”

First Corinthians 11:30 describes some members of the Corinthian congregation who were guilty of misconduct at the Lord’s Supper. They had, therefore, been visited with varying degrees of chastisement. Paul writes, “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” These same individuals are described by Paul as those who “hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2), clearly marking them as saved individuals.¹²⁴ As to whether the nature of their misconduct constitutes apostasy or not,¹²⁵ Paul’s estimation is that it constituted one as “guilty¹²⁶ of the body and the blood of the Lord” (verse 27), and that such a person “eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body

¹²³ J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Genesis to 2 Chronicles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008), 618.

¹²⁴ The language of 1 Corinthians 11:2 is strikingly parallel to that of 1 Corinthians 15:1–3 describing the gospel by which the Corinthian believers were saved. First Corinthians 11:2, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε. First Corinthians 15:2–3, δι’ οὗ καὶ σφύζεσθε, τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν εἰ κατέχετε, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ εἰκῆ ἐπιστεύσατε. παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις.

¹²⁵ The precise nature of the misconduct is not explicitly stated by Paul, but most commentators take it to have been a matter of class discrimination between wealthy believers and poor believers (e.g. Richard L. Pratt Jr, *I & II Corinthians*, vol. 7, Holman New Testament Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000], 197; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], on 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 856–857), the wealthy either excluding the poor or making them wait until the wealthy had finished eating. Thiselton regards it as “splits between the socially advantaged and the socially disadvantaged” (Thiselton, *Ibid.*, 857).

¹²⁶ The term ἔνοχος is rendered “guilty” by the vast majority of English translations (NASB, HCSB, ESV, NKJV, Darby, NET, NIV, KJV, NLT, LEB, NCV, RSV, ASV, TEV, YLT). NRSV and NJB, however, adopt “answerable for,” apparently based on an etymological derivation, rather than a meaning based on actual usage; see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 889. Thiselton cites “Collins’s observation that vv. 27–32 are “replete with judicial language: ‘unworthily . . . answerable . . . scrutinize . . . judgement . . . chastise . . . condemn,’ all belong to the semantic domain of the law and the courtroom” (*Ibid.* 890, citing R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SacPag 7 [Collegeville, Minn: Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999], 436). Calvin refers to it as a “heinous crime” (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* [Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010], 366).

rightly” (verse 29). This would appear to qualify as apostasy. So, for such a person to “sleep” would mean that he died¹²⁷ in a backslidden condition or a state of final apostasy as the ultimate chastisement from the Lord. Calvin puts it this way:

Many had died, in consequence of that abuse of the Supper, because they had offended God. By this he intimates, that by diseases and other chastisements from God, we are admonished to think of our sins; for God does not afflict us without good reason, for he takes no pleasure in our afflictions.¹²⁸

Pratt, who is Reformed, says on this verse, “God disciplines his church so the true believers will take notice and turn back to Christ in repentance, so that they will not be condemned with the world.”¹²⁹ But since this “discipline” includes death, it must also mean that some “true believers” die in a backslidden state.

4. A Sin unto Death

First John 5:16–17 states, “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.”

Two different interpretations of the expression “sin leading to death” in this passage tend to characterize both the dispensational and the Reformed positions. The characteristic dispensational interpretation is that this refers to physical death of a believer as a form of God’s

¹²⁷ Nearly all commentators understand the terms “weak,” “sick,” and “sleep” (ἀσθενεῖς, ἄρρωστοί, and κοιμῶνται) to be referring to physical conditions resulting from God’s judgment. S. Schneider (Schneider, S., “Glaubensmängel in Korinth. Eine neue Deutung der ‘Schwachen, Kranken, Schlafenden’ in 1 Kor 11:30,” *Filologia Neutestamentaria* 9 [1996]: 3–19) appears to be alone in regarding these terms as metaphorical for “weak in faith,” “spiritually sick,” and “asleep,” or “lethargic”; see fuller discussion in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 894.

¹²⁸ Calvin, *Commentaries the Corinthians*, 390.

¹²⁹ Pratt, 203.

chastisement of His disobedient child.¹³⁰ The characteristic Reformed interpretation is that this refers to the unpardonable sin, the sin of unbelief, which results in the eternal spiritual death of the unbeliever.¹³¹

Lewis Sperry Chafer expresses the interpretation that has been adopted by most dispensationalists, namely that “God reserves the right to remove from this life a believer who has ceased to be a worthy witness in the world.”¹³² Ryrie elaborates on this view by interpreting the sin leading to death as the most extreme form of chastisement upon a true believer:

If a believer persists in some sin, then other consequences may follow.

1. *Punishment.* Chastisement of some form may come (Heb. 12:5–11). Sickness may be one form of punishment (1 Cor. 11:30).

2. *Excommunication.* Excommunication from the local church may be necessary (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5).

3. *Physical death.* In some cases physical death may be a punishment for persistent sin (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).¹³³

¹³⁰ Zane C. Hodges, “1 John,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 902–903; Bernard Franklin, “The Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93, no. 370 (1936): 231; Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Abiding,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 107, no. 425 (1950): 2; John G. Mitchell, “Does God Heal Today?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122, no. 485 (1965): 47; Robert Dean, Jr., “Abiding in Christ: A Dispensational Theology of the Spiritual Life (Part 2 of 3)” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 7 (2001): 6; Rodney J. Decker, “The Warning of Hebrews Six,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5 (2001): 45; also references from Chafer and Ryrie below.

¹³¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1 John 5:16–17; Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, the New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 210; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 509.

¹³² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, VII:166; John A. Witmer, “Part 1: A Review of Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 594 (1992): 143.

¹³³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 267. Also, Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1918), 77; Ken Gardoski, “The Will of God and the Death of Christ: A Case for the Universal Scope of the Atonement,” ed. Gary Gromacki and Mike Stallard, *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 15, no. 1 (2011): 92; Kenneth M. Gardoski, “New Testament Warning Passages in the Light of the Doctrine of Eternal Security” (PhD dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002), 123–34.

Despite the fact that Reformed theology is dependent upon Augustine for its doctrine of perseverance of the saints, Augustine regards the sin leading to death as a sin committed by a Christian:

He manifestly shows that there are certain brethren for whom we are not commanded to pray, although the Lord bids us pray even for our persecutors. Nor can the question in hand be solved, unless we acknowledge that there are certain sins in brethren which are more heinous than the persecution of enemies. Moreover, that brethren mean Christians can be proved by many examples from the divine Scriptures.¹³⁴

The Reformed view is defined in the Canons of the Synod of Dort, Fifth Head, Article 6, which states that the Holy Spirit will not permit the elect believer to “commit the sin unto death.”

In the section on “Rejection of Errors,” they reject the idea that

true believers and regenerate can sin the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit. Since the same apostle John, after having spoken in the fifth chapter of his first epistle, vs. 16 and 17, of those who sin unto death and having forbidden to pray for them, immediately adds to this in vs. 18: “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin (meaning a sin of that character); the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him (1 John 5:18).”¹³⁵

It appears that the authors of the canons have not taken into consideration that the “sin unto death” could refer to a sin that leads to physical death, and thus may be committed by a believer. Their assumption appears to be that the “sin unto death” necessarily results in eternal death, and therefore cannot be committed by a true believer. However, this goes against the observation that 1 John was written to believers. The Canons do not define “sin unto death,” but presumably the authors of the Canons would have been in agreement with Calvin. According to Calvin, the sin

¹³⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” XXII in *Saint Augustin: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospels*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. William Findlay and David Schley Schaff, vol. 6, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 30.

¹³⁵ *Canons of the Synod of Dort*, Fifth Head, Rejection of Errors, par. 4.

unto death is “apostasy, by which men wholly alienate themselves from God” and become “reprobate and given up to destruction.”¹³⁶

Adherence to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints forced Piper to conclude that those who sin unto death are not genuine believers:

These verses are a summary of all the warnings of this book. They help us avoid two errors. One error would be the claim that any sin you commit after conversion rules you out of the kingdom. John avoids this error by saying at the beginning of verse 16 and at the end of verse 17: No, there is sin that is not unto death. Not all sin puts you beyond the reach of hope. This is what 1:8–10 and 2:1 were trying to make clear. But the other error John avoids is the claim that no amount or kind of sinning can put a professing Christian beyond the hope of salvation. John avoids this error by saying at the end of 5:16, “There is sin unto death.” He does not even say we should pray for such sin. There is sin that puts a person beyond hope. There is a habit of insubordination that becomes so strong we can no longer genuinely confess it as sin and repent of it.¹³⁷

Similarly, Grudem concludes, “In the light of John’s concern in this epistle to combat a heresy that did not confess Jesus as God who came in the flesh (see 1 John 4:2–3), it is likely that this sin ‘unto death’ is the serious heresy of denying Christ and subsequently failing to obtain salvation through Christ.”¹³⁸

Berkhof exemplifies the kind of leap in logic that many Reformed writers commit regarding this verse. He reasons as follows:

Except in the Gospels, this sin is not mentioned by name in the Bible. Thus the question arises, whether the passages in Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26, 27, 29, and 1 John 5:16 also refer to it. Now it is quite evident that they all speak of an unpardonable sin; and because Jesus says in Matt. 12:31, “Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven,” thereby indicating

¹³⁶ Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 269.

¹³⁷ John Piper, “Jesus Christ Is an Advocate for Sinners,” preached February 10, 1985, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007). Piper describes such a sinner as “beyond forgiveness even in this life,” John Piper, “Beyond Forgiveness: Blasphemy against the Spirit,” preached April 1, 1984, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007).

¹³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 503n22.

that there is but one unpardonable sin, it is but reasonable to think that these passages refer to the same sin.¹³⁹

His syllogism might be summed up as follows:

- Major Premise: Every sin that results in death is the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31.
- Minor Premise: 1 John 5:16 refers to a sin that results in death.
- Inference: Therefore, 1 John 5:16 is the same as the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31.

But the major premise is ill-formed. It fails to take into consideration the various Scriptural uses of the word “death.” Berkhof’s syllogism holds true only if “death” means the same thing as “spiritual death” (i.e., the Second Death of Revelation [20:6, 14]). But if the death of 1 John 5:16–17 refers to physical death, then the syllogism falls apart, and other options must be considered.

Numerous examples exist of physical death as God’s chastisement for sin, including Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10); the disobedient wilderness generation (Numbers 14:29); the disobedient prophet of 1 Kings 13; Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11); possibly the man sinning with his stepmother in 1 Corinthians 5, who was delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh but the salvation of his soul; and the people who “fell asleep” in 1 Corinthians 11:30. Furthermore, in John 11:4, Lazarus’ sickness was “not to death,” using the same expression as found in 1 John 5:16–17 (πρὸς θάνατον) and plainly referring to physical death.

¹³⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 254. Grudem also appears to equate 1 John 5:16–17 with the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31 (*Systematic Theology*, 507), though a page later he equivocates (*Ibid.*, 508).

But one cannot maintain the perseverance of the saints while seeing 1 John 5:16–17 as referring to physical death, for that would mean that believers die in a backslidden or apostate condition. So most Reformed interpreters offer arguments against physical death in this passage. First, it is argued that since “death” is used only one other time in 1 John (3:14), where it refers to spiritual death, it must therefore mean spiritual death in 1 John 5:16–17.¹⁴⁰ But such reasoning defies sound principles of exegesis. It cannot be argued on the basis of only one other usage in 1 John, separated by two chapters that the two references to this term must match. Busenitz insists that since ζωή must mean spiritual life, θάνατος must mean spiritual death.¹⁴¹ But ζωή is used frequently in Scripture to refer to physical life (Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; 15:19; Philippians 1:20; Luke 16:25; Acts 8:33; 1 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 7:3; Acts 17:25; Revelation 11:11; 16:3; James 4:14; and extracanonical references: Sirach 4:1; 29:21; 30:5; 1 Clement 16:8; 17:4; 20:10; Hermas, *Mandates* 3,3; 8,4 and 9; 11,7 and 16; Barnabas 4:9; Hermas *Similitudes* 6,3,6; 9,16,2; 9,29,2; Hermas *Visions* 3,12,2; 4,2,5;¹⁴² note particularly the Johannine uses in Revelation).

Secondly, it is argued, “From the outset it is safe and contextually appropriate to reject any interpretation that refers to a physical death, since ‘death’ is contrasted with spiritual (or ‘eternal’) life.”¹⁴³ But this is simply assuming what one is trying to prove, for those who argue for physical death also understand life here to be referring to physical life.

¹⁴⁰ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 4th ed. Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 191.

¹⁴¹ Irvin A. Busenitz, “The Sin unto Death,” *The Master’s Journal* 1 no. 1 (1998): 29.

¹⁴² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 430.

¹⁴³ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 208.

Finally, Busenitz argues that there are two notable differences between the passages that refer to physical death as chastisement and this one: “First of all, in the above cases, the sin which led to the punishment is more or less evident; in this instance, it is not revealed. Secondly, the exact nature of the death penalty is ambiguous here, while elsewhere it is not. So the problem encountered here is unique.”¹⁴⁴ Busenitz is simply in error with regard to his first observation, since 1 Corinthians 11:30 does not specify the sin that led to the death of some Corinthian believers.¹⁴⁵ And with respect to his second observation, the exact nature of death penalty is ambiguous in many places in Scripture. For example, Genesis 9:6 requires shedding of a murderer’s blood but does not specify whether it be by stoning, crucifixion, beheading, hanging, or any other method.

It seems that three exegetical issues are crucial to address in this passage: (1) Did John view the sin leading to death as something committed by a brother? (2) Does the word “death” refer to spiritual death or physical death? (3) What kind of sin is referred to, since it is something that is seen?¹⁴⁶

1. Who commits the sin leading to death? Verse 16 refers to one who sees his brother (ἀδελφός) commit a sin. The normal way of understanding the term “brother” in Acts and the Epistles is as a believer (e.g., Acts 6:3; 9:30; 10:23; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 6:23; 1 Timothy 6:2; Revelation 1:9; 12:10). To understand this term in any other sense should require some clear exegetical marker from the context. For example, in Romans 9:3 Paul refers

¹⁴⁴ Busenitz, 18.

¹⁴⁵ In a broad, general way, it may be said that they were guilty of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, but this is not very specific language.

¹⁴⁶ Busenitz suggests, “Two basic questions call for a response in this passage: (1) What is the nature of the sin? And (2) What is the nature of the death?” 18.

to unbelieving Jews as his brothers, but qualifies the term as “my brothers, my fellow kinsmen according to the flesh.” Likewise, in Acts a Jewish speaker clearly addresses a Jewish audience as brothers (Acts 2:29; 3:17, 22; 7:2, 23). First John 5:16–17, however, lacks any such exegetical marker, and the normal assumption would be that the term “brother” refers to a believer. To assume otherwise is to read theological assumptions into the text.

2. Is the death of 1 John 5:16–17 spiritual or physical death? The answer to this question lies in how one views the topic of the paragraph. Reformed and New Calvinist interpreters set these verses in the broader context of the Christological doctrinal issues covering the entire book,¹⁴⁷ but especially from the middle of chapter 2. They understand the death to be spiritual death resulting from an unorthodox view of Christ, thus a sin of unbelief. On the other hand, many see a topic shift occurring in 5:14, extending through verse 17, to the topic of prayer,¹⁴⁸ a topic previously discussed in 3:19–24. Accordingly, John is discussing how one receives answers to prayer, and this passage may be seen as parallel to James 6:13–18, which refers to prayer for a fellow brother’s recovery from illness. Such illness might result in death (see 1 Corinthians 11:30), but if God intended the illness to lead to death as a result of His chastisement, such a sin leading to that condition could reasonably be referred to as a “sin leading to death.” Busenitz, however, refuses to acknowledge any topic shift at all. He claims, “The entirety of 1 John deals with tests of life, tests designed to give assurance of salvation to believers.”¹⁴⁹ This is a dangerous hermeneutical assumption. To force every statement in 1 John into this hermeneutical straightjacket denies John the liberty to address more than one topic. Most New Testament

¹⁴⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 509.

¹⁴⁸ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 205, 207. See Appendix 3, “Structural Diagram of 1 John 4–5.”

¹⁴⁹ Busenitz, 18.

epistles simply do not conform to this “one topic fits all” mode of revelation. Rather, it is quite reasonable to understand the death of 1 John 5:16–17 as physical death, thus contradictory to the notion of perseverance of the saints.

3. What kind of sin is in view? Kinds of sins can be classified either as seen (e.g., stealing, adultery, murder, idolatry) or unseen (e.g., lust, envy, pride, hate). First John 5:16–17 is evidently referring to sins that are seen (5:16, “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin”). One might profitably ask what kind of sin merits physical death, and what kind merits spiritual death? The Bible often refers to some sins that are worthy of physical death and others that are not.¹⁵⁰ A first-century believer familiar with Scriptural teaching would be accustomed to thinking in such categories of sin. Busenitz claims that in contrast to “the sin which led to the punishment [which] is more or less evident,” the sin that leads to death “in this instance, it is not revealed.”¹⁵¹ This seems to be obviously wrong, since John is discussing sins that are seen. While the specific sin may not be revealed, the class of sin as one that is “seen” is clearly revealed.

Certain sins are specified in the Bible as meriting death:

Among those crimes which merited capital punishment were murder (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:12), blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), incitement to idolatry (Deut. 13:5ff.), fornication (22:20–21), violation of the Sabbath (Exod. 35:2), kidnapping (21:16), striking one’s parents (5:15), and sexual intercourse with animals (22:19; Lev. 20:15–16).¹⁵²

All of these fall into the category of sins that are seen (or heard, in the case of blasphemy). Other sins are unseen and may be known only to God and the sinner. Paul, for example, claimed to have perfectly kept the law (Philippians 3:4–6), yet the commandment prohibiting lust was one

¹⁵⁰ Busenitz, 17.

¹⁵¹ Busenitz, 18.

¹⁵² Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 273.

that he admitted he could not keep and by which he was condemned before God (Romans 7:7–8). Lust, an unseen sin, did not carry a death penalty. Paul was not condemned to death by his fellow Pharisees, neither apparently did God inflict him with terminal illness because of his lust. But his lust did condemn him to spiritual death in the eyes of God. The class of sin discussed in 1 John 5:16–17 (those which are seen) is precisely the class of sin one would expect could lead to physical death.

The sin that leads to death is best seen as a sin committed by a believer and resulting in God’s chastisement in the form of physical death. Reformed and New Calvinist interpreters, on the other hand, are kept from this conclusion—not by exegesis, but by theological presupposition. Presupposing the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, they must deny the normal, clear meaning of the term “brother”; they must also violate the change of topic at verse 14; and they must fail to recognize the distinction John makes between seen sins versus unseen sins. First John 5:15–17 then is evidently contradictory to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints.

Progressive Sanctification

New Calvinists generally express a strong desire to see holiness expressed in the lives of believers, and they are to be commended for this emphasis on holiness. However, their failure to adequately distinguish progressive sanctification from positional truths results in a lack of assurance that is ultimately damaging to a healthy spiritual life.

1. Progressive Sanctification and Perseverance of the Saints

The doctrine of progressive sanctification is closely related to the perseverance of the saints in New Calvinism. This is true, according to New Calvinists, because it is guaranteed that those who are truly regenerated will also persevere. Welch says, “Sanctification is possible—

assured even—among those who profess faith in Jesus.”¹⁵³ The same notion is affirmed by Piper: “Conquering canceled sin is essential if we are to be finally saved. Not because sins can be uncanceled, but because the will to kill canceled sin is the necessary sign that it is canceled.”¹⁵⁴ The degree to which one perseveres is the measure of his progressive sanctification. If one is not advancing in progressive sanctification, he is in danger of not persevering, and thus not truly saved. Without progressive sanctification, one cannot be saved, according to New Calvinists. Rick Phillips writes, “It remains no more possible to be saved without sanctification than without justification.”¹⁵⁵ According to Grudem, “This initial step in sanctification involves a definite break from the ruling power and love of sin, so that the believer is no longer ruled or dominated by sin and no longer loves to sin.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, continued growth in holiness is expected in the life of a believer. “It is the expectation of all the New Testament authors that our sanctification will increase throughout our Christian lives.”¹⁵⁷ There is no room in New Calvinist theology for a carnal believer (1 Corinthians 3:1–3) who will be saved yet as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:15).

2. Progressive Sanctification and the Judgment Seat of Christ

A crucial distinction between the dispensational approach to sanctification and the New Calvinist approach is in how the two systems view the judgment seat (βῆμα) of Christ.

¹⁵³ Ed Welch, “Sinners Learning to Act the Miracle,” *Acting the Miracle: God’s Work and Ours in the Mystery of Sanctification*, eds. John Piper and David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Desiring God, 2013), 68.

¹⁵⁴ John Piper, “Conclusion,” eds. John Piper et al, *Acting the Miracle*, 133.

¹⁵⁵ Rick Phillips, “Union with Christ and Sanctification,” *Reformation 21* (August 2014), <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/union-with-christ-and-sanctification.php> (accessed August 16, 2014).

¹⁵⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747.

¹⁵⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 749.

Dispensationalism views this judgment as entirely separate from the judgment at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11–15).¹⁵⁸ According to Revelation 20:14–15, everyone condemned at the Great White Throne will be cast into the Lake of Fire. On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 3:15 speaks of a judgment of believers' works at which the one who is condemned will be "saved, but as through fire" (σωθήσεται οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός). Dispensationalists conclude, therefore, that 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 describes a judgment that is entirely separate from the Great White Throne Judgment. Comparing the matter of salvation and loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ to the salvation and loss referred to in James 2:14–26, Bing provides this clarification:

That James speaks of a genuine faith which cannot "save" a Christian at the judgment seat of Christ is consistent with the New Testament's usage of *sōzō* and its teaching on the bema. In 1 Corinthians 5:5 *sōzō* is used of the believer at the bema who is *saved* from suffering a loss of some kind. This believer is already saved from hell, therefore he (as those in James) is saved from having his unworthy works burned (1 Corinthians 3:12–15) or from suffering a loss of reward and whatever other benefits are bestowed at the bema. Thus it seems the profit of which James speaks is not salvation, but advantages accrued in this life and at the judgment seat of Christ.¹⁵⁹

While Grudem acknowledges the believer's heavenly reward as a motive for obedience in the Christian life,¹⁶⁰ there is no developed doctrine of the Judgment Seat of Christ as a separate judgment. Indeed, in Grudem's view the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31–46), the judgment of believers' works (2 Corinthians 5:10), and the Great White Throne judgment

¹⁵⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV:377; VII:215; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 597–98; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 219–226; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 155–160; Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 113. Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 271–72; David R. Nicholas, "Judgments, Various," *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 225. Though not a dispensationalist, Eaton recognized this important distinction, Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 206, 216.

¹⁵⁹ Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 34. Bing also makes reference to the Master's thesis by Shane Barnes, "The Negative Aspects of Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984).

¹⁶⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 757.

(Revelation 20:11–15) “all speak of the same final judgment, not of three separate judgments,” and that “it is unlikely that the dispensational view is correct.”¹⁶¹ Failure to distinguish the Judgment Seat of Christ from the judgment at the Great White Throne results in seeing admonitions to fear God as warnings that one may not be saved. Whereas, distinguishing the Judgment Seat of Christ provides the perspective that some “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15).

3. The Means of Progressive Sanctification

New Calvinists and dispensationalists generally agree on the means of progressive sanctification. They both speak of the believer’s need to rely upon the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of the church. Where they differ is on what sanctification means in the broad scope of things. For the New Calvinist, sanctification is an evidence of genuine salvation. Without progress in sanctification, one must conclude that there was never any regeneration. So the doctrine of progressive sanctification is wielded like a heavy club to threaten and warn those whose lives are deficient in holiness that they may not be truly saved. Kevin DeYoung writes, “Some people have a very hard time understanding that threats and warnings are in the Bible for our sanctification. Of course, it’s wonderfully true that God will keep his elect and preserve them to the end. But how do you think he accomplishes this work of preservation? One way is by warning them of what will happen if they do not persevere.”¹⁶² This results in a legalistic life of

¹⁶¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1141.

¹⁶² Kevin DeYoung, “Incentives for Acting the Miracle: Fear, Rewards, and the Multiplicity of Biblical Motivations,” eds. Piper, et al, *Acting the Miracle*, 52.

continual introspection and lack of assurance of salvation.¹⁶³ Eaton writes about the kind of introspection that arises from what he calls “developed Calvinism”:

Traditional late Reformed theology has a problem with introspection. I have already urged that introspection is implicit in many aspects of the Reformed doctrine of grace in late Calvinism. Now I wish to underline the fact that the most intense introspection follows if many or all of the emphases are combined. If Christ did not die for all, and if it is possible to have a sorrow for sin which is not true repentance, a faith which is not true faith, a possessing of the Spirit which falls short of true regeneration, if despite any and every “experience” of the gospel there is “a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven,” if Paul himself feared loss of salvation, then what remains of the Calvinist’s assurance? It has died the death of a thousand qualifications.¹⁶⁴

Eaton goes on to characterize the kind of introspection that is characteristic of the believer who accepts the tenets of perseverance of the saints:

The way for faith has to be prepared by repentance. Repentance is turning from all known sin. Was my faith preceded by repentance? Have I turned from all known sin? I fear I may not have done so! Jesus did not die for everyone. Am I perhaps one of those for whom he did not die? Is there any way of knowing? If I believe, then I may know I am indeed one of the ones for whom Jesus died. Yes, but at the moment I am questioning whether I really did believe or not. Worst of all, there is such a thing as imitation-salvation. It is possible to be enlightened, to have tasted of the heavenly gift, even to have one’s life changed, and yet not be a true Christian.¹⁶⁵

For the dispensationalist, on the other hand, sanctification results in rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. A believer’s positional justification does not hinge upon his progressive sanctification. For the dispensationalist, assurance of salvation is primarily dependent upon the faithfulness of God to be true to His promise (1 John 5:13). Sanctification for the

¹⁶³ Some New Calvinists have acknowledged this threat of legalism. For example, Rick Phillips writes, “We must never ground our justification in terms of our sanctification. This is the crippling legalism that hinders so many Christians, who, on a day-to-day basis, ground their sense of acceptance with God on their spiritual performance.” Phillips, “Union with Christ and Sanctification.”

¹⁶⁴ Eaton, *No Condemnation*, 23.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

dispensationalist, then, offers an opportunity to earn rewards, but lack of sanctification does not represent a threat of eternal damnation.

4. The Relationship between Progressive Sanctification and Justification

The close relationship between sanctification and justification in New Calvinist theology leads to a quandary as to the relationship between faith and sanctification. New Calvinists are clearly Biblical in their view of justification by faith alone, but that faith must be given to the dead sinner by the monergistic act of a sovereign God. Sanctification, on the other hand, while also claimed to be operative in the realm of faith, not works, requires a different kind of faith. Phillips says, “Our faith in Christ is passive as we receive a finished justification from him. Moreover, that same faith is active in embracing the call to holiness that Christ energizes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:19–20).”¹⁶⁶ This raises serious questions as to the nature of faith. What is faith? Is it passive, or is it active? Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:3 suggests that the faith involved in our sanctification is the same as the faith that is involved in our justification.¹⁶⁷ But New Calvinists are forced to create two different kinds of faith—one active, the other passive—in an attempt to hold together the contradictory notions that sanctification is predestined, connected to justification, connected to glorification, and involves our active participation in a way that could never be allowed for justification.

¹⁶⁶ Phillips, “Union with Christ and Sanctification.”

¹⁶⁷ Galatians 3:1–5 sets up a series of contrasts: works vs. faith (verse 2); Spirit vs. flesh (verse 3); works vs. faith (verse 5). In verse 3 “Spirit” corresponds with “faith” of verses 2 and 5, so that being perfected (ἐπιτελεῖσθε)—i.e., sanctified—by the Spirit amounts to the same thing as being sanctified by faith.

5. Progressive Sanctification and Hebrews 12:14

Hebrews 12:14 states, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” New Calvinists and other Reformed theologians frequently cite this verse¹⁶⁸ as certain proof that progressive growth in holiness is necessary for final salvation. John Piper, for example, in a discussion with Timothy Keller about sanctification, said, “There’s a ‘holiness without which you won’t see the Lord.’ Now I take that passage to mean there are behaviors and attitudes, that if you persist in, you go to hell.”¹⁶⁹ Though frequently cited, it is rarely, if ever, carefully exegeted by New Calvinists. At issue here is whether the sanctification (or holiness) referred to is experiential or positional. That the difference between these two aspects of sanctification is important to maintain is admitted even by New Calvinists. Piper, in a recent New Calvinist book on sanctification, notes:

A book like this on sanctification is a book on being or becoming holy. And the reason I use the terms “being” or “becoming” holy is that the New Testament refers to our holiness in both of those senses—a condition of being holy and a process of becoming holy. The clearest place to see both of these in one chapter is Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10:10 says, “By [God’s] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” So there is a sense in which all those who believe in Jesus “have been sanctified.” They are holy. And then four verses later (v. 14) we read, “By a single

¹⁶⁸ For example, Robert A. Peterson, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages,” *Presbyterian* 17, no. 2 (1991): 99–103. Archer says the process of holiness is “an indispensable preparation for heaven,” and that “if the process does not go on at all, this is proof positive that the professing believer has never been born again and remains an unsaved sinner. He shall not ‘see God,’” Gleason L. Archer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 91.

¹⁶⁹ John Piper, “Piper and Keller Wrestle with Sanctification,” Desiring God Conference interview with John Piper and Tim Keller, July 11, 2012, time stamp about 04:45, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/piper-and-keller-wrestle-with-sanctification> (accessed August 12, 2014). Also, John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 68, 150; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 749; Kevin DeYoung, “Spirit-Powered, Gospel-Driven, Faith-Fueled Effort,” T4G (2012). Transcription at <http://flemingsburgbaptistyouth.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/t4g-5-kevin-deyoung-spirit-powered-gospel-driven-faith-fueled-effort-1-corinthians-1510/>; video at <http://t4g.org/media/2012/04/spirit-powered-gospel-driven-faith-fueled-effort-2/#.T42CT-vkyRY.wordpress> (accessed August 12, 2014). Too numerous to cite individually are over forty references to Hebrews 12:14 in John Piper’s published sermons from 1980 to 2009 in John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007); John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007); John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2009)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2009).

offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” So there is a sense in which Christians are both perfected already (are perfectly holy) and are being sanctified (being made holy). Both the condition of being holy and the process of becoming holy are prominent in the New Testament. Neither is minimized.¹⁷⁰

Piper is to be commended for acknowledging both aspects of sanctification in Hebrews 10, but he should have noted the same distinction in Hebrews 12:14. When the author of Hebrews exhorted his hearers to pursue sanctification, the sentiment is much like that of Paul’s in Philippians 3:11–14, where he spoke of the resurrection as the goal toward which he was pursuing. He had not yet attained it (verse 12), and did not expect to attain it until the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (verse 14). Nevertheless, it was a present goal toward which he was striving. Resurrection was already a positional reality for Paul (Colossians 3:1), but the pursuit of that positional reality was the experiential expression of his progressive sanctification. This is precisely the same way in which the author of Hebrews refers to positional sanctification as the goal toward which he exhorts his hearers to pursue. Olson notes,

A key proof-text of the holiness movements is Hebrews 12:14. . . . It has been assumed in this interpretation that the writer of Hebrews was using the word “sanctification” in the sense of experiential sanctification. However, he consistently used it for positional sanctification, which becomes ours at conversion. They fail to recognize that both the Hebrew and Greek words for “holiness” and its synonym “sanctification” have a primary meaning of “separation,” “set apart,” and that there is much about absolute, positional sanctification at the point of salvation.¹⁷¹

The primary exegetical issue related to Hebrews 12:14 is how the relative clause οὗ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὸν κύριον (“without which no one will see the Lord”) relates to the rest of the sentence. New Calvinist interpreters take it as qualifying the verb pursue, but grammatically it qualifies the noun ἁγιασμός. The New Calvinist interpretation suggests that we will not see the

¹⁷⁰ Piper et al., *Acting the Miracle*, 30.

¹⁷¹ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, 3rd ed. (Lynchburg, VA: Global Gospel Publishers, 2012), 242; see further at pp. 231–32.

Lord without pursuing holiness. Exegetically, one must ask what it is that one must have in order to see the Lord. Is it holiness, or is it the pursuit of holiness? In other words, is it the noun *ἁγιασμός*, or is it the verb pursue (*διώκετε*)? Grammatically, the pronoun can refer only to the noun, and the significance seems to be that one must have *ἁγιασμός* (positionally) in order to see God; further, the believer ought to pursue that holiness (experientially) in his walk with the Lord.

The context of Hebrews 12 is the subject of the Lord's discipline in the believer's life.¹⁷²

The assumption throughout the chapter is that it is referring to believers who are genuine children of God. All believers experience discipline (verses 5–7), and only those who are without discipline could be considered unsaved (verse 8). Verse 9 suggests that only those who submit to the Father shall live. “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?” A New Calvinist interpretation would suggest that eternal life depends upon submission to the Father in times of discipline. But what does “we shall live” mean? Is it a reference to eternal life, or does it refer to continuation in physical life? Either view might possibly fit the context. However, several arguments favor physical life:

- The context of the chapter is the discipline of children. Those in view here are already children. They have life. Discipline could take their life from them, but reverencing God is the proper response to discipline that would result in continuation of life.¹⁷³
- God is referred to in verse 9 as “the Father of [our] spirits.” This would reinforce the notion that this verse is describing those who are children of God, and thus already have eternal life.

¹⁷² See Appendix 4, “Structural Diagram of Hebrews 12:4–17.”

¹⁷³ See previous section on “Final Apostasy.”

- Ellingworth suggests that “the writer may be thinking of Exodus 20:12 . . . that you may live a long time in the land;”¹⁷⁴ thus, the reference would be to physical life.

Assuming, then, that this is a reference to continuation in physical life, one would conclude that failure to submit to the Father’s discipline may result in one’s physical life being cut short with the resultant loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.¹⁷⁵

Hebrews 12:14, then, does not make progressive sanctification a condition for final salvation. Rather, it assumes the assurance of final salvation for those who already possess positional sanctification, and exhorts them to make that sanctification the goal they pursue in their experience. This view is expressed succinctly by Fruchtenbaum:

Several times in this book he has drawn a contrast between positional sanctification (what the believer is in the Messiah) and practical sanctification (sanctification in day-to-day living). The way to pursue *the sanctification*, which is positional, is by seeking practical sanctification in their day-to-day living. Without positional sanctification, one cannot see God. Those who have believed have already been positionally sanctified, but now they must make it practical in day-to-day living.¹⁷⁶

6. Conclusion

Progressive sanctification in New Calvinism, being regarded as a requirement for ultimate salvation, is really the practical outworking of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Lack of progress in developing holiness leads to doubts about the genuineness of one’s confession and self-absorbed introspective questioning of one’s security in Christ. Since progress in holiness is difficult—if not impossible—to measure, all Christians who adopt the New Calvinist approach will ultimately be tormented in their spirits. The linking of progressive

¹⁷⁴ Ellingworth and Nida, *Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, 297.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 reprint), 163.

¹⁷⁶ Fruchtenbaum, “Messianic Jewish Epistles,” 177.

sanctification to ultimate salvation actually works against a believer's growth in holiness and serves only to promote a legalistic approach to the spiritual life.

Conclusion

The desire to see holiness developed in the lives of believers is a desire shared by all sincere Christians. Augustine developed the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as a means of motivating Christians to live pure, godly, and holy lives. Loss of salvation was used as the ultimate threat in an attempt to motivate professing Christians to live in obedience to the Lord. The Reformers, educated principally in Augustinian theology, took up the same doctrine with a slight modification. Rather than threatening loss of salvation, the Reformers stressed the eternal security of those who were genuinely saved, but they saw the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as describing the mark of genuine belief as opposed to false profession; nevertheless, it amounted to the same kind of negative, threatening motivation as was true in Augustine's day. New Calvinism has taken up the same approach as the Reformers. In contrast to this, dispensational scholars, while maintaining the security of the believer, reject the notion of the perseverance of the saints. Motivation for holy living from a dispensational perspective relies in large part on viewing the Judgment Seat of Christ as a distinct judgment intended only for believers. This judgment will not result in any believer being condemned to eternity in the Lake of Fire, but the severest form of condemnation will result in loss of reward. Thus, the Judgment Seat of Christ forms an important feature in the believer's motivation for holy living—albeit a negative motivation—but more significant are the positive motivations, such as the believer's gratitude for the gift of salvation, his love for the Lord, and his desire to be free from sin's bondage.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is inseparable from New Calvinist teaching and preaching. It is inconceivable that one could be a New Calvinist and not hold to this doctrine. Yet, in the history of Christian doctrine one finds no reference to its teaching before the time of Augustine. Major Reformed theologians are in agreement that the doctrine is “Augustinian” in origin. It was Augustine’s reinterpretation of Matthew 24:13 that led both him and later Reformers to the view that only those who persevere in holiness until the end of their lives will be saved. On the other hand, the Synod of Dort acknowledged that true believers might live most of their lives in vile sin, but they held that if such backsliders were genuinely saved, they would return to a life of faithfulness before death; they could not “continue and perish finally in their backslidings.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, the authors of the Canons of the Synod of Dort accepted the election of David and Peter,¹⁷⁸ but must have rejected the genuine salvation of Kings Asa and Joash, Ananias and Sapphira, those who commit the “sin unto death,” and of the “many who sleep” in the Corinthian congregation.¹⁷⁹ This caveat that allows for severe backsliding makes “perseverance until the end of one’s life” really not perseverance at all.

New Calvinists’ commitment to this point of Dortian Calvinism has led them to skew their interpretation of many Scriptures in an effort to fit the Scriptures into the mold of this doctrine. This practice of eisegesis betrays a weakness in the New Calvinist’s commitment to the

¹⁷⁷ *Canons of the Synod of Dort*, Fifth Head, Article 8.

¹⁷⁸ *Canons*, Article 4. This article affirms in the life of some believers, “Great and heinous sins by the flesh, the world, and Satan, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually are drawn into these evils. This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates.”

¹⁷⁹ New Calvinists, along with other Reformed theologians, generally do not approve of the notion of “Carnal Christians.” Yet Dort’s acknowledgment of the election of David and Peter appears to make allowance for such a category.

authority of the Bible among those who are otherwise strongly committed to the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

The most negative impact of the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is that it has robbed many believers of their assurance of salvation. In effect, this doctrine has tied salvation to conduct; those whose lives display any lack of devotion to God cannot be assured of their salvation. Even if they are presently living in general obedience to the Lord, as long as there remains the possibility that they may falter at some point before death, assurance of salvation could never be assumed. It seems preferable that assurance of salvation should rest solely on the promises of God's Word (1 John 5:13) and be separated from one's conduct.

Adherents to this doctrine have a legitimate concern for holiness. Indeed, holiness is expected and required in the lives of God's children (1 Peter 1:15). But the doctrine of perseverance of the saints is wielded by New Calvinists as the ultimate threat to frighten God's children into holy living. This is an unacceptable mixture of law and grace that is contrary to the teachings of the New Testament epistles (Galatians 3:3).

Chapter 5

Authority

New Calvinists and Authority

New Calvinists are to be commended for their enthusiastic support of the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Their commitment to the authority of the Bible has led to the emergence within the ranks of New Calvinist preachers of many notable exegetes and expositors. Such names as D. A. Carson, John Piper, and Timothy Keller are often associated with expository Biblical preaching, solid exegesis, and scholarship. However, such commitment to *sola Scriptura* appears to be inconsistent. It is one thing to claim a commitment to the authority of Scripture, another thing to consistently maintain such an authority.

Authority involves several related disciplines: the doctrine of revelation, hermeneutics, theological presuppositions, theological method, and epistemology. Also falling under the category of revelation is the view of Wayne Grudem (also adopted by John Piper, D. A. Carson, Mark Driscoll, et al¹) that the spiritual gift of prophecy in the New Testament is a continuing valid gift for today, but that such prophecy may be fallible. This view of prophecy will be referred to as “fallible prophecy.” Though fallible prophecy is not universal among New Calvinists, it is widespread enough to be considered broadly as characteristic of the movement. Due to this widespread acceptance of fallible prophecy, it will be examined first, followed in turn

¹ Michael John Beasley, *The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism* (The Armoury Ministries, 2013), 19, 22–23. For another very helpful critique of Grudem’s fallible prophecy view, see Bruce Compton, “Continuationism and a Closed Canon: Revisiting Wayne Grudem’s Two Levels of NT Prophecy,” paper delivered at the 2013 annual Evangelical Theological Society.

by critiques of hermeneutics and theological presuppositions, theological method as it relates to good and necessary consequence, and epistemology.

Fallible Prophecy

1. Prophecy and Authority

Prophecy is to be distinguished from other forms of oral communication empowered by the Holy Spirit, such as exhortation, preaching, and teaching (Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4:11).

As Ryrie notes,

Old Testament prophets brought God’s message to mankind (2 Sam. 23:2; Zech. 1:1), as did New Testament prophets (Eph. 3:5). They spoke with authority because they were communicating the Word of the Lord. A preacher or teacher today does not qualify as a prophet since he proclaims or explains God’s Word, previously given and written.²

Though prophecy may serve the purpose of exhorting or teaching, not all exhortation is prophecy, nor is all teaching prophecy. One who is an exhorter or teacher only has genuine authority to the degree in which his exhortation or teaching is based on prophecy. The prophet, on the other hand, speaks with authority by virtue of his speaking prophecy (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16). The authority that accompanies prophecy was as true for the New Testament prophet as it was for the Old Testament prophet; the New Testament prophet “is as much called of God and as highly to be esteemed as the prophet of old.”³

2. Tests of a Prophet

The authority that necessarily accompanied prophecy also introduced the danger of false prophets. How was one to know whether someone who claimed to be a prophet truly had

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 72.

³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV:286.

authority from God to speak as His prophet? Both Old Testament revelation and New Testament revelation spoke of the responsibility of God's people to test those who claimed to be prophets. Deuteronomy chapters 13 and 18 set the standard for the tests of a prophet. Two tests were given to Israel by God: the test of fulfillment and the test of doctrine. The test of fulfillment was a simple test based on whether a prediction came true or not. According to Deuteronomy 18:20–22,

“The prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” You may say in your heart, “How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

“[T]he genuineness of the prophet was exhibited in the accuracy of the prophecy.”⁴ A prophecy's failure of fulfillment resulted in the death penalty for the prophet. However, it is possible for some people to become very good at guessing or estimating what is likely to occur in the future. Such people may come to be falsely regarded as prophets. For such cases, a second test was also given, the test of doctrine. According to Deuteronomy 13:1–3,

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

In such a case, the prophet's prediction came true; however, his teaching was unorthodox (“Let us go after other gods”). In such a case, despite the accuracy of his prediction, his false doctrine proved him to be a false prophet. The tests were important for Israel, not only for verification of

⁴ Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 271.

the prophetic office, but supremely to discover whether the Israelites loved Yahweh, their God. Strict adherence to prophecy was a proof of their love; likewise, avoidance of all false prophecy was just as much a proof of their love for Yahweh.

The New Testament continued to promote the importance of testing prophets. First John 4:1 plainly states, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The specific tests to be used are not specified in 1 John, so it should be assumed that the same tests of fulfillment and doctrine were intended. Furthermore, when describing the spiritual gift of prophecy, the apostle Paul also mentioned a gift of discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). This was apparently a special ability enabling the possessor of this gift to test the prophets. Thus in both the Old and New Testaments, God’s people were expected to test the genuineness of those claiming to be prophets.

3. Prophecy and *Sola Scriptura*

The major thrusts of the Reformation are sometimes summarized in the terminology of the five great “*solae*”: *sola fides*, *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *Christus solus*, and *solus Deo gloriam*. Whether all five of these watchwords can be directly attributed to the Reformers themselves is debated, but from the time of Luther onward, the idea communicated by the phrase *sola Scriptura* was fundamental to all for which the Reformation stood.⁵ No position claiming to represent Reformed theology could credibly deny adherence to the principle of *sola Scriptura*. New Calvinism is no exception. Regarding the 2013 *Sola* Conference, devoted to the “*solae* of the Reformation,” Kevin DeYoung observes,

⁵ J. H. Elias, “Authority,” eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, and J. I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 65.

To my great surprise, we had almost 3,000 people in attendance, . . . mostly young people, to hear 7 hour-long sermons on the solas of the Reformation. . . . I met Lutherans and Methodists who were happy to find something so meaty in their backyard. I met young people with stacks of old books. . . . And they sat through long, sometimes dense messages exulting in the grace alone, that comes through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone.⁶

Reformed theology has traditionally been cessationist with regard to the spiritual gift of prophecy, based largely on its view of *sola Scriptura*. This tradition extends back to the very earliest of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin.

Luther's attachment to the principle of *sola Scriptura* led to two specific conflicts regarding those who claimed to have the gift of prophecy. The first was his conflict with the Zwickau prophets. Schaff notes,

He knew the enemy, but overcame it; his faith triumphed over doubt. In his later years he became more and more a conservative churchman. He repudiated the mystic doctrine of the inner word and spirit, insisted on submission to the written letter of the Scriptures, even when it flatly contradicted reason. He traced the errors of the Zwickau prophets.⁷

At the time, some, like Melancthon, wondered "if indeed the age of prophecy was *not* past."⁸ But Luther's cessationist response was definite. "When these men [i.e., the Zwickau prophets] speak of sweetness and of being transported to the third heaven, do not believe them. Divine majesty does not speak directly to men."⁹ For Luther, belief in the continuation of the gift of prophecy represented a "second front" in the Reformation's battles, a battle as important for

⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Young, Restless, and Reformed* blog, "What Do You Think of When You Think of the New Calvinism?" <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/12/11/what-do-you-think-of-when-you-think-of-the-new-calvinism> (accessed December 12, 2013).

⁷ Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 31. See also, Olaf Kuhr, "The Zwickau Prophets, the Wittenberg Disturbances, and Polemical Historiography," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 70, no. 2 (April 1996): 203–214

⁸ Paul L. Maier, "Fanaticism as a Theological Category in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44, no. 2–3 (July 1980): 174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

upholding *sola Scriptura* as the “first front,” his battle against Rome. This “second front” represented a “battle he had to wage for the rest of his life against the left wing of the Reformation, the radical approach which set the Spirit in opposition to Scripture.”¹⁰ Later, Luther continued this battle by rejecting the ongoing revelations claimed by Carlstadt,¹¹ referring to him in his Table Talk (Erl. ed., LXI. 911) as an “incarnate devil.”¹²

Calvin also held a view of *sola Scriptura* that required the cessation of prophecy. For Calvin, the coming of Christ—the Personal Word and *Scriptura* personified—meant the end of all prophecy.

Calvin, expounding Acts 21:9 in his 1554 commentary, explains that prophetic gifts were given only for a brief time because “Christ put an end to all prophecies.” In the same passage, he notes that, once the gift had been withdrawn, “there were, nevertheless, many fanatics who boasted that they were prophets.”¹³ His insistence on the cessation of prophecy, visions, oracles, and such revelatory gifts cannot be explained merely as a piece of anti-Radical polemic. . . . [T]he coming of Christ and the provision of scripture have put an end to any need for new revelation.¹⁴

From Luther and Calvin until the present, Reformed tradition has been fairly univocal in its cessationist position, due principally to its commitment to *sola Scriptura*. This makes New Calvinism’s acceptance of the continuation of the gift of prophecy particularly open to critique. Beginning with an evaluation of Grudem’s general argument for the continuation of all the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Schaff, 380–391.

¹² Ibid. Similar battles were fought against others such as Thomas Müntzer; see, e.g., Ronald F. Thiemann, “Law and Gospel in the Thought of Thomas Muentzer,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Nov. 1975): 347–363.

¹³ “*Scimus enim quum iam ablata esset illa facultas, exstitisse tamen multos fanaticos, qui se prophetas esse iactarent.*” Comm. Acts 21:9 (CO 45:478; CC 7:194–5).

¹⁴ Beth Y. Langstaff, *Temporary Gifts: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Cessation of Miracles*, PhD dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999, 143, 147.

charismatic gifts, this critique will proceed to examine his specific arguments for the continuation of prophecy.

4. Definition of Terms

The phenomenon of prophecy is found frequently in both the Old and New Testaments. In this dissertation, the term “prophecy” will be used to refer to special revelation that consists of authoritative communication from God to man in spoken or written words.¹⁵ These words may be descriptive of other forms of special revelation, such as dreams, visions, and miracles, but the prophecy itself refers to the words, either written or spoken. It is in this respect that Peter refers to the “prophetic word” (ὁ προφητικὸς λόγος, 2 Peter 1:19). According to Enns, “Through direct revelation the prophet received knowledge of divine ‘mysteries’ (1 Cor. 13:2) that man would not otherwise know.”¹⁶ This prophetic word has reference to both forthtelling (chiefly paraenesis, but also narrative and instruction) and foretelling (prediction of future events).¹⁷ Indeed, though perhaps popularly understood as primarily foretelling, the Biblical use of the term “prophecy” may involve more forthtelling than foretelling. The first two chapters of Isaiah are illustrative of these two features of prophecy: chapter 1 consists of an exhortation to repentance; chapter 2 contains a prediction of the future Messianic kingdom.

5. General Arguments for Continuation of Miracles, Prophecy, and Tongues

Grudem addresses the continuation of all three charismatic gifts generally by appealing to two passages of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10.

¹⁵ Chafer said that a prophet was “one who spoke for God” (*Systematic Theology*, IV:285).

¹⁶ Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 271.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV:285–286.

First Corinthians 1:7 states, “So then, you are not lacking in any gift [χάρισμα], while you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Grudem argues that this verse is

a general statement from Paul about the purpose of spiritual gifts in the New Testament age. In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul ties the possession of spiritual gifts (Gk. *χάρισμα*, from *χάρισμα*, G5922) to the activity of waiting for the Lord’s return: “you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

Grudem’s point is that as long as Christians are waiting for Christ’s return, all the spiritual gifts should be considered normative. But the fact that the carnal Corinthian believers possessed the gifts (in general) as they awaited the Lord’s return in no way signifies that the exceptional gifts of chapter 13 were intended by God to last until the return of Christ. In chapter 13 Paul singles out prophecy, knowledge, and tongues as somehow unique because they cease. First Corinthians 1:7 merely proves that the other gifts continue at least until Christ’s return. If anything, the fact that prophecy, knowledge, and tongues are singled out for special comment about their cessation in 13:10–12 forms a contrast with the statement of 1:7 about the gifts in general being in possession until the return of Christ.

First Corinthians 13:8–10. This passage is claimed both by many continuationists and many cessationists as the bullet-proof argument for their position. This alone should serve as a caution against simplistic approaches to the interpretation of this passage. Cessationists focus on verses 8 and 10, whereas continuationists focus on verses 10 and 12. The passage in its entirety reads as follows:

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly,

¹⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 1034.

but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

All are in agreement that verse 8 speaks of the cessation of these gifts; differences emerge over the timing. Cessationists generally hold that τέλειον in verse 10 refers to maturity and may also refer to the completion of the Canon. The idea of maturity appears to be supported by the following illustration relating to childhood and manhood. Continuationists, on the other hand, take the expression “face to face” in verse 12 to refer either to (1) the Second Coming or (2) our presence with God in Heaven. Grudem puts it as follows:

The meaning of verse 12 seems to require that verse 10 is talking about the time of the Lord’s return. The word “then” (Gk. τότε, G5538) in verse 12 refers to the time “when the perfect comes” in verse 10. This is evident from looking at verse 12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know even as I have been known” (Grudem’s translation).

When shall we see “face to face”? When shall we know “even as we have been known”? These events can only happen when the Lord returns.

The phrase “see face to face” is several times used in the Old Testament to refer to seeing God personally.¹⁹

Grudem’s argument was adopted by Mark Driscoll in a sermon preached at Mars Hill Church on June 9, 2013, titled, “Empowered by the Spirit to Follow Jesus.” Driscoll’s dependence on Grudem is apparent.

When, when does it cease? When does tongues conclude? When is it over, right? What’s the expiration date on the box for tongues? When’s it over? Was it over in the first century, or is it not over yet? What’s the answer?

Well, let’s read the book that the Holy Spirit wrote: “When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” The cessationists then say, “And the perfect is the perfect Word of God. Now that we have the perfect Word of God, we don’t need certain supernatural, miraculous, spiritual gifts.” OK, Mars Hill, do we believe that the Word of God is

¹⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1033. In footnote 24, Grudem cites Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10; Judges 6:22; Ezekiel 20:35.

perfect? Absolutely. Absolutely. But the perfect being spoken of there is not the conclusion of the writing of the Bible.

Read with me. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” Oh, so the perfect has a face. The perfect has a face. Well, who are we talking about now? OK, just so you know, one perfect guy, OK? Let’s all say it together. His name? [*Congregation responds, “Jesus.”*] Nailed it. Good job, Mars Hill. OK, so one perfect guy shows up, and we see him face to face—that’s the Bible’s language for friendship. So, when do these gifts cease? When? When Jesus comes back, when we see him face to face.²⁰

Both Grudem and Driscoll have misunderstood Paul’s rhetoric in this verse. The expression “face to face” is probably not a reference to believers’ face-to-face presence with the Lord, but is still a part of the metaphor. Grudem insists that the expression “face to face” in the Bible regularly refers to “seeing God personally.” This is simply not the case. In fact, it is also used in Scripture of seeing others face-to-face (e.g., Amaziah and Jehoash, 2 Kings 14:8; 2 Chronicles 25:17; Zedekiah and the king of Babylon, Jeremiah 32:4; 34:3; an accused before his accusers in Roman law, Acts 25:16; Paul with the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10:1; Paul with the Colossians, Colossians 2:1; Paul with the Thessalonians, 1Thessalonians 2:17; 3:10; John and the recipient of 2 John, 2 John 12; John and the recipient of 3 John, 3 John 14). In fact, unless 1 Corinthians 13:12 is the lone exception, Paul never uses the phrase of seeing God face-to-face, but uses it five times of seeing man face-to-face. More importantly, however, in verse 12 Paul is using a metaphor about a man seeing his face in a mirror. It is just poor hermeneutics to understand “now we see dimly in a mirror” as metaphorical, but to understand “but then face to face” as literal. It is much more likely that both expressions form parts of the metaphor. The seeing face-to-face is part of the mirror metaphor. Twenty-first-century Western culture has a difficult time understanding this metaphor. In the first-century AD, metal-coated glass mirrors

²⁰ Mark Driscoll, “Empowered by the Spirit to Follow Jesus,” <http://www.christianpost.com/news/cessationists-are-wrong-about-speaking-in-tongues-says-pastor-mark-driscoll-95341> (accessed August 3, 2013).

were almost unknown. They appear for the first time in the late first-century Sidon,²¹ and then only among the very elite and wealthy. For most people in Paul's day, a "mirror" consisted either of a bowl/pool of water, or, among the wealthy, a highly polished piece of bronze. The point of Paul's metaphor seems to be that when you met someone face-to-face, that person could actually see you with greater clarity than you could see yourself. Gordon D. Fee, one who is certainly sympathetic with New Calvinism's position on the gifts, gets the metaphor right, although he makes the wrong application. Fee says, "The emphasis is . . . to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone face to face."²² Unfortunately, he then goes on to make the following conclusion:

The analogy, of course, breaks down a bit since one sees one's own face in a mirror, and Paul's point is that in our present existence one "sees" God (presumably), or understands the "mysteries," only indirectly. It is not a *distorted* image that we have in Christ through the Spirit; but is as yet *indirect*, not complete. To put all this in another way, but keeping the imagery, "Our present 'vision' of God, as great as it is, is as nothing when compared to the real thing that is yet to be; it is like the difference between seeing a reflected image in a mirror and seeing a person face to face." In our own culture the comparable metaphor would be the difference between seeing a photograph and seeing someone in person. As good as a picture is, it is simply not the real thing.²³

Fee still wants to have the "face-to-face" image fulfilled only when we are in God's actual presence. Rather, Paul's point was that, during the foundational stage of the church, there was not a mature knowledge of the things of the Lord, and this was due to an incomplete (i.e., immature) canon of Scripture. The early church's knowledge was akin to a man's seeing a dim

²¹ E. König, "Mirrors, Hebrew" in Samuel Jackson Macauley, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), VII, 389. König offers the following details: "In Egypt the mirrors were of tin; with the Greeks of brass, silver, gold, etc.; among the Romans commonly of copper, mixed with tin, zinc, and other materials. The Talmud knew only of metal mirrors. Pliny asserts that glass mirrors (unsilvered) were invented in Sidon, but the first certain testimony comes from Alexander Aphrodisiensis at the beginning of the third century."

²² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 648.

²³ *Ibid.*

image of himself in a piece of polished bronze. A time would come, however, when the church would possess a completed, mature Canon, and then knowledge would be as clear as when one man sees another man face-to-face. This approach seems to make the best sense of the context, is culturally informed as to the use of mirrors in the first century, and avoids the difficulty of cutting the metaphor in two. Neither side in this debate has a bullet-proof case in 1 Corinthians 13, but the completed Canon view has excellent merit. In the end, the argument for cessationism needs to go elsewhere than 1 Corinthians 13.

6. Specific Argument for Continuation of Prophecy

Grudem's argument for the continuation of prophecy rests entirely on the presumption that New Testament prophecy is somehow different than Old Testament prophecy, and that, therefore, New Testament prophecy can be less than one hundred percent authoritative and inerrant. Grudem admits that this point is absolutely essential to his continuationist position:

Now *if* New Testament congregational prophecy was like Old Testament prophecy and New Testament apostolic words in its authority, then this cessationist objection would indeed be true. . . . I have argued extensively elsewhere that ordinary congregational prophecy in New Testament churches did *not* have the authority of Scripture.²⁴

A fresh examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift will show that it should be defined not as “predicting the future,” nor as “proclaiming a word from the Lord,” nor as “powerful preaching—but rather as “*telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.*”²⁵

Grudem does something here that he does frequently in his continuationist arguments; he simply redefines terms to his own liking and then argues on the basis of his redefinition. So the real cessationist argument then must be against the continuationist redefinition of “prophecy” as

²⁴ Grudem, 1039.

²⁵ Grudem, 1049.

something that can be errant. Grudem’s expression “a fresh examination of the New Testament” reveals that he is committing the same kind of hermeneutical error here that leads to amillennialism and covenant theology, namely that of reading the New Testament without taking its Old Testament background into consideration. The words “prophet,” “prophecy,” and “prophesy” all have a foundation in the Old Testament. The New Testament authors used these words in a way that is consistent with their meaning in the Old Testament. David Aune writes,

In early Christianity the exclusive use of the term *prophētēs* as a designation for a human medium of divine revelation is consciously borrowed from the widely accepted equation in Judaism of the Greek word *prophētēs* with the Hebrew term *nabi’* (reflected in the LXX). The term *prophētēs* occurs 144 times in the NT, 86 of which refer to OT prophets. Similarly, in the Apostolic Fathers the word occurs 58 times, 37 of which refer to OT prophets. The early Christian application of the designation *prophētēs* to individual Christians, then, was originally determined by the prevalent conception of the prophetic role in the OT. In early Judaism the term “prophet” (*nabi’* or *prophētēs*) was rarely applied to those who were not OT prophets or eschatological prophets. In early Christianity this reluctance to apply the designation to contemporary figures was completely overcome, and the term *prophētēs* was freely applied to those who were regarded as inspired spokesmen of God. In the gospels the title is used of John the Baptist ten times and of Jesus nine times.²⁶

Other Greek words were available to Paul that might have meant a “word brought spontaneously to mind,” such as ὑποφήτης, μάντις, προμαντις, θεομαντις, θεοπρόπος, χρησμολογος, χρήστης, etc.²⁷ Grudem’s definition is a theological definition, not a lexical one.

a. Is New Testament prophecy different from Old Testament prophecy?

According to Grudem, “The Greek word προφήτης (G4737, ‘prophet’) at the time of the New Testament had a very broad range of meanings. It generally did not have the sense ‘one who speaks God’s very words’ but rather ‘one who speaks on the basis of some external

²⁶ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 195.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23n.

influence' (often a spiritual influence of some kind)."²⁸ Not only does he flatly deny the standard meaning of "prophet," he attempts to shift this meaning to another word:

In the New Testament there were also people who spoke and wrote God's very words and had them recorded in Scripture, but we may be surprised to find that Jesus no longer calls them "prophets" but uses a new term, "apostles." The apostles are the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophets (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 1:8–9; 11–12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Peter 3:2). It is the apostles, not the prophets, who have authority to write the words of New Testament Scripture.²⁹

In response, we should note that the terms προφητεύω, προφήτης, and προφητεία have a history of usage in the Old Testament. The New Testament writers frequently used these terms precisely the same way as in the Old Testament. The fact that extra-biblical contexts in the first-century Greek used these words in other senses in no way requires us to import such meanings into their biblical usage. The New Testament usage of these terms places prophecy on the same level of authority as revelation from God. Gerhard Friedrich concurs:

All prophecy rests on revelation, 1 C. 14:30. The prophet does not declare what he has taken from tradition or what he has thought up himself. He declares what has been revealed to him. The ἀποκάλυψις of 1 C. 14:26 is the revelation which is imparted to the prophet and which is to become prophetic proclamation in the congregation, 1 C. 14:26–30. Thus prophecy is very closely related to revelation.³⁰

Grudem's strategy amounts to redefining terms in order to fit his theology. Substituting "apostles" as the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament prophets sets up a false dichotomy between prophets and apostles. The term "prophet" can be inclusive of "apostles." If so, then Grudem's argument is completely invalid. Grudem even admits later in his treatment of

²⁸ Grudem, 1050.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gerhard Friedrich, "D. Prophets and Prophecies in the New Testament, 7. Revelation and Prophecy," in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 6:853.

prophecy that such was the case: “Of course, the words *prophet* and *prophecy* were *sometimes used of the apostles* in contexts that emphasized the external spiritual influence (from the Holy Spirit) under which they spoke (so Rev. 1:3; 22:7; and Eph. 2:20; 3:5).”³¹

b. Testing of prophets

The Old Testament saint was commanded in the law to test prophets as to whether they were true or false prophets. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 established a test of doctrine, and Deuteronomy 18:20–22 established a test of fulfillment. The punishment for a false prophet under the Old Testament theocracy was death by stoning. The severity of culpability, not only for the false prophets themselves, but also of those who tolerate them, is well illustrated by Jeremiah 14:15–16.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them—yet they keep saying, “There will be no sword or famine in this land”—by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them—neither them, nor their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters—for I will pour out their own wickedness on them.

Now, under the age of grace, we are no longer under a theocracy, and we do not stone false prophets to death,³² but the New Testament saint was urged to test the prophets, as was the Old Testament saint (see 1Thessalonians 5:19–22 and 1 John 4:1–3). This indicates a strong continuity between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament prophecy. Nevertheless, Grudem comments on 1 Thessalonians 5:21,

³¹ Grudem, 1051. Aune claims that this attempt to “regard the early Christian *apostles* as the true functional equivalents of the OT prophets, appears to oversimplify the role of the OT prophet” (Aune, 217).

³² Beasley suggests that the New Testament parallel to stoning is excommunication, the ultimate expression of Church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:12–13). Beasley, *Fallible Prophets*, 41.

When Paul tells them to “test everything” it must include at least the prophecies he mentioned in the previous phrase. He implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good when he encourages them to “hold fast *what is good*.” This is something that could never have been said of the words of an Old Testament prophet, or the authoritative teachings of a New Testament apostle.”³³

Likewise, Piper said in an interview recorded January 17, 2013, “Prophecy in the New Testament, at least the way it’s treated in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, doesn’t appear to have the same Scripture quality inerrant, inspiration and authority that when in Isaiah, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ You don’t go up to Isaiah and say, ‘I’m gonna test what you’ve said now and hold fast to what is good and throw the rest away.’ But you do that with New Testament prophecy.”³⁴

Both Grudem and Piper assume that Paul has in view prophecies that contain both good and bad. But much more likely is that there were good prophets (to be accepted) and bad (i.e., false) prophets that were to be rejected. Paul’s admonition is precisely in line with what God had commanded the Old Testament saint to do with respect to the Old Testament prophets.

c. New Testament examples of prophecy

Grudem puts forth two examples of New Testament prophets whom he says gave prophecies that contained errors. The first is Acts 21:4. The disciples of Tyre “kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.” Grudem claims that Paul “disobeyed” this prophecy, which he would never have done if it had authority equal to Scripture. Yet the verse could simply mean that the disciples correctly and accurately prophesied that Paul would be

³³ Grudem, 1054.

³⁴ John Piper, “What Is the Gift of Prophecy in the New Covenant,” David Matthews’ interview of John Piper (January 17, 2013), <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues>. Quotation begins shortly after 0:18.

arrested in Jerusalem, and that on the basis of this inerrant prophecy, they urged him not to set foot in Jerusalem.

The second, and more important, example is Acts 21:10–11. Here we read that Agabus “took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”’” On the face of it, the expression “Thus says the Holy Spirit” (τάδε λέγει) would seem to indicate that Agabus’s prophecy was of equal authority with the Old Testament prophets who used the similar expression, “Thus says Yahweh.” Grudem, however, seeks to lessen the significance of this introductory formula. He suggests that

the same words (Gk. τάδε λέγει) are used by Christian writers just after the time of the New Testament to introduce very general paraphrases or greatly expanded interpretations of what is being reported (so Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 7:1–2 [about a.d. 108] and *Epistle of Barnabas* 6:8; 9:2, 5 [a.d. 70–100]). The phrase can apparently mean, “This is generally (or approximately) what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.”³⁵

Grudem’s line of reasoning is faulty on several counts. First, he has misrepresented both Ignatius and Barnabas. Here are the actual quotes to which he has referred:

Ignatius, *Philadelphians*, 7:1–2

“But the Spirit proclaimed these words: Do nothing without the bishop.”³⁶

τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ἐκήρυσσεν λέγον τάδε· Χωρίς τοῦ ἐπισκόπου μηδὲν ποιεῖτε.³⁷

³⁵ Grudem, 1056.

³⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 83–84.

³⁷ www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/ignatius-philadelphians.htm (accessed May 6, 2014).

This reference to Ignatius is inaccurate for two reasons: (1) The introductory formula is not the same. The verb is ἐκήρυσσεν, not λέγει. (2) Nothing suggests that this is an “approximation” rather than a direct quote.

Barnabas 6:8

And Moses also says to them, “Behold these things, saith the Lord God: Enter into the good land which the Lord swore [to give] to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and inherit ye it, a land flowing with milk and honey.”³⁸

τί λέγει ὁ ἄλλος προφήτης Μωϋσῆς αὐτοῖς; Ἴδού, τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός· Ἐισέλθατε εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν ἀγαθὴν, ἣν ὤμοσεν κύριος τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, καὶ κατακληρονομήσατε αὐτήν, γῆν ῥέουσαν γάλα καὶ μέλι.³⁹

The quotation is a conflation of Exodus 33:1 and Leviticus 20:24:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it’” (Exodus 33:1).

Hence I have said to you, “You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples (Leviticus 20:24).

This reference to Barnabas 6:8 is inaccurate for two reasons: (1) Though the introductory formula is closer here than in the preceding Ignatius quote, it is still not identical to Acts 21:11, since the subject of the verb here is κύριος ὁ θεός, not τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. (2) While what follows the introductory formula is indeed a “summary,” or more accurately, a conflation of Exodus 33:1 and Leviticus 20:24, it is an accurate representation and carries the full authority of Scripture.

³⁸ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “The Epistle of Barnabas,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 140.

³⁹ http://www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/barnabas_a.htm.

Barnabas 9:2

And again He says, “Hear, O Israel, for these things saith the Lord thy God.” And once more the Spirit of the Lord proclaims, “Who is he that wishes to live forever? By hearing let him hear the voice of my servant.”⁴⁰

καὶ πάλιν λέγει· Ἴσραήλ, ὅτι τάδε λέγε κύριος ὁ θεός σου. καὶ πάλιν τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου προφητεύει· Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ θέλων ζῆσαι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα; ἀκοῆ ἀκουσάτω τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ παιδός μου.⁴¹

The quote is from Psalm 34:11–13:

Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

This reference to Barnabas 9:2 is inaccurate for two reasons: (1) The introductory formula is not identical to Acts 21:11, since the subject of the verb here is κύριος ὁ θεός, not τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, though τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου is made to be the subject of προφητεύει. (2) What follows the introductory formula is an accurate representation of Psalm 34:12 and carries the full authority of Scripture.

Barnabas 9:5

He saith to them, “These things saith the Lord your God”—(here I find a new commandment)—“Sow not among thorns, but circumcise yourselves to the Lord.” And why speaks He thus: “Circumcise the stubbornness of your heart, and harden not your neck?” And again: “Behold, saith the Lord, all the nations are uncircumcised in the flesh, but this people are uncircumcised in heart.”⁴²

λέγει πρὸς αὐτούς· Τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ θεός ὑμῶν (ᾧδε εὕρισκω ἐντολήν)· Μὴ σπείρητε ἐπ’ ἀκάνθαις, περιτμήθητε τῷ κυρίῳ ὑμῶν. καὶ τί λέγει; Περιτμήθητε καρδίαν ὑμῶν, καὶ

⁴⁰ Roberts, “Epistle of Barnabas,” 142.

⁴¹ http://www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/barnabas_a.htm.

⁴² Roberts, “Epistle of Barnabas,” 142.

τον τράχηλον ὑμῶν οὐ σκληρυνεῖτε. λάβε πάλιν· Ἴδού, λέγει κύριος, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἀπερίτμητα ἀκροβυστίαν, ὁ δὲ λαὸς οὗτος ἀπερίτμητος καρδίας.⁴³

For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, “Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns (Jeremiah 4:3).

So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer (Deuteronomy 10:16).

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised— Egypt and Judah, and Edom and the sons of Ammon, and Moab and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart” (Jeremiah 9:25–26).

This reference to Barnabas 9:5 is inaccurate for two reasons: (1) The introductory formula is not identical to Acts 21:11, since the subject of the verb here is κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, with no reference to πνεῦμα at all. (2) What follows the introductory formula is an accurate representation of Jeremiah 4:3, Deuteronomy 10:16, and Jeremiah 9:25 and carries the full authority of Scripture.

So Grudem’s attempt to lessen the significance of Agabus’s prophecy by appealing to Ignatius and Barnabas has misrepresented these two early church fathers. In fact, they appear to use an introductory formula *similar to* that used in Acts 21:11 to introduce quotations carrying the full force of authoritative Scripture. Even more damaging to Grudem’s portrayal of the introductory formula of Acts 21:11, however, is the fact that he has cited early church fathers while entirely ignoring numerous New Testament references with much stronger parallels. The New Testament uses the formula *τάδε λέγει* to introduce quotations that have the full force of inerrant, authoritative revelation from God. Beasley has compiled these New Testament references:

⁴³ http://www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/barnabas_a.htm.

- **Acts 21:11:** And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “*This is what the Holy Spirit says [tade legei to pneuma to ‘agion]: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’*” In all of the parallels supplied below, the reader should note the *arthrous* use of the word *pneuma* which is rightly translated as *the Spirit*, i.e. *the Spirit of God*. In Acts 21:11 and Hebrews 3:7, we have the addition of *to ‘agion, i.e., the Holy Spirit*. These examples align themselves most closely with Acts 21:11, and in every case, the question of *indicative attribution* is quite clear. It is *the Spirit* of God who speaks with *indicative certainty*, delivering the revelation of God Himself:
- **Acts 8:29:** “*the Spirit said [eipen de to pneuma] to Philip, ‘Go up and join this chariot...’*” This revelation from God was given in reference to Philip’s needed ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip rightly obeyed this declaration of the Lord.
- **Acts 13:2:** Luke records for us what the Spirit revealed concerning Paul and Barnabas, “*...the Holy Spirit said [eipen to pneuma to ‘agion], ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’*” (Acts 13:2). Once again, like Paul and his companions in Acts 21, we find submission and obedience to the will of the Lord.
- **Hebrews 3:7:** Outside of the book of Acts, we have yet another, unmistakable parallel in Hebrews – 7 Therefore, just as *the Holy Spirit says [kathos legei to pneuma to ‘agion], ‘Today if you hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. 10 “Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways’; 11 As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’*”
- **Revelation 2:7:** John was commissioned by the Lord to record the book of revelation for the church and her posterity: “write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches.” In view of this, it is no wonder that the same expression appears in view of the Spirit’s activity of direct revelation: **2:7** ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit says[to pneuma legei]* to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’ **Revelation 14:13:** And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” *says the Spirit [legei to pneuma],* “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

In each of these examples, every use of the verb *legō* is in the indicative voice [*sic*], denoting direct and real action. Thus, there is no sense in which we could say that the Spirit “might be indicating” or is “possibly saying” etc. . . . Grudem’s own tactic of

focusing exclusively on the words *tade legei* fails to support his connotation of “the Spirit might be indicating” or is “possibly saying.”⁴⁴

Grudem also contends that Agabus’s prophecy was “nearly correct but not quite.” He finds two faults with the prophecy: (1) it was the Romans, not the Jews, who bound Paul (Acts 21:33; 22:29), and (2) the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force (21:32). However, the argument that it was the Romans, not the Jews, who bound Paul is an argument from silence. The account in Acts does not say that the Jews did not bind Paul. In fact, they likely did restrain him in some way in order to beat him in the temple. Acts 24:6 records that “the Jewish attorney, Tertullus, testified before Felix that Paul had been *arrested*.”⁴⁵ Tertullus’s use of the term κρατέω suggests at least the possibility, if not probability, that Paul was bound by the Jews. The same verb is used in Matthew 14:3 of the arrest of John the Baptist, where it is recorded that “when Herod had John arrested (κρατέω), he bound (δέω) him and put him in prison.” Similarly, in Revelation 20:2, Satan is seized (κρατέω) and then bound (δέω). John 18:12, while not using κρατέω, portrays Jesus as “arrested” (συλλαμβάνω) and “bound” (δέω). So it is at least likely that once “arrested” by the Jews in the temple, Paul was in fact bound *by the Jews* before he was turned over to the Romans.⁴⁶ A case cannot be made for Agabus’s prophecy being in error on this point. (2) The argument that the Romans rescued Paul by force ignores the fact that verse 32 specifically says that as the Roman official was approaching the scene, the mob stopped beating Paul. Thus, the Jews did in fact

⁴⁴ Beasley, 66–68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁶ An alternate view is put forth by Robert Thomas in “Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of the Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas TX), 149, no. 593 (1992): 82–96. According to Thomas, the Romans were the intermediate agents of the Jews’ binding of Paul, while “the Jews were the ones who bound Paul, that is, they were the instigators of his binding” (p. 91).

deliver Paul to the Romans.⁴⁷ Aune concludes, “There is no reason to regard the claims of Agabus (Acts 21:11) . . . as in any way inferior to those of John the prophet.”⁴⁸

So Grudem has not proved that New Testament prophecy was in any way different in character or degree of accuracy from Old Testament prophecy. By his own admission, Grudem claims that he must prove that New Testament prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy. He attempts to do this simply by redefining words in order to fit his theology. His redefinition of prophecy in the New Testament fails in three ways: (1) linguistically, (2) in terms of the testing of prophets, and (3) in his failed attempt to find examples of errant New Testament prophecy.

Hermeneutics and Theological Presuppositions

New Calvinists are not the only ones guilty of letting theological presuppositions drive their exegesis, but it seems particularly egregious for those who exalt the reformation cry of *sola Scriptura* to engage in eisegesis. At least three theological presuppositions predetermine the exegetical conclusions of New Calvinists: (1) from the canons of the Synod of Dort: the doctrine of perseverance of the saints,⁴⁹ (2) also from the synod of Dort, the doctrine of limited atonement, and (3) the definition of “repentance” as both “sorrow” and a “turning from sin.”

1. Limited Atonement and the Canons of the Synod of Dort

The canons of the Synod of Dort, popularly known by the acronym TULIP, are, by anyone’s estimation, a sine qua non of any form of “Calvinism,” including the New Calvinism.

⁴⁷ Nathan Busenitz, “Throwing Prophecy under the Agabus,” *The CrippleGate for a New Generation of Non-conformists* (March 15, 2012), <http://thecripplegate.com/throwing-prophecy-under-the-agabus> (accessed August 21, 2013).

⁴⁸ Aune, 208.

⁴⁹ See chapter 4, “Perseverance of the Saints.”

In their vigorous support of the canons, New Calvinists frequently practice eisegesis in their exposition of supporting Scriptures. Perseverance of the saints may be considered one representative doctrine of TULIP that rests on questionable exegetical grounds. For an analysis of the perseverance of the saints, see chapter 4. Another representative doctrine is limited atonement.⁵⁰

“Limited atonement” is the name popularly given to the Second Head of Doctrine of the Council of Dort, namely, “The Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men Thereby.”⁵¹ For centuries theologians have debated the validity of this doctrine, and it “still divides some of the most orthodox and scholarly theologians.”⁵² The controversy surrounding this doctrine mostly involves pejorative connotations related to the use of the term “limited.” Despite that this term arose because of the acronym and does not actually occur anywhere in the canons themselves, New Calvinists at times go to great lengths in their attempts to demonstrate that the notion of limitation in the atonement is supported by Scripture. New Calvinists hold tenaciously to this point of doctrine, even though “not all who are rightfully classified as Calvinists accept this one feature of that system.”⁵³ As with attempts to provide a Scriptural defense of other doctrines suggested by TULIP, support for the idea of limitation in the atonement is based either on eisegesis or selective use of evidence neglecting Scripture that supports an unlimited atonement.

⁵⁰ It is not the intention of this dissertation to dispute the doctrinal convictions expressed in the second head of the canons of the Council of Dort. That would involve an entirely different set of theological arguments. The purpose of this section dealing with limited atonement is to demonstrate the use of eisegesis on the part of New Calvinists in their attempt to support the notion of limitation in the atonement.

⁵¹ Though it is the third point according to the TULIP acronym. The Latin title for Dort’s Second Head is, *Secundum Doctrinae Caput, De Morte Christi, et Hominum per Eam Redemptionie*.

⁵² Lewis Sperry Chafer, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 548 (1980): 304. This article first appeared in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 417 (January 1948).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Either way, such efforts point to a weak view of Biblical authority. Of course, this would be entirely unnecessary if New Calvinists would simply be content with upholding the doctrine as expressed by the Synod of Dort, since the authors of the canons spoke of the atonement as being “of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.”⁵⁴

Some New Calvinists have attempted to avoid use of this negative terminology, preferring rather to use such titles as “definite atonement”⁵⁵ or “particular redemption,”⁵⁶ but these attempts are merely playing with semantics in order to make the position appear more palatable. The fact remains that whether definite atonement or particular redemption, it is still a limited atonement. Grudem affirms this when he says of particular redemption, “Christ died for particular people (specifically, those who would be saved and whom he came to redeem). . . . The opposite position, that Christ’s death actually paid for the sins of all people who ever lived, is called ‘general redemption’ or ‘unlimited atonement.’”⁵⁷ Despite claims of preferring such terms as “definite” or “particular,” these same authors attempt to show that the Scriptures do indeed present a limited view of the atonement. Piper explained this limited view during the 2008 Desiring God conference:

God does intend to obtain the grace of faith and repentance for a definite group by the death of Christ. . . . He didn’t do it for everyone. So at this level the atonement becomes “limited.” And this is what Arminians stumble over: is there anything that God would do

⁵⁴ Canons of Dort, Second Head, Article 3. Article 4 also asserts that the death of Christ was of “infinite value and dignity.”

⁵⁵ R. C. Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology: Limited Atonement,” Ligonier Ministries blog (November 19, 2012), <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-limited-atonement> (accessed August 31, 2014).

⁵⁶ John Piper, *Five Points* (Christian Focus Publications, Kindle Edition, 2013), Kindle Location 581. Though he claims to prefer the expression “particular redemption,” Piper still uses the language of limitation with regard to the application of atonement, *Five Points*, Kindle Locations 104, 218, 570, 579, 609. Also, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 596.

⁵⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 596.

to get some unbelievers saved that he would not do for all? This “limitation” implies a choice on God’s part to save some and not all.⁵⁸

The notion of limitation in the atonement is never a direct teaching of Scripture, but rather arrived at by Reformed theologians through application of “good and necessary consequence.” Piper argues, for instance, that limited atonement is a logical necessity based on the doctrine of irresistible grace:

You begin to see how closely this doctrine of the atonement is connected with the previous one, irresistible grace. What I think the Bible teaches is that this very irresistible grace is purchased by the blood of Jesus. The new birth is blood-bought. The effectual call is blood-bought. The gift of repentance is blood-bought. None of these acts of irresistible grace is deserved. They came to us because Christ secured them by his blood and righteousness.⁵⁹

That Christ’s atonement was unlimited is the clear statement of many passages of Scripture. In the face of these, New Calvinists display a weak view of Scriptural authority by elevating their theological system above these clear statements of Scripture. Following is an examination of seven representative passages strongly supportive of an unlimited atonement. New Calvinist writings about the atonement either ignore these passages or practice eisegesis in order to maintain support for their particular view of the atonement.

a. 1 Timothy 2:3–4

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This passage illustrates the connection between the will of God and the atonement.

Gardosky says of this connection, “God is pleased when we pray for all people. The reason he is

⁵⁸ John Piper, “TULIP, Part 7, Limited Atonement” (March 15, 2008), <http://www.desiringgod.org/seminars/tulip-part-7>, time stamp begins at 43:33 and ends at 44:45 (accessed June 18, 2014).

⁵⁹ Piper, *Five Points*, Kindle Locations 426–429.

comes in v. 4: God ‘desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’”⁶⁰ First Timothy 2:3–4 is a significant support for unlimited atonement and is cited in major works defending this view.⁶¹ Geisler notes that “even Charles Spurgeon, who believed in limited atonement, could not deny the obvious meaning of this text.”⁶² However, Piper’s failure to refer to this passage even once in his book *Five Points* demonstrates selective use of evidence. It is not as though Piper were unaware of the significance of this text. Thirteen years before writing *Five Points*, he included a discussion of this text in the chapter “Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved” in the book *Still Sovereign*.⁶³ In “Two Wills” Piper affirms based on 1 Timothy 2:4 that “God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men.”⁶⁴ And he adds, “God wills not to save all, even though he is willing to save all, because there is something else that he wills more, which would be lost if he

⁶⁰ Ken Gardosky, “The Will of God and the Death of Christ,” 96.

⁶¹ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 2; Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 201–202, 209, 212, 219; Chafer “For Whom Did Christ Die?” 319; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 371. While Calvin argued that “all” in verse 4 refers to “classes of men, and not to individual persons” (Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 219), other commentators have noted that “the term ‘all’ in v. 4 must refer to the same group as the reference to ‘everyone’ in v. 1. The petitions of v. 1 are to include all human beings, and the objects of Christ’s death must include the same group. It would certainly include all persons without distinctions of race or social standing, but it also refers to all persons individually” (Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34, The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992], 89.); cf. A. Duane Litfin, “1 Timothy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 734; Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 48.

⁶² Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 201. Geisler cites Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 150, 151, 154. Commenting on one hyper Calvinist’s interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:3–4, Spurgeon remarked, “I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read: ‘Who will not have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth’” (Geisler’s emphasis).

⁶³ John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 122. In this chapter, Piper states, “Therefore I affirm with John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin,” 122.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

exerted his sovereign power to save all. This is the solution that I as a Calvinist affirm along with Arminians.”⁶⁵ Yet in *Five Points* Piper affirms, “God did not do this for everyone. He did it for a ‘definite’ or a ‘particular’ group,”⁶⁶ and that he (Piper) is “jealous for this doctrine of limited atonement.”⁶⁷

It is equally surprising to find no references to 1 Timothy 2:3–4 in any of Grudem’s discussion of the doctrine of salvation in his *Systematic Theology*. He refers to this passage only once in his entire *Systematic Theology*, and that is in his section on the doctrine of the Church under a discussion of the relationship between the church and the state.⁶⁸ But in the section on the doctrine of salvation there is no extended discussion, no parenthetical reference, not even a mention in a footnote. How does one write a systematic theology and in the section specifically dealing with the doctrine of salvation not even mention a verse that says God desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth?⁶⁹

New Calvinist Michael Bird, on the other hand, in his *Evangelical Theology* acknowledges the unlimited implications of 1 Timothy 2:3–4, but still rejects the clear statement based on theological reasoning. He says,

Statements about God’s universal love, such as . . . God our Savior desires “all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), may be convenient biblical hooks for us on which to hang our universalistic hopes. However, at the end of the day, we cannot accept the universalistic

⁶⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁶ Piper, *Five Points* (Kindle Locations 522–523).

⁶⁷ Ibid., Location 581.

⁶⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 893.

⁶⁹ This is despite the fact that Grudem makes the following claim for his theological method: “A good theological analysis must find and treat fairly all the relevant Bible passages for each particular topic, not just some or a few of the relevant passages” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 24).

option because of the overwhelming testimony of Scripture and because of the character of God's justice.⁷⁰

This selective use of Biblical evidence suggests a weak view of the authority of Scripture that is willing simply to toss out Scriptural evidence that counters one's theological position.

b. 1 Timothy 2:5–6

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

This is another very clear text supporting the unlimited atonement of Christ, describing Christ's atonement as a ransom for all. As with the previous text, there is not a single reference to this text in Piper's *Five Points*.

Grudem strikes a more Amyrauldian position when commenting on 1 Timothy 2:6 that "Christ died to make salvation available to all people."⁷¹ According to Grudem, "Calvinists should be able to agree with Arminians on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:5–6 that God wills that all be saved."⁷²

c. 1 Timothy 4:10

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

⁷⁰ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 584. Bird's exalting of perceived logic over exegesis in this respect is clear from his further statement that "the only way that Jesus Christ can be appointed as the Savior of all people . . . while maintaining the sovereignty of God's decision in election, is through a scheme that makes the appointment of Christ as Redeemer logically prior to God's decision to provide salvation for the elect," Ibid. 525.

⁷¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 601.

⁷² Gardosky, "The Will of God and the Death of Christ," 18n90. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 684.

Here is another verse that should require some comment from those who undertake a serious treatment of the doctrine of limited atonement. New Calvinists have taken at least two approaches to explain this verse.

The first approach is that the Savior of all men refers to the universal gospel invitation. This is John Piper's view. While Piper maintains that Christ "died to save all *in some sense*," he denies that "the death of Christ is for all men in the *same sense*."⁷³ The sense in which the death of Christ is considered as for all men is seen in that it "is the foundation of the free offer of the gospel. . . . The sending of the Son is for the whole world in the sense that Jesus makes plain: *so that whoever believes in him should not perish*. In that sense God sent Jesus for everyone."⁷⁴ But this raises the question of whether the universal offer of the gospel is a bona fide offer. If God will regenerate and draw only the elect, as Calvinism insists, then in what sense is there a universal offer of the gospel in any legitimate sense? How can God be said legitimately to be the Savior of all men in this sense?

An analogy may be helpful at this point: Suppose a boat carrying five people on the Niagara River were to capsize and all five men wearing life jackets were being carried downstream toward the falls. Suppose further that a park ranger on the shore has five life preservers attached to ropes and that he has both the skill and ability to throw each man a life preserver and haul them to shore. The ranger might surmise that the five men were in violation of clear signs warning against boating so close to the falls, and that if he were to let them go, they would meet their justly deserved destruction. On the other hand, if moved by compassion, he elected to rescue three of the men and leave the other two to their justly deserved destruction, he

⁷³ Piper, *Five Points*, Kindle Location 450. Emphasis his.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 450–455. Emphasis his.

could easily throw life preservers to the three men he had elected to save. If he elected to save only three of the men, but then called out to all five of them, saying, “Just grab on to the life preserver I am throwing to you,” while only throwing three life preservers at only three of the men, how is it possible to say that such a park ranger was issuing an invitation for salvation to all five men? How could such a park ranger in any reasonable sense be considered the rescuer of all five men? Likewise, if God is truly the Savior of all men, there must be a bona fide offer of salvation to all men that goes beyond the limited or particular or definite redemption of extreme Calvinism. If the Holy Spirit draws only those whom God has elected, it does not seem that there could be any kind of a legitimate general call to salvation.

The second approach is that God is the Savior of all men only in the sense of rescuing from danger. This is Wayne Grudem’s view. According to Grudem, God is only the Savior of all men in the sense of common grace and deliverance from physical danger. He says that Paul “probably uses the word ‘Savior’ in the sense of ‘one who preserves people’s lives and rescues them from danger’ rather than the sense of ‘one who forgives their sins.’”⁷⁵ This was essentially the position taken by Calvin.⁷⁶ However, since the context of verse 8 prioritizes godliness over bodily exercise, and godliness has profit not only for this life but also for the life to come, the contextual focus seems to be on the “life to come” rather than on physical safety in the present life. This common grace view is given a bit more of a spiritual interpretation by some, according to which “Jesus saves all men from the immediate eternal punishment they deserve all during the time they are allotted to live on the earth, but He saves only the elect from eternal punishment

⁷⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 599n38. Grudem makes reference to George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* pp. 203–4.

⁷⁶ John, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 112 n2.

after they die.”⁷⁷ But this hardly seems worthy of the expression “Savior of all men.” As David Servant explains,

I hardly think, however, that this would make Jesus much of a “savior” to the non-elect, as it would have been better for them to never have been born than that they “enjoy” such a temporal “salvation.” Every second of “common grace” will cost them billions of years in hell where they will be tortured forever. The “common grace” that God extends to those predestined to be eternally damned makes Jesus more of a sadistic, deranged maniac than a savior to them. (What would you think of a person who conceives children with the intention of being kind to them for five years and then torturing them for seventy?)⁷⁸

Grudem appears to be coming at this verse with a predetermined object of avoiding its apparently clear implications of an unlimited atonement.

The best way to understand 1 Timothy 4:10 may be simply that God is the Savior of all men in that He provided a sufficient atonement for them, but He is especially the Savior of those who believe, because only those who believe receive the benefit of the atonement.⁷⁹ This corresponds with the plain sense of the verse and is rejected by new Calvinists on theological grounds, not exegetical grounds.

d. Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ David Servant, “The Five Points of Calvinism Considered, 4. Limited Atonement” (2007), <http://www.heavensfamily.org/ss/calvinism/calvinism-limited-atonement> (accessed September 1, 2014).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 136; Litfin, “1 Timothy,” 740; Andrew D. Chang, “Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, no. 565 (1985), 48; Ron Rhodes, “The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement versus Unlimited Atonement (Part One),” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, vol. 2 (1996): 6.

⁸⁰ Farrar argued that ὑπέρ was used in a sense “not ‘as a substitution for,’ which would require ἀντί.” (F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893], 48). However, this was

This verse very clearly teaches the unlimited view of the atonement.⁸¹ Yet, once again, there is no mention of this verse in Piper's book *Five Points*.

Grudem does discuss this verse in his *Systematic Theology*. He attempts to reconcile this verse with his view of limited atonement by commenting,

The Greek word $\pi\alpha\tilde{\nu}\varsigma$ (G4246) here translated "every one," is also used in a similar sense to mean "all of God's people" in Hebrews 8:11, "for *all* shall know me," and in Hebrews 12:8, "If you are left without discipline, in which *all* have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." In both cases the "all" is not explicitly restricted by a specific phrase such as "all of God's people."⁸²

However, Hebrews 8:11 and 12:8 are not good parallels to use in this regard. In both of these verses, $\pi\alpha\tilde{\nu}\varsigma$ is in the plural, whereas in 2:9 it is singular. Alford comments on the singular, "If it be asked, why *pantos* (each) rather than *panton* (all), we may safely say that the singular brings out, far more strongly than the plural would, the applicability of Christ's death to each individual man."⁸³ Furthermore, Hebrews 8:11 is a poor parallel, because it is quoting Jeremiah 31:34 (LXX 38:34) and does not reflect the author of Hebrews' use of $\pi\alpha\tilde{\nu}\varsigma$.

e. 2 Peter 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

effectively countered by Chafer (Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Soteriology," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 103, no. 409 [January 1946]: 7), who argued for the full substitutionary sense of $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$, concluding that " $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ shall be accepted [in this context] as equipollent with $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota$ " (see also, L. S. Chafer, "For Whom Did Christ Die," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 417 [January 1948]: 28).

⁸¹ Paul Martin Henebury, "Christ's Atonement: Its Purpose and Extent, Part 1," *Conservative Theological Journal* 9, no. 26 (March 2005): 105; Brenda B. Colijn, "Let Us Approach': Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 4 (December 1996): 573.

⁸² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 599.

⁸³ Alford, *Greek Testament*, cited by Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 290; Ron Rhodes, "The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement Versus Unlimited Atonement (Part 1)," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 6.

Rather than overtly claiming that the atonement is unlimited, this verse accomplishes essentially the same thing by claiming that false prophets who are doomed to eternal destruction (2 Peter 2:3) have been bought by the Lord. That these false teachers are those who are truly lost and will never be saved is quite clear from the context. As Geisler explains,

They are called “false prophets,” “false teachers,” those “denying the Lord” (v. 1), who are themselves “destructive” (v. 2 NKJV), and bringing “judgment” (v. 3). What is more, they are compared to fallen and unredeemable angels who were cast “into hell” (v. 4), the “wicked” (v. 7 NKJV), the “unjust” (v.9 KJV), “natural brute beasts” (v. 12 KJV), a “dog” (v. 22), and “slaves of corruption” (v. 19 NKJV)—none of which are descriptions of the elect in Scripture. What is more, for them “is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (v. 17).⁸⁴

That these false teachers were purchased by the Lord amounts to unlimited atonement⁸⁵ by an *a fortiori* argument. Since Peter plainly states that unsaved false teachers were bought by the Lord, it would seem impossible to argue for a limited atonement in light of this verse. Piper, in fact, makes no mention of this verse in *Five Points*. Grudem, on the other hand, resorts to a questionable interpretation first proposed by John Gill.⁸⁶ According to this interpretation, Peter is alluding to Deuteronomy 32:6, where Moses says to the rebellious people who have turned away from God, “Is not He your Father who has bought you?” As such, Grudem reasons that Peter is “drawing an analogy between the past false prophets who arose among the Jews and those who will be false teachers within the churches.” He concludes,

The text means not that Christ had redeemed these false prophets, but simply that they were rebellious Jewish people (or church attenders in the same position as the rebellious Jews) who were rightly owned by God because they had been brought out of the land of

⁸⁴ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 195–96.

⁸⁵ Kenneth O. Gangel, “2 Peter,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 870; Chafer, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” 34; Rhodes, “The Extent of the Atonement,” 7; Zeller, “Do I Interpret the Bible Literally?” 63.

⁸⁶ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Evansville, IN: Sovereign Grace Book Club), 63.

Egypt (or their forefathers had), but they were ungrateful to him. Christ's specific redemptive work on the cross is not in view in this verse.⁸⁷

There are three problems with this interpretation. First, the false teachers are assumed to be necessarily Jewish. Though it is acknowledged that Peter's readers were Jewish believers (the *διασπορά* of 1 Peter 1:1), it is not at all clear that this prediction of false teachers at some point in Peter's future would necessarily be Jewish, especially in view of the rapidly changing face of the church in the mid first century, developing from a primarily Jewish society to an increasingly Gentile one.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Peter appears to have intended some distinction by changing the term "prophets" to "teachers."⁸⁹ Second, assuming that Gill's argument was dependent upon John Owens' view,⁹⁰ the Master (*δεσπότης*) is a reference to the Father, not Christ.⁹¹ Even if Peter did have Deuteronomy 32:6 in mind when he wrote this,⁹² there can be no doubt, in light of the parallel passage in Jude 4, that the redeemer in view is Jesus Christ. Jude 4 rephrases Peter's statement, specifying that the false teachers "deny our only Master (*δεσπότης*) and Lord, Jesus Christ."⁹³ Third, the purchase (*ἀγοράζω*) in view, according to Grudem, was not Christ's work

⁸⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 600. In a footnote, Grudem notes that "this is the view taken by John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980; repr. of 1855 ed.; first published 1735), p. 61. Gill discusses other possible interpretations of the passage, but this seems most persuasive. We should realize that in both of his epistles, Peter very frequently portrays the churches to which he is writing in terms of the rich imagery of the people of God in the Old Testament: see W. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* p. 113."

⁸⁸ Gordon H. Clark, *II Peter* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 38.

⁸⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 326.

⁹⁰ John Owens, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 250–251. Gill was born about fifteen years after Owens' death. Both men were British Calvinists, and it is likely that Gill's thought was highly influenced by Owens. Owens' interpretation is quite similar to Gill's, but Gill appears to have developed the interpretation more fully.

⁹¹ "The word *δεσπότης*, *Lord*, does not design Christ, but God the Father of Christ," Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 61.

⁹² Chang argues effectively against accepting the Deuteronomy 32:6 allusion, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," 58.

⁹³ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 196. Also Chang, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," 53–54. The expression "only Master and Lord" reflects a Granville-Sharp construction in the original Greek: τὸν μόνον

on the cross. The national redemption of Israel in the Exodus was due to the blood of the paschal lamb. Grudem seems to think that this only accomplished redemption from physical slavery in Egypt and, therefore, has nothing to do with a Christian's redemption from sin.

However, as with the previous point, the parallel passage in Jude 4 makes clear that the redemption in view is that which was accomplished by Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ Furthermore, "the New Testament nowhere else uses the word for redemption in association with Christ in a non-soteriological sense (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18–19; Rev. 5:9; 14:3–4)."⁹⁵ Schreiner concludes that Owens' (and by extension Grudem's) interpretation "suffers from special pleading since redemption is invariably soteriological."⁹⁶

It seems much more consistent with the language of this text to understand the meaning to be that "even though Christ's death on the cross provided for their salvation, they had not personally by faith trusted Christ as their Savior."⁹⁷ Grudem, Gill, and Owens, are guilty of gross eisegesis. They have decided beforehand, on the basis of their theological system, what 2 Peter 2:1 can and cannot say. They are so committed to the doctrine of limited atonement that no

δεσπότην καὶ κύριον, further strengthening the argument that both terms—δεσπότης and κύριος refer to Jesus Christ.

⁹⁴ Schreiner admits as much when he says, "A reference to Jesus Christ is likely in the phrase he 'bought them' (cf. Rev 5:9)" (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 329). Nevertheless, Schreiner does not support an unlimited atonement. Rather, he views Peter as employing phenomenological language that views the false teachers as giving the appearance of being genuine Christians; so also Roger Nicole, "The Case for Definite Atonement," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1967): 205. One wonders what Gill was reading when he concluded that in Jude 4, "God the Father is plainly intended" (*The Cause of God and Truth*, 61).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 330. Also Gangel, "2 Peter," 870. On the meaning of ἀγοράζω in relation to the atonement, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 53; Chang, "Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement," 54–56; Henebury, "Christ's Atonement," 93n10; Douglas W. Kennard, "Petrine Redemption: Its Meaning and Extent," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 4 (December 1987): 402.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 124.

matter what the text actually does say, they have concluded it cannot mean that Jesus Christ redeemed the false teachers.

f. 2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

This verse does not teach an unlimited atonement directly. However, its reference to God's desire to save all strongly implies that His intention in the atonement was to provide salvation for all. R. C. Sproul, on the other hand, expresses a Reformed interpretation shared by many New Calvinists. He makes the following comment:

One of the texts that we often hear used as an objection against the idea of a definite atonement is 2 Peter 3:8–9. . . . The immediate antecedent of the word *any* in this passage is the word *us*, and I think it's perfectly clear that Peter is saying that God is not willing that any of *us* should perish, but that all of *us* should come to salvation. He's not speaking of all mankind indiscriminately; the *us* is a reference to the believing people to whom Peter is speaking. I don't think we want to believe in a God who sends Christ to die on the cross and then crosses His fingers, hoping that someone will take advantage of that atoning death.⁹⁸

The point that is “perfectly clear” to Sproul is apparently not perfectly clear to other Calvinist authors. Even John Calvin, commenting on this same passage of Scripture maintained that “so wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost.”⁹⁹ Calvin further commented, “Mention is here made . . . of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand

⁹⁸ Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology.” Emphasis his. This interpretation is also taken by Gordon Clark, *II Peter*, 71. Clark observes that this same view is found in *Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes*, viii. xi. 1.

⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 419.

without a difference to all.”¹⁰⁰ Thomas Schreiner admits, “At the end of the day, restricting ‘anyone’ to church members is not the most satisfying solution in this text.”¹⁰¹

Piper is silent on the meaning of this verse in *Five Points*, and when he preached on this passage at Bethlehem Baptist Church, he entirely avoided any explanation of how God’s desire to save all relates to the extent of the atonement.¹⁰² But in his chapter “Two Wills,”¹⁰³ he explains this verse in terms of two wills in God—His will of command and His will of decree.¹⁰⁴ Schreiner says with regard to this view, “Many think this approach is double-talk and outright nonsense.”¹⁰⁵ And Shellrude adds, “This interpretive approach is counterintuitive, contextually unsupported, and ahistorical because no evidence shows that this is how these statements would have been read in a first century context.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 419–420.

¹⁰¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 382. Schreiner prefers explaining the verse on the basis of a distinction between God’s “decretive will” and His “desired will” (Ibid. 381).

¹⁰² John Piper, “Where Is the Promise of His Appearing?” Sermon on 2 Peter 3:1–10 preached June 6, 1982. He does, however, admit that the patience God exhibited is specifically toward the false teachers, not the elect: “The tragic irony is that the false teachers take God’s patience, which is giving them an opportunity to repent, and turn it against God as an evidence that Christ is not coming.” John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007). On October 20, 1985, Piper preached on the topic “Those Whom He Predestined He Also Called (Part 2)” from Romans 8:28–30. In this sermon he intimated that 2 Peter 3:9 might be explained in terms of “God willing and yearning that men and women be saved” while realizing that “the mind and heart of the infinite God are more complex than we may have at first thought and may indeed allow for another sense in which for good and wise purposes he ordains to come to pass what in itself he hates.” But then he backed away from this explanation because “the context . . . provide[s] a different solution.” What that “different solution” is, however, he did not explain (Ibid.).

¹⁰³ John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 114, 122. This is also the approach taken by Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 683–684. Grudem prefers the expressions “revealed will” and “secret will.”

¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 381–382.

¹⁰⁶ Glen Shellrude, “Calvinism and Problematic Readings of New Testament Texts,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 78n21. John Piper argues that God ordains both the damnation of the majority of humanity as well as the evil and carnage so pervasive in human experience for the express purpose of magnifying His glory since these realities are necessary prerequisites for the elect to understand the depth of God’s holiness, majesty, and glory. For a critique of this construct along with a response from Piper, see Thomas McCall, “I Believe in Divine Sovereignty,” *Trinity Journal* 29 (2008): 205–26; John Piper, “I Believe in God’s Self-

Several times in “Two Wills,” Piper includes with approbation the following quote from Arminian theologian I. Howard Marshall: “We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God's will.”¹⁰⁷ But this in no way justifies a limited atonement view. It is only stating that the atonement is both limited (in one sense) and unlimited (in another sense), the same admission many Arminians claim.

g. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

This verse has proved one of the most difficult for supporters of a limited atonement to explain. The obvious contrast between “our sins” and “those of the whole world” is convincing enough to compel most commentators to conclude the unlimited nature of Christ’s propitiation. And though John clearly does not teach universalism, this verse is taken by most commentators to mean that the benefits of Christ’s atonement are made available to all people universally. “The provision for all have [*sic*] been accomplished. The reception and application of that provision is appropriated by faith.”¹⁰⁸

Sufficiency: A Response to Thomas McCall,” *Trinity Journal* 29 (2008): 227–34; Thomas McCall, “We Believe in God’s Sovereign Goodness: A Rejoinder to John Piper,” *Trinity Journal* 29 (2008): 235–46.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 110, 112, 113, citing I. Howard Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles,” *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Randall G. Basinger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 56.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 85. Similar conclusions are reached, for example, by Zane Hodges, “1 John” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 887; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, 4th ed., *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1902), 44–45; David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 160; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 John 2:2.

Calvinists, however, seek through various means to limit the propitiation to the elect only. Piper and Grudem each take different approaches to reconcile this verse with their limited atonement view. According to Grudem, the preposition “for” lacks specificity, and therefore it cannot be pressed to specify how Christ was the propitiation for the world. Piper, on the other hand, follows Calvin’s approach¹⁰⁹ and focuses his attention on the expression “the whole world,” understanding this in a partitive sense to mean elect people from the whole world.

Grudem insists that “the preposition ‘for’ (Gk. περί, G4309, plus genitive) is ambiguous with respect to the specific sense in which Christ is the propitiation ‘for’ the sins of the world.”¹¹⁰ And he concludes, “It would be entirely consistent with the language of the verse to think that John is simply saying that Christ is the atoning sacrifice who is available to pay for the sins of anyone in the world.”¹¹¹ This attempt at justifying his position based on the Greek preposition περί seems strained at best. In fact, it runs counter to what the standard New Testament Greek Lexicon states specifically about this preposition when ἁμαρτία is its object. The Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states that when περί is used with ἁμαρτία, it “has the sense *to take away, to atone for* περί ἁμαρτίας”¹¹² and includes no less than ten Biblical references to περί used with ἁμαρτία to refer specifically to atonement for sins (Numbers 8:8; Romans 8:3; Galatians 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 5:3; 10:18, 26; 13:11; 10:6, 8).

¹⁰⁹ Calvin understands “the whole world” to be a reference to “those who were then scattered through various parts of the world,” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, 173.

¹¹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 598.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 599.

¹¹² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 798.

While it is true that 1 John 2:2 contains no specifics about how the propitiation was made, one wonders why Grudem brings the Greek preposition περί into the discussion. It seems totally irrelevant to the point he is trying to make. Furthermore, the relevant point is not the way in which the propitiation was made, but the extent of the propitiation.

Piper’s tactic is to limit the world to the world of the elect, but he chooses a somewhat novel approach. Piper builds his interpretation of 1 John 2:2 on a perceived parallel with John 11:51–52.¹¹³

<u>John 11:51–52</u>	<u>1 John 2:2</u>
Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for (ὑπέρ) the nation, and not for (ὑπέρ) the nation only, but in order that (ἵνα) He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.	And He Himself is the propitiation for (ὑπέρ) our sins; and not for ours only, but also for (ὑπέρ) those of the whole world.

Piper concludes,

The “whole world” is parallel with “children of God scattered abroad.” So it is natural to think that John’s point in 1 John 2:2 is to stress that God’s propitiating work in Christ is not parochial, as if he is only interested in Jews, or in one class or race. No grouping of

¹¹³ Piper, *Five Points*, Kindle Location 550. This parallel was also noted by Philo, *de Monarch*, 2:6, 2, and is noted by Westcott (*The Epistles of St. John*, 45), but neither Philo nor Westcott draws the same conclusion regarding a limited atonement as Piper does. See also, John Samson, “Understanding 1 John 2:2,” *Reformation Theology*. Posted by John Samson on October 28, 2005, 01:48 p.m. http://www.reformationtheology.com/2005/10/understanding_1_john_22_by_pas.php (accessed November 29, 2014).

humans should ever say, “He is the propitiation for our sins only.” No. His propitiating work is meant to gather people from the “whole world.”¹¹⁴

But there are at least three problems with this proposed parallel.

First, this only makes a true parallel on the faulty assumption that 1 John was written to a Jewish audience. As such, “our sins” would be parallel to “the nation [of Israel]” and “the whole world” parallel to “the children of God who are scattered abroad [i.e., diaspora Jews].” Piper does specifically state that 1 John was written to a Jewish audience; however, this is apparently the position John Samson takes in his defense of the same interpretation as Piper’s. Samson says, “With this in view, John writes of Jesus Christ being ‘the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only (Hebrews), but also for the whole world (the Gentiles).’”¹¹⁵ But 1 John is not normally thought to be addressed to a Jewish, or even Hebrew Christian, audience.¹¹⁶

Second, structurally, this makes a poor verbal parallel. The first instance of ὑπέρ in 1 John 2:2 is indeed parallel with the two occurrences of ὑπέρ in John 11:51 and 52a, but the second ὑπέρ of 1 John 2:2 is parallel to a construction of ἵνα followed by a subjunctive in John 11:52b. Thus, the proposed parallel breaks down structurally for the second prepositional phrase of 1 John 2:2.

¹¹⁴ Piper, *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 562–565.

¹¹⁵ Samson, “Understanding 1 John 2:2.” See also, Puritan Lad, who claims that “it also appears as if he [John] was writing to Jewish Christians in particular,” and concludes, “John did not hold that Christ died for every single individual, but for ‘ours’ (the nation—Israel), and not only for ‘ours’ (this nation only), but for the ‘whole world’, (the children of God who are scattered abroad.)” Puritan Lad, “1 John 2:2 and Limited Atonement,” *Covenant Theology* (January 4, 2008), <http://covenant-theology.blogspot.com/2008/01/1-john-22-and-limited-atonement.html> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹¹⁶ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 675–676; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed., The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 861; Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1974), 369; Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, xxxii; Walls and Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, 152.

Third, John’s use of the expression “whole world” later in the same epistle provides a more likely parallel to 1 John 2:2 and affirms an unlimited notion for the expression. Indeed, one might compare all the New Testament occurrences of the expression “the whole world” (ὁ κόσμος ὅλος¹¹⁷). In the New Testament, the expression is found on only two occasions in the teachings of Jesus—once in Romans and twice in 1 John. In the Gospels, Jesus posed the question, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25). Jesus also mentioned regarding the woman who anointed him in the home of Simon the leper that “wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken” (Matthew 26:13; Mark 14:9). Paul stated that the faith of the Roman believers was “being proclaimed throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8). And the apostle John used the expression not only in 1 John 2:2 but also in 5:19. None of the uses of this expression fits the limited notion of the world of the elect. Of greatest significance in determining the meaning in 1 John 2:2 is its use in 1 John 5:19. Piper, along with others who limit the sense of “whole world,” miss the important contextual connection with 1 John 5:19, “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one,” where the expression cannot possibly refer in a limited sense to the world of the elect.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ In the seven occurrences of this expression, the article always immediately precedes the noun κόσμος, while the adjective ὅλος remains anarthrous. In about half the occurrences (four of the seven), the article and noun precede the adjective (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25; 1 John 5:19), while in the rest the adjective precedes the article and noun (Matthew 26:13; Mark 14:9; 1 John 2:2). In 1 John 2:2, the adjective may be placed first in order to emphasize the idea of universality.

¹¹⁸ Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 287. McKenzie attempts to avoid this obvious conclusion by the following rationale: “‘The whole world’ here cannot include believers (4:4). Thus, ‘the whole world’ only includes all of a certain class of people. 5:19 refers to the class of the lost; 2:2 to the class of the elect” (Rolaant L. McKenzie, “Answers to Arminian Arguments,” http://www.gospeloutreach.net/tulip_defense.html (accessed November 29, 2014)). But McKenzie has apparently not considered the possibility that before conversion all believers (the elect) did in fact lie in the power of the evil one (Ephesians 2:2–3), and thus the “whole world” in 1 John 5:19 can most certainly refer both to the elect (before salvation) and the non-elect.

The point seems inescapable that the scope of the propitiation in 1 John 2:2 is unlimited, at least in terms of the provision it made. This does not require that one be a universalist regarding salvation. As Akin affirms, “Universal in *provision* is not to be equated with universal in *application*.¹¹⁹ Akin sums up what most commentators conclude regarding this verse: “This propitiation does not itself guarantee the actual salvation for the whole world. The provision for all have [*sic*] been accomplished. The reception and application of that provision is appropriated by faith. The efficacy of Jesus’ propitiation for salvation personally and individually is dependent on one believing in Jesus.¹²⁰

Conclusion

This survey of the above passages indicates that New Calvinists prefer their logical system over exegesis when considering passages that point to the unlimited nature of Christ’s atonement. Zeller sums this up when he says,

Do I understand that Christ died for all men and that He tasted death for every man without exception? The language of the Bible cannot be clearer: He died for . . . the world (John 3:16; 6:33, 51); the whole world (1 John 2:2); all (1 Timothy 2:6); us all (Isaiah 53:6); all men (Romans 5:18); every man (Hebrews 2:9); Christ-deniers (2 Peter 2:1). Does God really mean what He says? Can we take Him at His Word? Or, are we going to let our theology force us to change the meaning of words that by themselves are very clear?¹²¹

While on the one hand affirming the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, New Calvinists effectively demean the authority of Scripture through eisegesis and selective use of evidence.

Another example of this can be found in John Piper’s book *The Justification of God*, in which he

¹¹⁹ Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 84. Emphasis his.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²¹ George Zeller, “Do I Interpret the Bible Literally? Seven Tests to See If I Truly Do,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 8, no. 23 (2004): 63.

attempts to apply verses that speak of the corporate election of Israel in view of the future kingdom to individual election to salvation. C. Gordon Olson finds in Piper’s approach “a defective, deductive methodology” in which “he started out with extensive theological discussion before really getting into the exegesis of the text. This biases the whole exegesis and is a reversal of the proper inductive theological methodology.”¹²²

Rather than trying to force the Scriptures into the Procrustean bed of limited atonement, Chafer suggest that the atoning work of Christ may be divided into two general categories, one of which applies generally to all men, the other applying in a limited sense only to believers. Chafer bases this distinction on the actual language of Scripture, rather than an attempt to force the Scriptures into a logical framework. The two categories are: (1) the finished work of Christ, universally applied to all men, represented by the words redemption (ἀγοράζω), reconciliation (καταλλαγή), and propitiation (ἰλασμός); and (2) the work of Christ particularly belonging only to the saved, represented by the words forgiveness, regeneration, justification, and sanctification.¹²³ According to this twofold division, unlimited language is used in Scripture of the first division, but limited language is used of the second, so that the sacrifice of Christ “is a divine work (finished, indeed, as to its scope and purpose) which renders all men *savable*, but is applied in sovereign grace by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit only when the individual *believes*.”¹²⁴

¹²² C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (Lynchburg: Global Gospel Ministries, Inc., 2012), 359–360.

¹²³ Chafer, “For Whom Did Christ Die?” 311. In the introductory portion of this article, Chafer identifies ἀπολύτρωσις as the Greek term for “redemption” that speaks of Christ’s work done generally in the interest of all men. However, it becomes obvious from the later discussion that he intended the Greek word ἀγοράζω.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 314. Chafer explains the distinction as follows: “Certainly Christ’s death of itself forgives no sinner, nor does it render unnecessary the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Anyone of the elect whose salvation is predetermined, and for whom Christ died, may live the major portion of his life in open rebellion against God and during that time manifest every feature of depravity and spiritual death. This alone should prove that men are not

2. Repentance as “Sorrow” and “Turning from Sin”

Another area of New Calvinist teaching that reflects eisegesis and theological presupposition is in their teaching on repentance. Repentance is a major theme in much of New Calvinist writing and preaching. In one sense, this reflects a proper focus on an important Biblical theme. There can be no doubt that repentance is a major theme in the Bible. But in another sense, New Calvinism’s focus on repentance poses problems, due to two factors: (1) the definition of “repentance” and (2) the relationship between repentance and faith in salvation. John MacArthur finds repentance such an important component of the gospel that he says, “No evangelism that omits the message of repentance can properly be called the gospel, for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will.”¹²⁵ Beginning with an incorrect concept of salvation, New Calvinists then force Scriptural references to repentance into a theological construct that contradicts sound exegesis. New Calvinists’ confused understanding of repentance fits well with their peculiar doctrine of perseverance of the saints¹²⁶ when repentance is understood in terms of turning from sin or forsaking sin.

a. *Definition of Repentance*

In the New American Standard Version of the Bible, some form of the word “repent” occurs seventy-three times—seventeen times in the Old Testament and fifty-six times in the New Testament. But perhaps the most significant problem in any attempt to study the Biblical

severally saved by the act of Christ in dying, but rather that they are saved by the divine *application* of that value when they *believe*. The blood of the Passover lamb became efficacious only when applied to the doorpost.”

¹²⁵ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 167. Hodges notes that this is an astounding statement in light of the fact that the terms *μετάνοια* and *μετανοέω* do not occur even once in the entire Gospel of John and asks rhetorically, “Are we to conclude that its gospel is not the biblical gospel after all?” (Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989], 147).

¹²⁶ See chapter 4, “Perseverance of the Saints.”

teaching about repentance has to do with the problem of terminology. After all, the term “repentance” is an English language term, and ultimately the Biblical scholar must investigate what the original Greek and Hebrew of the Bible really taught. Two misconceptions are commonly associated with Biblical repentance: first, concepts of pain and sorrow; second, the concept of turning.

The theme of repentance has suffered much in English language literature due to unfortunate semantic baggage tied to the Latin root *pen/poen* of the word “repent.” Nearly every occurrence of the English terms repent/repentance translates an original Greek *μετάνοια* or *μετανοέω*. Standard Greek lexicons identify *μετανοέω* as signifying “to change one’s mind,”¹²⁷ a meaning that corresponds with its etymology. As such, *μετάνοια/μετανοέω* should be understood as being roughly synonymous with belief/faith (*πίστις/πιστεύω*).¹²⁸ Notions stemming from the Latin root of “repentance,” however, have given the word a connotation that “fails to come anywhere near” the sense of the New Testament Greek terms *μετάνοια/μετανοέω*.¹²⁹ Other English terms based on this Latin root include such words as “pain,” “penitent,” “penitentiary,” and “penance.” All of these terms connote some sense of remorse, sorrow, and even pain. Such connotation is not a part of the semantic sense of the Greek terms *μετάνοια/μετανοέω*. Contextually, ideas of remorse and sorrow may accompany the use of either *μετάνοια* or *μετανοέω*, but such connotation comes from the context, not from the semantic sense of these

¹²⁷ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640; Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1115.

¹²⁸ C. Gordon Olson describes repentance and faith as “two sides of the [same] coin,” *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 98.

¹²⁹ Treadwell Walden, *The Great Meaning of Metanoia: An Undeveloped Chapter in the Life and Teaching of Christ* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1896), 14.

terms themselves. Connotations of remorse and sorrow are more closely linked with the term μεταμέλομαι.¹³⁰ Wilkin has demonstrated that μετάνοια/μετανοέω consistently refer to the changing of one's mind, from pre-Christian times (beginning with Thucydides and Xenophon) to the New Testament era. He concludes,

In a few contexts it is used via metonymy as a synonym for eternal salvation. When it is used in contexts dealing with temporal salvation from life's difficulties, a change of mind about one's sinful ways (i.e., repentance) is given as the condition. However, when used in contexts dealing with eternal salvation from hell, a change of mind about oneself and Christ (or, in one passage, regarding idols and God) is given as the condition. In such contexts *metanoia* is used as a synonym for faith.¹³¹

In the fourth century, Jerome decided to use the Latin *paeniteo* to translate μετανοέω in his Vulgate translation of the Bible. *Paeniteo*, though overlapping somewhat in semantic range with μετανοέω, nevertheless has mostly a considerably different semantic range than does μετανοέω. Jerome's personal experience as an ascetic hermit doubtless influenced his choice of this emotionally packed word. He had continually struggled with temptations of lust in his previous life of profligacy and had found peace only in penitent submission to Christ.¹³² According to Lewis, *paeniteō* means "to make sorry, cause to repent, to repent, be sorry, grieve, rue, discontent, displeasure, vex, make angry, offend, dissatisfy."¹³³ It is doubtful that this Latin

¹³⁰ Walden, 18, 19, 98; Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Xulon Press, 2010), 65–67.

¹³¹ Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation: New Testament Repentance: Lexical Considerations," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 2, no. 2 (1989): 19. Also, Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 65–69; Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, 109–110.

¹³² Schaff describes Jerome's experience around 374 in the Syrian Desert as "a grievous struggle with sensuality . . . tormented . . . with wild images of Roman banquet and dances of women." His deliverance from such torments came in the following manner: "Helpless he cast himself at the feet of Jesus, wet them with tears of repentance, and subdued the resisting flesh by a week of fasting and by the dry study of Hebrew grammar . . . , until he found peace, and thought himself transported to the choirs of the angels in heaven" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910], 208).

¹³³ Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (Medford, MA: American Book Company, 1890), *paeniteō*.

term communicated the same sense as the first-century Greek reader would have understood by μετανοέω. Wilkin explains,

The Latin Fathers translated, or rather mistranslated, the NT words *metanoēō* and *metanoia* to reflect their theological bias. They translated those terms as *poenitentiam agite* and *poenitentia*, “to do acts of penance” and “acts of penance,” respectively. Those mistranslations unfortunately became part of the Old Latin and then the Latin Vulgate versions of the Bible. It was not until the Reformation that those translations were given a serious and widespread challenge.¹³⁴

Yet Grudem defines Biblical repentance as “a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”¹³⁵ Paul Washer makes “sorrow for sin” a necessary part of his definition for repentance.¹³⁶ R. Scott Clark defines true repentance as “genuine sorrow for sin against God and heartfelt desire to turn away from it.”¹³⁷

There is no doubt that heartfelt sorrow often accompanies the action conveyed by μετανοέω, but it is not a necessary accompaniment of that action. Defining Biblical repentance in terms of *paeniteō*, rather than μετανοέω, amounts to adding to the Biblical requirements for salvation; it confuses cause (μετανοέω) and effect (*paeniteō*) and may even approach requiring works for salvation, thus contradicting the Reformed principle of *Sola Gratia*, as expressed so clearly in Ephesians 2:8.

The other misconception associated with repentance comes from understanding the term to refer to a turning around, sometimes described as a 180-degree turn. In recent times this idea

¹³⁴ Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation Part 1: The Doctrine of Repentance in Church History,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 1, no. 1 (1988): 13.

¹³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 713.

¹³⁶ Paul Washer, *The Gospel Call and True Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013).

¹³⁷ R. Scott Clark, “Crouching Tiger, True Repentance,” The Gospel Coalition (February 23, 2010), <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/crouching-tiger-true-repentance> (accessed December 15, 2014). Clark is professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.

has found support in Behm’s and Würthwein’s contributions to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,¹³⁸ whose work was essentially repeated in Colin Brown’s *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.¹³⁹ What both Behm, Würthwein, and Brown conclude is that in the Bible μετάνοια/μετανοέω derive their meanings from the Hebrew term שׁוּב, rather than from the meaning established by usage in Greek literature—this, despite the fact that שׁוּב is never translated with μετανοέω in the Septuagint.¹⁴⁰ According to Wilkins,

Behm . . . argues that *metanoēō* in the Greek OT “approximates” *shûb* of the Hebrew OT. However, I believe he fails to prove his point. The term *shûb* was used 1,056 times in the Hebrew text. None of those occurrences is translated by *metanoēō* in the Greek OT. Not one. This is inexplicable if the translators of the LXX felt that *metanoēō* was a good translation of *shûb*. Rather, the translators routinely used *strephō* and its various compound forms to translate *shûb*.¹⁴¹

James Barr argues effectively against the kind of linguistic nonsense practiced by Behm here and which occurred frequently in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.¹⁴² A literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic insists that the Bible employs language according to

¹³⁸ J. Behm and E. Würthwein “† μετανοέω † μετάνοια, C. μετανοέω/μετάνοια in Hellenistic Jewish Literature, D. Conversion in Rabbinic Literature, E. μετανοέω and μετάνοια in the New Testament, F. μετανοέω/μετάνοια in the Ecclesiastical Writings of the Post-Apostolic and Early Catholic Period,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), IV:975–1008.

¹³⁹ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 357–359.

¹⁴⁰ Behm, freely admits, “The LXX never uses μετανοέω [for שׁוּב] but always → ἐπιστρέφω (-ομαι) or ἀποστρέφω (-ομαι),” (Behm, 989). He then states the linguistically non-sensical *non sequitur*, “The linguistic material leads to the conclusion that for the Jewish Hellenistic world of the 2nd cent. A.D. μετανοέω was a common and even preferred equivalent of ἐπιστρέφομαι = שׁוּב, ‘to turn,’ ‘to convert.’” (Behm, 990). Μετανοέω occurs twenty times in the LXX (1 Sam 15:29; Prov 14:15; 20:25 (19); 24:24 (29:27), 27 (32); Isa 46:8; Jer 4:28; 8:6; 18:8; Joel 2:13, 14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9, 10; 4:2; Zech 8:14). In these twenty uses it consistently “retain[s] the meaning of a change of mind about someone or something” (Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation: New Testament Repentance: Lexical Considerations,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 2:2 [1989], 15).

¹⁴¹ Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation: Lexical Considerations,” 15–16.

¹⁴² James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 238–246. Also Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 115–125.

the normal conventions of Greek and Hebrew to which everyday speakers of those languages were accustomed.¹⁴³ There is not a specialized use of language in the Bible that departs from these conventions. Behm’s violation of sound linguistic practice led him to make the following confusing and contradictory statement: “Before himself and before the gods the Greek can μετανοεῖν a sin *in actu* . . . but he has no knowledge of μετάνοια as repentance or conversion in the sense found in the OT and NT.”¹⁴⁴

Despite the clear lexical evidence that μετάνοια/μετανοέω refer to a change of mind, rather than to a turning around, New Calvinist writers and speakers regularly define Biblical repentance as a turning from sin that is seen in the believer’s conduct. Thus, Grudem concludes, “Genuine repentance will result in a changed life.”¹⁴⁵ Thabiti Anyabwile preached a message at the 2014 Together for the Gospel meeting titled “The Happiness of Heaven in the Repentance of Sinners.” In this message he described repentance from the life of the prodigal son as follows: “He left the harlots. He left the swine. He left all that he had and did not try to keep his sin to come to Christ. We bring no good works. We bring nothing to him except that we try to turn to him.”¹⁴⁶ Paul Washer lists the following characteristics of genuine repentance: renunciation of self-righteousness or good works, turning to God, and practical obedience,¹⁴⁷ then continues to provide the following more complete definition:

¹⁴³ Cotterell and Turner, 25–26.

¹⁴⁴ Behm, 979.

¹⁴⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 713.

¹⁴⁶ Thabiti Anyabwile, “The Happiness of Heaven in the Repentance of Sinners,” <http://philliphowell.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/thabitis-anyabwile-t4g-2014-message-the-happiness-of-heaven-in-the-repentance-of-sinners> (accessed December 15, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Washer, *The Gospel Call*.

In the Old Testament, the word *repents* is translated primarily from a Hebrew word that means “to return or turn back.” It implies not only a turning away from evil, but also a turning to righteousness. Therefore one of the telltale signs of genuine repentance will be honest and sincere forsaking or turning away from sin. . . . It is an undeniable biblical truth that genuine repentance will manifest itself in a turning away from sin.¹⁴⁸

It is clear from this quote that Washer has completely and uncritically adopted Behm’s faulty connection of μετανοέω with שׁוּב. Matt Chandler claims, “The real issue is repentance. The question is not ‘Do I sin?’ but ‘Am I walking in repentance?’ . . . The question is about repentance. Are we turning from sin and embracing Jesus?”¹⁴⁹

b. Relation of Repentance to Faith in Salvation

When understood as “turning from sin,” repentance is made a second condition of salvation, rather than a synonymous expression for faith. Sproul says that the gospel is “not universally offered in the sense that it’s offered to anyone without any conditions. It’s offered to anyone who believes. It’s offered to anyone who repents. Obviously the merit of the atonement of Christ is given to all who believe and to all who repent of their sins.”¹⁵⁰ Grudem states,

Therefore, it is clearly contrary to the New Testament evidence to speak about the possibility of having true saving faith without having any repentance for sin. It is also contrary to the New Testament to speak about the possibility of someone accepting Christ “as Savior” but not “as Lord,” if that means simply depending on him for salvation but not committing oneself to forsake sin and to be obedient to Christ from that point on.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Matt Chandler, “Answering Four Street-Level Arguments for Sexual Immorality,” The Gospel Coalition (December 4, 2013) <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/answering-four-street-level-arguments-for-sexual-immorality> (accessed December 15, 2014).

¹⁵⁰ Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology.”

¹⁵¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 714.

In 1990, Piper defined “repentance” this way:

Repentance is not just regret. They had already been cut to the heart (v. 3). And now Peter says, “Repent!” So repentance is more than feeling sorry. It means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God. Jesus spoke to Paul in Acts 26:18 about this “turning” that leads to forgiveness and gave Paul his commission with these words, “I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” There it is. That is repentance: turning from darkness to light and from Satan to God. It is a reversal of the direction of your life—toward God.¹⁵²

This linking of repentance, when understood as turning from sin, with faith as a requirement for salvation comes very close to the Roman Catholic doctrine so passionately rejected by the Reformers. Calvin, commenting on Isaiah 59:20 writes,

Papists overturn the whole doctrine of salvation, by mingling and confounding pardon of sin with repentance; and not only they, but others also who wish to be thought more acute. They acknowledge that a man is justified by free grace through Christ, but add, that it is because we are renewed by him. Thus they make our justification to depend partly on the pardon of sins and partly on repentance. But in this way our consciences will never be pacified; for we are very far from being perfectly renewed. These things must, therefore, be distinguished, so as to be neither separated nor confounded; and thus our salvation will rest on a solid foundation.¹⁵³

Later, however, Piper seems to have repented of this definition. In his more recent book, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, he no longer uses the language of turning, focusing rather on the idea of a change of mind.

First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English “repent” (μετανοέω, *metanoēō*) points in this direction. It has two parts: *meta* and *noeō*. The second part (*noeō*) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (*meta*) is a prefix that regularly means movement or change. In view of the way this

¹⁵² John Piper, “Repentance, Forgiveness, and the Gift of the Spirit” *Desiring God* (November 25, 1990), <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/repentance-forgiveness-and-the-gift-of-the-spirit> (accessed December 10, 2014).

¹⁵³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 4 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 269.

prefix regularly functions, we may infer that the basic meaning of *repent* is to experience a change of the mind's perceptions and dispositions and purposes.¹⁵⁴

Though John Piper seems to have developed a more Biblical and linguistically informed definition of “repentance,” the Desiring God website continues to propound the view that repentance is a turning from sin. An article titled “What is Repentance?” dated May 23, 2011, cites with approbation J. I. Packer’s definition: “Repentance means turning from as much as you know of your sin to give as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of your God, and as our knowledge grows at these three points so our practice of repentance has to be enlarged.”¹⁵⁵

It is not clear how the requirement that one must turn from sin, forsake sin, and practically obey God in order to be saved is consistent with the Reformed doctrine of *sola gratia*. However, it does appear that New Calvinists’ definition of repentance and requiring of such repentance for salvation is consistent with their view of perseverance of the saints.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, it seems that such a requirement could never result in assurance of salvation. Bing sums up this criticism well:

The Lordship view of repentance cannot offer an absolute assurance of salvation . . . for one can never be absolutely sure all sins have been forsaken. If it is asserted that repentance means *resolving* to forsake all *known* sin, then the absurd scenario emerges in which it would be best to keep people ignorant of their sins when preaching the gospel.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 40–41.

¹⁵⁵ J. I. Packer, “What Is Repentance?” <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/what-is-repentance> (accessed December 10, 2014).

¹⁵⁶ See chapter 4, “Perseverance of the Saints.”

¹⁵⁷ Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 95.

The Reformed Doctrine of Good and Necessary Consequence

With the publication in 2012 of McGraw's *By Good and Necessary Consequence*,¹⁵⁸ renewed attention has been focused on this doctrine. An important concept in the tradition of Reformed theology, seen also with much significance in New Calvinist writings and preaching, Good and Necessary Consequence places logical deduction from Scripture on the same level of authority as explicit statements from Scripture. The earliest formal statement of this doctrine is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. (2 Tim. 3:15–17, Gal. 1:8–9, 2 Thess. 2:2)¹⁵⁹

This statement specifies two sources of authority for determining the whole counsel of God: (1) that which is expressly set down in Scripture and (2) that which may be deduced from Scripture. Indeed, logical deduction seems necessary for arriving at some essential points of doctrine. For example, the fully developed doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly stated in any single passage of Scripture but is arrived at only by logical deduction. Rational thought about the things of God involves more than mere exegesis of passages of Scripture. As Rollin Chafer says, "One may trot all day in a grammatical half-bushel and not come within clear sight of the great themes of the Bible and their logical development."¹⁶⁰ However, at issue is whether overreliance on deduction

¹⁵⁸ Ryan M. McGraw, *By Good and Necessary Consequence* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). Significant reviews of this book are found in Ronald L. Cammenga, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 46, no. 1 (November 2012): 154–55; and Donald Macleod, *Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (April 2012): 181–184.

¹⁵⁹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 1, 6, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

¹⁶⁰ Rollin Thomas Chafer, "A Syllabus of Studies in Hermeneutics Part 5: IV. The Relation of Logic to Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 94, no. 373 (1937): 71.

as a source of authority might amount to a diminishing of the authority of Scripture. While on the one hand maintaining *sola Scriptura*, Reformed theology, including New Calvinism, relies heavily upon deduction for certain key (i.e., necessary) doctrines. The preceding chapter on perseverance of the saints and the preceding section on limited atonement are good examples of New Calvinism's reliance upon deduction. Frame asserts that such deductions "are 'good and necessary consequences.' As such, they have all the authority of Scripture itself."¹⁶¹ The equating of the authority of deduction with explicit statements of Scripture has led some critics to contend that Reformed theologians "insinuate insufficiency to the Scriptures."¹⁶²

Historically, English Baptists disagreed with Presbyterians over the authority of necessary consequence. In their 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Westminster's article on the authority of Scripture was edited to state simply, "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience."¹⁶³ The appeal to necessary consequence was entirely dropped, despite the fact that, for the most part, the Baptist Confession was "simply the Baptist recension of the Westminster Confession"¹⁶⁴ and that it "follows the Westminster Confession, with very few verbal alterations, except in the doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments."¹⁶⁵ This historical disagreement between Baptists and Reformed theologians over the authority of deduction extends back to the sixteenth-century debates

¹⁶¹ John M. Frame, Review of Winfried Corduan: *Handmaid to Theology: An Essay in Philosophical Prolegomena*, *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1983): 446.

¹⁶² Kenneth Good, *Are Baptists Reformed?* (Lorain, OH: Regular Baptist Heritage Fellowship, 1986), 105.

¹⁶³ 1677/89 *London Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1,1, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/bcf.ii.ii.html> (accessed January 14, 2015). Not only is the statement edited, it is also made the first sentence of the confession. See further helpful comments at Fred A. Malone, "The Subjects of Baptism," *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (2005): 57–58.

¹⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), I, 855.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

between Reformers and Anabaptists over the issue of paedobaptism. The Anabaptists “affirmed a sort of *sola Scriptura*. To them, it meant that the Bible alone is our authority and, *therefore*, orthodox Christianity is suspect.”¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, “the reformers and their successors did not deny a positive role to tradition.”¹⁶⁷ According to Good, “The Reformed tendency has been to explain what appears to be the plain meaning of a text from the standpoint of what (to them) is the implied theological meaning (the so-called ‘analogy of faith’). To the Baptists this is to attempt explanation of the obvious on the basis of the obscure. Even the Reformers themselves admitted that the Anabaptists were primarily *Biblicists*.”¹⁶⁸ Warfield explains the importance of necessary consequence to Reformed theology as follows:

It must be observed, however, that the teachings and prescriptions of Scripture are not confined by the Confession to what is “expressly set down in Scripture.” Men are required to believe and to obey not only what is “expressly set down in Scripture,” but also what “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” . . . It is the Reformed contention, reflected here by the Confession, that the sense of Scripture is Scripture, and that men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications. The re-emergence in recent controversies of the plea that the authority of Scripture is to be confined to its expressed declarations, and that human logic is not to be trusted in divine things, is, therefore a direct denial of a fundamental position of Reformed theology, explicitly affirmed in the Confession.¹⁶⁹

The danger here is in reading one’s preconceived ideas of orthodoxy into the Scriptures.

According to Good, this reliance upon deduction for Reformed theologians elevates theology above Scripture and puts them at variance with Baptists who historically “desired to continue as they had been, a company of believers who, in any given debate would characteristically ask,

¹⁶⁶ P. Andrew Sandlin, “Two Paradigms for Adherents of Sola Scriptura,” *Reformation and Revival* 9, no. 4 (2000): 38–39. Emphasis his.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Good, 107.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1972), 226–227.

‘Chapter and verse please?’ rather than, ‘Where is it so stated in the Creed?’ At the risk of being considered unlearned, the Baptists resorted more quickly to the Scriptures than to the theologians.”¹⁷⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer was careful to keep logic subordinate to exegesis in his theological method. He writes, “Systematic Theology does draw its material from both revelation and reason, though the portion supplied by reason is uncertain as to its authority and, at best, restricted to the point of insignificance. Reason, as here considered, indicates the intellectual and moral faculties of man exercised in the pursuit of truth and apart from supernatural aid.”¹⁷¹

In recent times, the doctrine of good and necessary consequence has been used to justify such diverse positions as:

- The Trinity¹⁷²
- The *Filioque*¹⁷³
- Opposition to nuclear war¹⁷⁴
- In-vitro fertilization¹⁷⁵
- Forms of worship¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Good, 109.

¹⁷¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), I: 48–49. See also Bruce A. Baker, “The Theological Method of Lewis Sperry Chafer,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5, no. 1 (2001): 59.

¹⁷² Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 100.

¹⁷³ Marc A. Pugliese, “How Important Is the Filioque for Reformed Orthodoxy?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004), 167.

¹⁷⁴ John M. Frame, “Some Questions about the Regulative Principle,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992), 361n6.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Also, Robert Letham, “Does the Regulative Principle Demand Exclusive Psalmody?” <http://9marks.org/article/journaldoes-regulative-principle-demand-exclusive-psalmody> (accessed December 31, 2014); Monty Wilson, “Without Form and Void: The Usefulness of Liturgies and Written Prayers,” *Reformation*

- Theonomy¹⁷⁷
- Paedobaptism¹⁷⁸
- Limited atonement¹⁷⁹
- Biblical counseling theory¹⁸⁰

McGraw explains the need for good and necessary consequence as follows: “There are some doctrines (such as the doctrine of the Trinity) that are dear to Christians, but that cannot be proved by any single passage of Scripture. Such doctrines must be inferred and pieced together from several passages of Scripture.”¹⁸¹

New Calvinists in general continue the Reformed tradition of observing the principle of good and necessary consequence. Though not always using the nomenclature of “good and necessary consequence,” an overreliance on theological deduction, even when it runs counter to the explicit statements of Scripture, characterizes much of New Calvinist teaching. Joe Carter, an editor for The Gospel Coalition, sets out his basic presuppositions and beliefs in an article titled “Naming Your Turtles.” In his section on “The Bible,” he writes, “I believe that the whole

and Revival 12 (2003), 25–26; T. David Gordon, “Some Answers about the Regulative Principle,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993), 323, 326n20.

¹⁷⁷ T. David Gordon, “A Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994), 27.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Horton, “Membership Requires Infant Baptism, A Response,” <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/membership-requires-affirmation-of-infant-baptism> (accessed December 31, 2014); Fred Malone, “Infant Baptism and the Regulative Principle of Worship,” <http://founders.org/fj35/infant-baptism-and-the-regulative-principle-of-worship> (accessed December 31, 2014); Fred A. Malone, “The Subjects of Baptism,” *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (2005): 57–58; W. G. Crampton, review of “*Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, J. V. Fesko,” *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 7 (2010): 98; John Murray, “Christian Baptism: Second Article,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 14 (1951), 19.

¹⁷⁹ Cornelius Van Til, Review of Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Westminster Theological Journal* 31 (1968), 93.

¹⁸⁰ Eric L. Johnson, “Reformational Counseling: A Middle Way,” *Reformation and Revival* 13 (2004), 33.

¹⁸¹ McGraw, *By Good and Necessary Consequence*, 1.

counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."¹⁸² Rolaant L. McKenzie appeals to the principle of good and necessary consequence in defense of the doctrine of limited atonement:

Christ foresaw the suffering and agony that He would have to endure, and yet, He was content with it, for He realized that by His death, everyone for whom He died would be redeemed from sin. Now if Christ died for all men, and some for whom He died ended up going to hell anyway, then Christ could not have foreseen the suffering and agony of His soul and been satisfied. He would have been disappointed because His efforts would not have been sufficient to save everyone for whom He died. Therefore, the atonement Christ made for the sins of His people was limited in purpose; not in its value, but in its purpose, for it was designed for the elect of God.¹⁸³

One problem with the principle of good and necessary consequence is how far one can stray from Scripture. Westminster Confession specified "deduced from Scripture." But does this include deduced from a deduction from Scripture? What about deduced from a deduction that was deduced from Scripture? For example, paedobaptism is deduced from a presupposition of covenant theology. But covenant theology is based on a deduction from Scripture (albeit an incorrect deduction), yet paedobaptists are confident that their doctrine is correct on the basis of good and necessary consequence. It has been demonstrated above that Piper builds his case for limited atonement on a series of deductions.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Joe Carter, "Naming Your Turtles," <http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/naming-your-turtles> (accessed August 13, 2014).

¹⁸³ Rolaant L. McKenzie, "Limited Atonement," http://www.gospeloutreach.net/limited_atonement.html (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ See also criticism of this tendency in Piper at David Servant, "The Five Points of Calvinism," 4.

All deduction is only as good as the assumptions that underlie the premises.¹⁸⁵ In mathematics, such assumptions are minimal; for example, the definition of a point, the assumption that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, or the axiom that $a + b = b + a$. But in theology, the assumptions are much more complicated, making theological deduction less reliable than mathematical deduction.¹⁸⁶ This is due in part to Scriptural admonitions such as Isaiah 55:9, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts,” and Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (also Isaiah 44:25; etc.). Logical premises in theology are based on exegesis of Scripture, and exegesis of Scripture is often dependent upon multiple assumptions. The interpreter assumes that he has a good grasp on the meaning of ancient languages, ancient customs, matters of Biblical introduction, etc. But any of these things may be open to some degree of uncertainty. Thus, though one may grant the soundness of the laws of logic (though some would question even this¹⁸⁷), this does not mean that theological deductions can be granted the same degree of certitude as mathematical deductions.

¹⁸⁵ Robert Lightner, “A Case for Systematic Theology” *Conservative Theological Journal* 4, no. 11 (2000): 37. Henebury, for example, claims that “the covenant theologian is implacably devoted to a view of the Covenant of Grace which prevents him from considering any eschatology that will not bend under its guiding authority. Dispensational Premillennialism is just not an option. The blinkers are on and they are content to keep them on. For this reason dispensationalists need to be wary of critiques of their system from covenant theologians.” (Paul Martin Henebury, “The Eschatology of Covenant Theology,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 10, no. 30 [2006]: 15).

¹⁸⁶ Rollin Thomas Chafer, “A Syllabus of Studies in Hermeneutics, Part 6, IV. The Relation of Logic to Interpretation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 94, no. 374 (1937): 208.

¹⁸⁷ For example, John V. Dahms, “How Reliable is Logic?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 (December 1978): 369–380.

J. I. Packer spoke of a hermeneutical spiral that involved three stages: exegesis, synthesis, and application.¹⁸⁸ Good and necessary consequence (deduction) belongs to the second stage (synthesis), and while synthesis can effect exegesis, at the outset it is secondary to exegesis and ultimately must be controlled by exegesis. Historically, dispensational theologians have focused on the elevation of inductive logic over deductive logic,¹⁸⁹ which tends to promote the task of exegesis. This is preferable to the Reformed practice of equating the authority of deduction to the authority of explicit statements of Scripture based on exegesis. Explicit statements of Scripture must be primary, while deduction must be secondary.¹⁹⁰

Epistemology

The preceding sections of this chapter, as well as the previous chapter on perseverance of the saints, have demonstrated a surprising deficiency on the part of New Calvinists in the area of Biblical authority. It is surprising because, while New Calvinists affirm belief in the authority of the Scriptures, they nevertheless contradict such belief in their mishandling of the Scriptures vis-à-vis their attempts to support their distinctive doctrines. This inconsistency between belief and practice is likely linked to a deficient epistemology.

¹⁸⁸ J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 348.

¹⁸⁹ Rollin Chafer, "Relation of Logic to Interpretation," 94, no. 373: 77–79; Lightner, "A Case for Systematic Theology," 37; Mal Couch, "What Is Systematic Theology?" *Conservative Theological Journal* 8, no. 23 (March, 2004): 11; Henebury, "The Eschatology of Covenant Theology," 15.

¹⁹⁰ This sentiment appears to be affirmed by the Reformed theologian Gaffin: "More than has been the case heretofore, dogmatics must be controlled by biblical theology, not only in its material but also in the way it structures this material, in the questions it asks, and perhaps even in the methods it employs. Among other things, such control should help to insure that, when drawn, the 'good and necessary consequence' of which the Confession speaks (I, vi) is really good and necessary" (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Study of the New Testament," *Westminster Theological Journal* 31, no. 2 (1968): 144.

1. Correspondence Theory

Cope notes several features of a Biblical epistemology: first, false doctrine is testable (1 John 4:1–2); second, true knowledge of God is comprehended only by the regenerate (1 Corinthians 2:14; third, truth (including truth about God) is knowable and propositional (Romans 10:10); and fourth, God’s truth is a historical fact recorded in Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).¹⁹¹ Geisler adds several other relevant observations: “The normal and consistent New Testament usage of ‘truth’ is of truth in the cognitive, propositional sense. Truth is what can be *known* (Rom 2:20), what can be *thought* (1 Tim 6:5), what can be *heard* (Eph 1:13; 2 Tim 4:4), what can be *believed* (2 Thess 2:12)—in short, it is used of propositions.”¹⁹²

In contrast to this Biblical approach to epistemology, The Gospel Coalition’s founding documents offer an approach that appears to be influenced by postmodern thinking. There is a tendency on the part of at least some New Calvinists to compromise the correspondence theory of truth. The Gospel Coalition’s Theological Vision for Ministry affirms, on the one hand, that “truth is correspondence to reality,” but then adds this caveat: “But to deny the possibility of purely objective knowledge does not mean the loss of truth that corresponds to objective reality, even if we can never know such truth without an element of subjectivity.”¹⁹³ So while generally affirming the correspondence theory of truth, the Gospel Coalition is not one hundred percent committed to it. They claim to hold to a “chastened correspondence theory”¹⁹⁴ and “deny the possibility of purely objective knowledge,” believing that “we can never know such truth without

¹⁹¹ Stephen M. Cope, “The Gospel Coalition: the ‘New Calvinism’s’ Attack on the Bible and Its Epistemology,” *The Trinity Review*, 133 (Sept–Oct 2013): 3–4.

¹⁹² Norman L. Geisler, “The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 548 (1980), 333.

¹⁹³ The Gospel Coalition, *Theological Vision for Ministry*, I.1.

¹⁹⁴ *Theological Vision*, I.4.

an element of subjectivity.” Thus, truth, according to the authors of this document, is not completely objective but is partially subjective. And if so, then what one person considers truth, at least partially, may be different from what another person considers truth. One may legitimately ask, What is it about the correspondence theory that needs to be chastened? Either truth corresponds to reality or it does not. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “*Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*,”¹⁹⁵ which “points back to Aristotle’s definition that ‘To say of what is that it is not . . . is false, while to say of what is that it is . . . is true.’”¹⁹⁶

But it is not only the issue of objectivity versus subjectivity that is problematic in The Gospel Coalition’s epistemology. There is also a problem with whether truth may be considered propositional. The Gospel Coalition’s theological vision goes on to state, “We believe that Scripture is pervasively propositional. . . . But the truth of Scripture cannot be exhausted in a series of propositions.”¹⁹⁷ By using the qualifying adverb “pervasively,” it is maintained that some truth claims are nonpropositional. They claim to adopt a “‘chastened’ correspondence–theory of truth that is less triumphalistic than that of some in the older evangelicalism.”¹⁹⁸ This statement makes two unproven, and likely faulty, assumptions: (1) that complete adherence to the correspondence theory necessarily leads to a triumphalistic attitude and (2) that a triumphalistic confidence in the truth is somehow morally wrong. Part of the problem with this statement is the failure to define the term “triumphalistic.” On the one hand, a “smug or boastful

¹⁹⁵ “Truth is the conformity of thing and intellect,” Anthony C. Thiselton, “Truth,” Colin Brown, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), III, 894.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Theological Vision*, I.2.

¹⁹⁸ *Theological Vision*, I.4.

pride”¹⁹⁹ certainly ought always to be avoided (Psalm 138:6; Matthew 23:12; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5); but on the other hand, rejoicing in the truth²⁰⁰ (1 Corinthians 13:6; 2 John 4) and confident refutation of false doctrine (1 Timothy 6:12; Jude 3) are both enjoined by Scripture. How does compromising objectivity while promoting subjectivity figure as a remedy for pride? The Gospel Coalition avers that some truth cannot be stated propositionally and can only be known subjectively. But in order for truth to qualify as truth, it must be objective, and therefore propositional. Just because God has not expressed some truths propositionally (Deuteronomy 29:29) does not mean that such truths cannot be expressed propositionally. Clark expresses this view clearly as follows:

The Bible nowhere suggests that there are any inexpressible truths. To be sure, there are truths which God has not expressed to man, for “the secret things belong unto God”; but this is not to say that God is ignorant of the subjects, predicates, copulas, and logical concatenations of these secret things. Once again we face the problem of equivocation. If there could be a truth inexpressible in logical, grammatical form, the word *truth* as applied to it would have no more in common with the usual meaning of truth than the Dog Star has in common with Fido.²⁰¹

To suggest that some truths cannot be expressed propositionally seems to run contrary to the apostle Paul’s admonition “not to exceed what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6). The Gospel Coalition’s approach to knowledge is a slippery slope that will likely lead one to a neo-orthodox view of truth that is both relativistic and existential.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ The noun “triumphalism” is defined as “smug or boastful pride in the success or dominance of one’s nation or ideology over others” in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

²⁰⁰ The noun “triumph” is defined as “the joy or exultation of victory or success,” *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Gordon Clark, “The Bible as Truth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114, no. 454 (1957): 167.

²⁰² Such as Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 369–70; Norman Geisler, “The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate,” 328n12; Cope, 11; Clark, 170. Thiselton has demonstrated convincingly, contra the views of Heidegger et al, that the Biblical view of truth in no way rules out the correspondence theory, and that both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the terms for “truth” (ἀλήθεια, ἀληθεια) are used to speak of truth in contrast to lying or deception; i.e., truth is that which corresponds with the

2. Foundationalism

The authors of the founding documents of The Gospel Coalition take a particularly dim view of foundationalism. This marks a departure from traditional Reformed theology. Beginning with the Westminster Confession of Faith (ca. 1646), Reformed expressions of systematic theology have generally begun with Bibliology,²⁰³ regarding this doctrine as foundational to all the rest of theology. The Gospel Coalition, on the other hand, regards the doctrine of Scripture as the wrong place to begin. Their confessional statement begins with an article on “The Tri-une God” and places their article on “Revelation” second. This order is no mere triviality. While from God’s perspective metaphysics may come first, in human inquiry, epistemology must come first, and this includes Bibliology.²⁰⁴ In a passage describing how The Gospel Coalition’s confessional foundation came to take the form it did, Carson and Keller explain:

We also thought it was important to begin our confession with God rather than with Scripture. This is significant. The Enlightenment was overconfident about human rationality. Some strands of it assumed it was possible to build systems of thought on unassailable foundations that could be absolutely certain to unaided human reason. Despite their frequent vilification of the Enlightenment, many conservative evangelicals have nevertheless been shaped by it. This can be seen in how many evangelical

facts of a matter (Thiselton, “Truth,” 874–901); also a good discussion of this is to be found in Geisler, “The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate,” 332–333.

²⁰³ The first chapter of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is titled, “Of the Holy Scripture.” For a comparison of major reformed confessions, see Appendix 5, “Major Confessions Leading up to Westminster.” William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, places Bibliology before Theology (Proper). Though Berkhof does not have a separate section for Bibliology in his *Systematic Theology*, under the doctrine of God, he states, “God is first of all the subject communicating knowledge to man, and can only become an object of study for man in so far as the latter appropriates and reflects on the knowledge conveyed to him by revelation. Without revelation man would never have been able to acquire any knowledge of God,” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 34. Hodge, like Berkhof, does not have a separate section on Bibliology; however, in his introduction he has a section on theological method in which he states, “His only proper course is to derive his theory of virtue, of sin, of liberty, of obligation, from the facts of the Bible. He should remember that his business is not to set forth his system of truth (that is of no account), but to ascertain and exhibit what is God’s system, which is a matter of the greatest moment. If he cannot believe what the facts of the Bible assume to be true, let him say so. Let the sacred writers have their doctrine, while he has his own.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 13. A. H. Strong appeals to the priority of Bibliology in his prolegomena, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 27.

²⁰⁴ The author is indebted to Dr. Christopher Cone for this observation in a private e-mail correspondence.

statements of faith start with the Scripture, not with God. They proceed from Scripture to doctrine through rigorous exegesis in order to build (what they consider) an absolutely sure, guaranteed-true-to-Scripture theology. The problem is that this is essentially a foundationalist approach to knowledge. It ignores the degree to which our cultural location affects our interpretation of the Bible, and it assumes a very rigid subject-object distinction. It ignores historical theology, philosophy, and cultural reflection. Starting with the Scripture leads readers to the overconfidence that their exegesis of biblical texts has produced a system of perfect doctrinal truth.²⁰⁵ This can create pride and rigidity because it may not sufficiently acknowledge the fallenness of human reason.

We believe it is best to start with God, to declare (with John Calvin, Institutes 1.1) that without knowledge of God we cannot know ourselves, our world, or anything else. If there is no God, we would have no reason to trust our reason.²⁰⁶

Placing their statement on the triune God before their statement on Revelation is both significant and is based on their rejection of foundationalism. Their view of foundationalism and their rejection of the priority of Bibliology appear to be echoes of Grenz and Franke's 2001 book, *Beyond Foundationalism*.²⁰⁷ One can certainly sympathize with their concern regarding being "overconfident about human rationality." But should foundationalism, on this basis, really be jettisoned? And is it reasonable to promote the doctrine of God over the doctrine of the Scriptures? This dim view of foundationalism suggests a problematic and possibly dangerous epistemological direction in New Calvinism.

a. Is Priority of Bibliology the Equivalent of Foundationalism?

The Westminster Confession of Faith (ca. 1646), one of the earliest major confessions to begin with an article on Scripture, was indeed contemporaneous with many of the principal

²⁰⁵ At this point, the following is cited as footnote 1: See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 61–64.

²⁰⁶ Timothy Keller and D. A. Carson, *Gospel-Centered Ministry*, The Gospel Coalition Booklets, Kindle Edition (Crossway, 2011), 6.

²⁰⁷ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001). Grenz and Franke, in turn, appear to be following the lead of Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996).

Enlightenment philosophers such as Francis Bacon (1562–1626), René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), John Locke (1632–1704), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), Voltaire (1694–1778), Francis Hutcheson, (1694–1746), David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Isaac Newton (1643–1727). But chronological contemporaneity does not prove philosophical dependence. In fact, it must be questioned whether Carson and Keller are even accurate in attributing the priority of Bibliology to foundationalism. Pierce wonders whether Carson and Keller are “either ignorant about the meaning of a basic philosophical term or completely mistaken in how to apply it.”²⁰⁸ Enlightenment foundationalism is usually traced to René Descartes and his appeal to the proposition *cogito ergo sum* as the foundational sensory realization on which his entire knowledge system could be based. This is a far cry from the Westminster Confession’s beginning with the doctrine of the Scriptures as a foundation for the rest of the confession. Confessional priority of Bibliology appears to be something fundamentally different from the philosophical foundationalism that Carson and Keller are referring to. Nevertheless, whatever Carson and Keller mean by foundationalism, they identify it with Enlightenment doctrine.

There does seem to be some confusion of terms here, and it appears that Pierce is correct to question the legitimacy of Carson and Keller’s reference to foundationalism. Some form of foundationalism has been accepted by the majority of philosophers at least since the time of Aristotle.²⁰⁹ It is overly simplistic to say that foundationalism either should be or has been rejected. It is overly simplistic because it fails to distinguish between classical foundationalism

²⁰⁸ Jeremy Pierce, “Foundationalism and Starting with God,” Parableman (April 3, 2011, 7:25 p.m.) <http://parablemania.ektopos.com/archives/2011/04/foundationalism.html> (accessed October 8, 2014).

²⁰⁹ J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112; Norman L. Geisler, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 19.

and nonclassical foundationalism, between weak foundationalism and strong foundationalism, between internal foundationalism and external foundationalism.²¹⁰ There are varieties of foundationalism, not all of which have been as roundly rejected by modern philosophers as Carson and Keller represent.²¹¹

Carson and Keller's argument for rejecting the priority of Bibliology in favor of the priority of the article on the triune God rests on this faulty identification of Bibliology's priority with foundationalism.²¹² In fact, the Westminster Confession was not the first major confession to put Bibliology first. That distinction belongs to the Tetrapolitan (Zwinglian) Confession of 1530. Zwingli's confession begins with chapter 1, "Of the Subject-Matter of Sermons," which contains a strong statement on "divinely inspired Scripture" being "profitable for doctrine." Zwingli states, "It seemed to us not improper to resort in such a crisis whither of old and always not only the most holy fathers, bishops and princes, but also the children of God everywhere,

²¹⁰ McCall had the same criticism of Grenz and Franke, arguing that "it is less than obvious that they are working with the best understanding of what it is that they are rejecting. For instance, in some places, it appears that they are confusing genus (foundationalism) with species (what is commonly called classic, narrow, or strong foundationalism). At some points, they appear to recognize a distinction between soft or modest foundationalism, on one hand, and narrow or strong foundationalism, on the other hand. Often they proceed as if there is only one version of foundationalism (i.e., the strong version). Such an approach to this central topic makes it hard to escape the impression that Grenz and Franke have either misunderstood foundationalism or overlooked the possibility that modest foundationalism is still viable and thus have dismissed it too hastily" (Tom McCall, Review of Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 41, no. 1 [April, 2006]: 155–156).

²¹¹ Moreland and Craig, 110–129. A number of evangelical Christian philosophers would identify themselves as foundationalists, such as William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Keith DeRose, "Direct Warrant Realism," Andrew Dole and Andrew Chignell, *God and the Ethics of Belief* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 151).

²¹² There is a tendency on the part of some evangelicals to appeal to a rejection of foundationalism as a reason to reject the doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture. This is the case with Nancey Murphy in her book *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996). A helpful review of Murphy's book is R. Scott Smith, "Post-Conservatives, Foundationalism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 351–363. Other evangelicals who link the rejection of foundationalism with rejection of inerrancy include Stanley Grenz in his 1993 book, *Revisiting Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993) and both Grenz and John Franke in their 2001 book, *Beyond Foundationalism*. This is not to suggest that Keller and Carson necessarily reject inerrancy; however, the fact that they are following in the footsteps of Murphy, Grenz, and Franke in rejecting foundationalism certainly sounds a note of caution.

have always resorted – viz., to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.” After this, chapter 2 is titled, “Of the Holy Trinity and the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ.”²¹³ Zwingli’s confession is clearly too early to have been influenced by the Enlightenment.

b. What Is the Alternative to Foundationalism?

Carson and Keller’s rejection of foundationalism is also troubling in that it begs the question of what should be substituted for it. They do not address this question in *Gospel-Centered Ministry*, but the alternative to foundationalism is generally considered to be coherentism.²¹⁴ Moreland and Craig refer to coherentism as “the only viable alternative” to foundationalism.²¹⁵ By rejecting foundationalism, Carson and Keller run the risk of giving tacit approval to coherentism as an approved system of epistemology. Pierce regards such approval as being “radically incompatible with Christian teaching.”²¹⁶ While coherentism may function within a broader system of (weak) foundationalism,²¹⁷ it is insufficient as an overall epistemological control. The chief problems associated with coherentism are that it requires circular reasoning, is relativistic, and tends to subjectivism.²¹⁸ The tendency to subjectivism can be seen in Keller and Carson’s statement that a foundationalist approach to theology “ignores the

²¹³ See Appendix 5, “Major Confessions Leading up to Westminster.”

²¹⁴ McCall, Review of *Beyond Foundationalism*, 156. Michael D. White, “Everything Old Is New Again: A Comparative Assessment of the Postconservative Proposals of John Franke and Roger Olson,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 419.

²¹⁵ Moreland and Craig, 123.

²¹⁶ Pierce, “Foundationalism and Starting with God.” For a formal critique of coherentism, see Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 25ff.; also, DeRose, “Direct Warrant Realism,” 157–59.

²¹⁷ DeRose, “Direct Warrant Realism,” 157–158.

²¹⁸ DeRose, “Direct Warrant Realism,” 157; Moreland and Craig, 123–127; Michael D. White, “Everything Old Is New Again,” 432.

degree to which our cultural location affects our interpretation of the Bible, and it assumes a very rigid subject-object distinction.”²¹⁹ If Keller and Carson are serious about rejecting foundationalism, they need to offer an alternative epistemology. Failure to provide such an alternative leaves their followers—The Gospel Coalition—subject to the vagaries of a coherentist epistemology.

c. Is It Wrong to Begin with Bibliology?

The notion that Bibliology is foundational to the rest of theology is a thoroughly Biblical teaching. It was not an idea derived from Enlightenment philosophers. Proper knowledge of God is derived only from the Scriptures. According to Romans 1:18–32, man’s mind, unaided by Scripture, can produce only a corrupt view of God. It is the Scriptures that testify of Jesus (John 5:39). Therefore, they are foundational to our understanding of God. Rather than finding fault with the priority of Bibliology, perhaps it is best to agree with the Biblical evaluation of the Bereans, who “searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The psalmist testified that God Himself exalts His Word above His name (Psalm 138:2). Carson and Keller were confident that their placing the doctrine of God before the doctrine of the Scriptures reflected Calvin’s priorities in the way the *Institutes* are ordered, but Calvin might have been consulted in his commentary on Psalm 138:2 where he affirms, “Nor can [there be] any doubt that owing to our blind insensibility to the benefits which God bestows upon us, the best way in which he can awaken us to the right notice of them is by first addressing his word to us, and then certifying and sealing his goodness by accomplishing what he has promised.”²²⁰

²¹⁹ Keller and Carson, 6.

²²⁰ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 200–201.

d. Is Beginning with “God” Less Foundationalist than Beginning with Bibliology?

Keller and Carson reasoned that because foundationalism is to be rejected, The Gospel Coalition’s confessional statement should begin with God rather than with Scripture. But how is beginning with God less foundationalist than beginning with Scripture?²²¹ Pierce observes, “If the idea is that we shouldn’t start with the foundation of scripture and instead start with the foundation of God, then that’s still foundationalism, just with a different foundation.”²²² Keller and Carson’s exact statement is that “without knowledge of God we cannot know ourselves, our world, or anything else.”²²³ This sounds very much like they are saying that knowledge of God is foundational to knowledge about “ourselves, our world, or anything else.” How is this not foundationalist? And if it is just a better foundation than Scripture, then how does this avoid the triumphalism that Keller and Carson are trying to avoid, since it is foundationalism that they claim leads to a triumphalistic attitude?²²⁴

e. Does Beginning with the Triune God Make One Less Confident about Human Rationality?

An earlier section in this chapter critiqued the Reformed doctrine of good and necessary consequence. It is only by good and necessary consequence that one deduces the Trinitarian doctrine of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere clearly stated in Scripture, but is a deduction. This may be considered a valid use of good and necessary consequence; nevertheless, it is applying human rationality to the data of Scripture in order to formulate the doctrine. The

²²¹ Christopher Cone, “Which Comes First, Metaphysics or Epistemology?” <http://www.drcone.com/2014/04/02/which-comes-first-metaphysics-or-epistemology/> (accessed December 2, 2014).

²²² Pierce, “Foundationalism and Starting with God.”

²²³ Keller and Carson, *Gospel-Centered Ministry*, 6.

²²⁴ McCall, Review of *Beyond Foundationalism*, 156.

Gospel Coalition's confession begins, not merely with a statement about the Creator God, but with a statement about the triune God: "We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another." No evangelical Christian could have any objection to this statement. But it is inconsistent for Keller and Carson to criticize evangelical statements that prioritize Bibliology because they reflect Enlightenment thinking that is "overconfident about human rationality" and are built on "systems of thought [based] on unassailable foundations that could be absolutely certain to unaided human reason" and then to begin with a logically deduced statement on the triune God. Their criticism seems at best embarrassing, and at worst ludicrous, since their own confession leads with a statement that is itself a logical deduction.

Human rationality is a gift from God. It is an inherent part of man based on the *imago Dei*. There is nothing essentially wrong with employing human rationality (Isaiah 1:18). Kurka states that "the origins of modern science were inarguably forged from the biblical doctrine of creation and its resultant worldview that presented a cosmos of rationality, coherence, and comprehension."²²⁵ The Gospel Coalition's opening statement about the triune God is a perfectly good statement that relies upon such human rationality. But it should not be preferred to the priority of Bibliology on the basis that it will somehow make one less confident about human rationality. McCall remarked that such linking of overconfidence to foundationalism was unwarranted:

Individualism, rationalism, and the desire for certainty are neither necessary nor sufficient for foundationalism —someone who is not a foundationalist could exhibit any or all of these characteristics while a foundationalist might not be guilty of any of these

²²⁵ Robert C. Kurka, "Before 'Foundationalism': A More Biblical Alternative to the Grenz/Franke Proposal for Doing Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 155. Kurka cites S. L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 33.

charges. Grenz and Franke advocate a theology that is “beyond foundationalism,” but, from what we have in this work, it is still less than obvious either that their use of the term is consistent or that their understanding of foundationalism is the best one available.²²⁶

Human rationality, when submitted to the propositions of Scripture, expresses a humble faith in God that accepts His Word and His commands as the ultimate authority in believers’ lives (Acts 17:11; John 5:39; Isaiah 8:20; 34:16). The triune God that Keller and Carson confess is a God who can only be deduced from the propositions of Scripture—and they are right to confess such a God. But if He can only be deduced from the propositions of Scripture, then Keller and Carson have, in fact, prioritized Bibliology, and it is both dangerous and hypocritical for them to argue that prioritizing Bibliology is flawed.²²⁷

Conclusion

On the one hand, New Calvinists are to be commended for their stated commitment to the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. However, in this and the preceding chapter it has been demonstrated that, though claiming to hold strongly to *sola Scriptura*, New Calvinists in fact violate their stated commitment to this doctrine. This was seen first through an examination of the way New Calvinists seek to maintain their beliefs in four key doctrines: perseverance of the saints, fallible prophecy, limited atonement, and the soteriological requirement of repentance as

²²⁶ McCall, Review of *Beyond Foundationalism* 156. Similarly, regarding Roger Olson’s rejection of foundationalism, White argues that the “claim that some conservative evangelicals function with an informal magisterium might be counted as a clever rhetoric, the lack of evidence for such a claim relegates his assertions to the level of name-calling” (White, “Everything Old Is New Again,” 433). For another rejection of this linking of foundationalism with overconfidence, see R. Scott Smith, “Post-Conservatives, Foundationalism, and Theological Truth: A Critical Evaluation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 351–363.

²²⁷ Cone suggests that another key flaw in Reformed epistemology is the failure to include hermeneutics within one’s scheme of epistemology. For a helpful evaluation of Van Til’s epistemology along with a critique of his failure to include hermeneutics, see Christopher Cone, “Two Deficiencies of Reformed Epistemology: A Brief Commendation and Critique of Cornelius Van Til’s Epistemology,” <http://www.drcone.com/2014/04/28/two-deficiencies-of-reformed-epistemology-a-brief-commendation-and-critique-of-cornelius-van-tils-epistemology/#sthash.lc58tXE3.dpuf> (accessed December 2, 2014). For another helpful critique of Carson and Keller vis-à-vis foundationalism, see <http://parablemania.ektopos.com/archives/2011/04/foundationalism.html>.

both the expression of sorrow and a turning from sin. From an examination of these four doctrines a further examination was made into the philosophical bases for the New Calvinist view of authority. These philosophical bases consist of a reliance upon the Reformed doctrine of good and necessary consequence and of an epistemological approach that runs counter to Scriptural teaching regarding the correspondence theory and foundationalism. These two chapters have shown that New Calvinists approach the Scriptures with a preunderstanding that commits them to certain dogmas despite Scriptural teaching that can be reached through sound exegetical procedure.

Conclusion

At the dawning of the twenty-first century, a resurgence of Reformed theology among many young Christians has come to be known as New Calvinism. The previous century had seen a notable advance in theology with the development of dispensationalism. Even George E. Ladd, an opponent of dispensationalism, noted about the dispensational teachers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

It is doubtful if there has been any other circle of men who have done more by their influence in preaching, teaching and writing to promote a love for Bible study, a hunger for the deeper Christian life, a passion for evangelism and zeal for missions in the history of American Christianity. They were men who walked with God.¹

New Calvinism's resurgence is something of a step backward against the previous advances made by dispensationalism. It is an effort to return to what is perceived as the theological correctness of the Reformers and Puritans. There is something to be said for seeking a more historical approach to doctrine. After all, contemporary theology has brought no end of erroneous and heretical doctrines. But the problem with seeking a more historical approach is the question, "How far back do you go?" What is the age of perfection in theology that we ought to seek? Was it the sixteenth-century Reformers? Was it the seventeenth century with its Synod of Dort and the great Reformed creeds? Was it the era of the Puritans? If the Puritans, which ones? Jonathan Edwards? C. H. Spurgeon? Or is it necessary to wait for a modern-day John Piper, D. A. Carson, or Timothy Keller to parse correctly the theology of those preceding eras?

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 49.

The allure of a historical theology in the end will always prove elusive. The only real satisfaction comes from finding a theology that is rooted in the teachings of the inerrant Word of God. If Calvin discovered that Biblical theology perfectly, then fine, we should follow the teachings of Calvin. If Edwards, then follow him. But maybe it was a dispensationalist who discovered the right theology. Could it have been John Nelson Darby? C. H. Mackintosh? C. I. Scofield? Lewis Sperry Chafer? or the many others whom Ladd describes as “men who walked with God”? Ultimately, one’s confidence in theology should not be based on “great men of the faith,” for all these “great men” were simply sinners saved by grace. Unless one’s theology can be sustained by thorough, consistent, and responsible exegesis of the Word of God, it must be held as suspect.

The preceding pages have sought to demonstrate that the key defining doctrines of New Calvinism, when examined in the light of thorough, consistent, and responsible exegesis of the Word of God are, in fact, weighed in the balances and found wanting. This dissertation has examined five significant doctrines deemed by the author to constitute the sine qua non of New Calvinism. The author’s intent has not been to demean the character of any of the proponents of New Calvinism, for many of them are sincere men of God who are honestly and enthusiastically seeking to understand God’s will and Word. However, it is the studied opinion of this author that these New Calvinists have had their thinking prejudiced and clouded by improper presuppositions. These presuppositions have led them to adopt theological conclusions unwarranted from the text of Scripture and damaging to the hopes and spiritual well-being of their followers.

Eclecticism. Of the five characteristics studied, eclecticism is the most pragmatic and the least theoretical. Clearly, one the features that distinguishes New Calvinism from older, more

traditional Calvinism is the desire to bring a much broader swath of Christianity under the banner of Calvinism. This has resulted in an effort to include such diverse groups as Presbyterians, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Charismatics, and Hipsters. But serious doctrinal differences between these groups make the survival of such a coalition doubtful. Indeed, already as of the writing of this dissertation, fragmentation has been witnessed within some of the key New Calvinist groups.

Soteriocentrism. Nothing may be more characteristic of Reformed theology than a soteriocentric focus. This is true also of New Calvinism. Historically, the soteriocentric focus of the sixteenth-century Reformers makes perfect sense. The most glaring theological error characterizing medieval Roman Catholicism was its unscriptural teaching of a works-based salvation. With the Bible's having become recently available to men due to the remarkable historical movement known as the Renaissance, those eager to know God's will came to understand the doctrine of salvation by the free grace of God—*sola fides*. From man's perspective, nothing can be more important than our eternal salvation. And so the Reformation was born out of a focus on the doctrine of salvation based on God's grace.

Within this Reformed tradition, covenant theology developed, which sought to explain all of God's dealings with His creation in terms of His eternal plan to bring salvation to the elect. However, when God's creation is viewed from God's perspective, it appears that God does have other purposes than the salvation of the elect—purposes related to the angels, the physical creation, the family, and the nations. Covenant theology, as convenient as it seemed for explaining how God brings His elect to salvation, came up short in explaining these other purposes of God. Dispensationalism was more all-encompassing with its controlling purpose of God's glory. This is largely why dispensationalism was such a success in the twentieth century. New Calvinism's regress into covenant theology comes up short in allowing all of Scripture to

speak plainly about all the purposes of God. Its insistence that all of Scripture be centered on the gospel forces a nonliteral interpretation of many texts, resulting in a deficient view of Scripture itself.

Supersessionism. One of the most astounding historical occurrences of the twentieth century was the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. Already dispensationalism had been promoting the Biblical teaching that God would restore the nation of Israel in the latter days. When the modern nation was born, it just seemed to confirm what dispensationalists had been teaching for a hundred years. But the idea of a reconstituted and restored nation of Israel did not fit well into the theological system based on the Covenant of Grace. So those committed to Reformed theology continued to be at odds with the teaching of dispensationalism.

Reformed theology's approach to understanding Israel was that "Israel" was never intended to signify solely the physical nation, but that it was a sort of code word to refer to the elect. Now that the Church had come into existence, the Church was the new Israel, the true Israel of God, and promises that God had apparently made to national Israel in the Old Testament were now transferred to the Church. New Calvinism continues this reinterpretation of Israel. Even premillennial New Calvinists, such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem, refer to the Church as the true Israel of God. And while some of them may see a future salvation of Jews, there is no place in their theology for a reconstituted and restored nation of Israel as part of God's program for the world. Historically, supersessionism had frequently led to anti-Semitic hatred. This is not intended to equate New Calvinism with anti-Semitism, but in this day of Christian Palestinianism and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanction movement against Israel (both of which are anti-Semitic), it is to direct a note of caution to New Calvinists. God's promise to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse him (Genesis 12:3) is still in force.

Perseverance of the Saints. Nowhere is the need for definition of terms felt more acutely than in discussion of the perseverance of the saints. Most dispensationalists identify with this doctrine; however, they usually understand it as it was identified by Lewis Sperry Chafer as identical with the doctrine of the security of the believer. In Reformed theology, while it includes the notion of the security of the believer, the perseverance of the saints also requires the belief that one who is truly born again will necessarily persevere throughout his life in good works. This latter emphasis becomes a teaching popularized among New Calvinists known as lordship salvation.

The motive behind the promulgation of lordship salvation appears to be well-intentioned; namely, a desire to promote holiness in the lives of believers. However, upon close inspection of the Scriptures, Biblical passages put forth to substantiate this teaching are found to be taken out of context and given a meaning not intended by the original Biblical authors. Lordship salvation teaching has the disastrous side-effect of producing lack of assurance of salvation for the believer. The believer robbed of his assurance through the teaching of lordship salvation becomes introspective and doubtful. This in turn produces the very opposite of what the teachers of lordship salvation intend to produce. The introspective and doubtful will never produce holiness in their lives, but rather will live in bondage to fear and either develop a legalistic approach to Christianity that is opposed to the New Testament teaching of grace, or he will simply give up, assume that he is lost, and live a life of debauchery.

Authority. The above aberrant teachings are all held by good men who are honestly seeking to understand God's will according to the teachings of His Word. How can this be? New Calvinists, despite that they claim to hold the Reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, in fact add to the authority of Scripture in many ways. Traditional, historical Calvinism never accepted the

validity of the continuation of revelatory gifts, such as prophecy and tongues. This was because it believed that the Scriptures were authoritative, sufficient, and complete. New Calvinism, however, opened its doors to the acceptance of the validity of these gifts continuing.

Furthermore, by adopting a gospel-centered approach to the Scriptures, New Calvinism biases the outcome of its interpretation of many passages, necessitating a departure from a literal, grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Perhaps most dangerous of all is the adoption of a faulty epistemology, one which, on the one hand, elevates deductive logic above inductive conclusions drawn from Scriptural observation, and, on the other hand, accepts a postmodern rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and of foundationalism. By way of contrast, dispensationalism has always relied heavily on an inductive approach to knowledge and an acceptance of both the correspondence theory of truth and of a proper foundationalism that begins all theological discussion with the authority of the Bible.

Appendix 1

The Christocentric Principle of Hermeneutics and Luke 24:27

Introduction

Christocentricity has frequently been proffered both as a sure guide to proper interpretation of Scripture and as a guard against faulty interpretation. Butler, in commenting on Luke 24:27, has expressed this principle as follows:

Jesus said one principle should guide your reading of Scripture. You should search the Scriptures to see how each part points to the life, death, resurrection, and mission of Jesus. Scripture is read correctly only when it is read in light of Jesus. Other readings of Scripture are in error because they miss the main point of the writing. The Hebrew Scriptures were not written to provide a history in preparation for Mohammed. They were not written to become a law book that formed the basis for the moral interpretations of the Talmud. They were written to prepare people to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as Son of God, Redeemer of Israel, and Savior of the World.¹

Nearly all Christian interpreters would agree in general with this sentiment; however, “christocentricity” must be carefully defined and limited, or it may itself become the cause of faulty interpretation. The excessive practice of christocentric interpretation among the Reformers, leading to extremes in typological and allegorical interpretation, is well known, and in more recent times, christocentricity has even become an earmark of a “neo-orthodox dogmatic interest (as distinct from a legitimate historiographical issue).”² According to Farrar, Luther’s six principles of interpretation are:

1. The necessity for grammatical knowledge

¹ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 3, Holman Reference (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 425.

² Richard A. Muller, “A Note on ‘Christocentrism’ and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 68, 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006), 254.

2. The importance of taking into consideration times, circumstances, and conditions
3. The observance of the context
4. The need of faith and spiritual illumination
5. Keeping what he called “the proportion of faith”
6. The reference of all Scripture to Christ³

It is the all-inclusiveness of Luther’s sixth principle that often led him to the abuse of this principle.⁴ Calvin, likewise, was known for taking the christocentric principle to an extreme.⁵ Other examples of overstatement of the christocentric principle might be found in such well-known and respected commentators as Godet:

Jesus had before him a grand field, from the Protevangelium, the first great Gospel of Genesis, down to Malachi. In studying the Scriptures for himself, he had found himself in them everywhere (John 5:39, 40).⁶

or Matthew Henry:

There are things dispersed throughout *all the scriptures* concerning Christ, which it is of great advantage to have *collected* and *put together*. You cannot go far in any part of scripture but you meet with something that has reference to Christ, some prophecy, some promise, some prayer, some type or other; for he is the true *treasure in the field* of the

³ Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1886), 332.

⁴ Farrar, 334–36. Farrar notes specifically, “When Luther reads the doctrines of the Trinity, and the Incarnation, and Justification by Faith, and Reformation dogmatics and polemics, into passages written more than a thousand years before the Christian era -- when, in a spirit worthy of R. Aqiba himself, he infers the Divinity of the Messiah and the ‘Communication of Idioms’ from the particle \aleph in Gen. v. 22, he is adopting an unreal method which had been rejected a millennium earlier by the clearer insight and more unbiased wisdom of the School of Antioch” (p.334).

⁵ David S. Dockery, Trent C. Butler, Christopher L. Church et al., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 31–32.

⁶ Cited in *The Pulpit Commentary: St Luke Vol. II*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 271.

Old Testament. A golden thread of gospel grace runs through the whole web of the Old Testament. There is an *eye* of that *white* to be discerned in every place.⁷

or Warren Wiersbe: “The key to understanding the Bible is to see Jesus Christ on every page.”⁸

Such extremes have led many interpreters to violate the principle of literal interpretation. One of the most obvious areas of violation of literal interpretation due to the christocentric principle is seen in approaches to the Song of Solomon. Understood literally, this beautiful song portrays the joys of a love relationship between man and wife as designed by God.⁹ Yet many interpreters have thought this an unworthy theme for the Scriptures, and because of their commitment to christocentricity have adopted an allegorical interpretation. Such was the view of J. Hudson Taylor:

Read without the key, this book is specially unintelligible, but that key is easily found in the express teachings of the New Testament. The Incarnate Word is the true key to the written Word. . . . In Solomon, the bridegroom king, as well as author of this poem, we have a type of our Lord, the true Prince of peace, in His coming reign.¹⁰

In a similar vein, McPhee argues,

When we see the bride so gently won to a wholehearted allegiance and devotion to her beloved, her life redeemed from the bondage of serving in the enemies’ vineyards until at last she is seen in such happy adjustment to her beloved, bringing forth fruit for his pleasure, caring for the weaker sisters, leaning upon him for guidance and comfort, and finally resting and waiting for him in the gardens with his friends where her testimony of him and her worship directed to him gladden his heart, how can we fail to see in this

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), Lk 24:13–35.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Lk 24:13.

⁹ It is a platonic dualism, not the Bible, that portrays physical love between man and wife in a negative light. God created the entire physical universe, including man and woman, and declared it to be “very good” (Genesis 1:27, 31). While Adam and Eve were still in their innocent state, God made them “one flesh” and commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28; 2:22–25).

¹⁰ J. Hudson Taylor, *Union and Communion or Thoughts on the Song of Solomon* (London: China Inland Mission, 1914), 2–3.

beautiful story a picture of our lives as they should develop under the inconceivable grace of our Beloved?¹¹

Likewise reasons the great Puritan author Burrowes:

In the eyes of many who are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile, this Song is in as bad repute as was Nazareth of old; and when they say, Can any good thing come out of this book? with the feelings of Philip, we reply, Come and see. Here we have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write; and as that ancient saint saw in Jesus of Nazareth more than the son of Joseph, even the Messiah – so does divine illumination cause us to see in this portrait of the Beloved, a greater than Solomon, even him in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily . . . therefore . . . this Song is to be interpreted allegorically.¹²

One of the key Scriptural references used to support the hermeneutical principle of christocentricity is Luke 24:27: “And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets He interpreted¹³ to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”¹⁴ An examination of this verse in its context will show that while generally supporting the idea of christocentricity in the Scriptures, it does *not* support the extreme view that Christ is to be found in every single verse, let alone every phrase or word.

1. Contextual Setting

Luke 24:27 falls within the pericope of Christ’s revelation of Himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. As such, it forms part of the fourfold post-resurrection sequence of events as recorded by Luke:

¹¹ L. M. McPhee, *The Romance of the Ages* (Oak Park, IL: Designed Products, Inc., 1950), 3.

¹² George Burrowes, *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1853), 53–54.

¹³ From διαρμηνεύω, which may mean “to translate,” “to interpret,” or “to explain” (BDAG s.v. διαρμηνεύω).

¹⁴ Other Scriptural support is found in Luke 24:44; Matthew 5:17–20; John 5:46.

1. Discovery of the body's absence—first day of the week early in the morning (τῆ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ὄρθρου βαθέως) (24:1–12)
 - a. By the women (vv. 1–11)
 - b. By Peter (v. 12)
2. Jesus appears, unrecognizable at first, to the Emmaus disciples—late afternoon of the same day (24:13–35)
3. Jesus appears recognizable to the disciples in Jerusalem—evening of the same day (24:36–49)
4. Ascension (24:50–51)¹⁵

Luke's purpose in recording the three resurrection day appearances focuses heavily on the importance of Scripture in producing faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus. There is a noted progression: The first appearance (24:1–12) involves no citation from or teaching from the Scriptures.¹⁶ The disciples' response to this first appearance is recorded in verse 11: "These words appeared before them as nonsense, and they did not believe them." The second appearance (24:13–35) involves Jesus' teaching of the two disciples from the entirety of the Hebrew canon of Scripture (verse 27, "Moses," "all the Prophets," "all the Scriptures"¹⁷). The response of these two disciples was twofold: (1) their "heart was burning within [them]" (verse 32), indicating a

¹⁵ In the Gospel account, Luke introduces verse 50 as if it followed immediately upon verse 49. It is only when one consults Acts 1:3 that he learns of the intervening period of nearly forty days. Both Matthew and John give some details of this extended post-resurrection ministry in Galilee, but Luke and Mark omit the Galilean phase.

¹⁶ In verses 6–7 the angels remind them of Jesus' prediction of His death and resurrection, but this was not yet a part of canonical Scripture and cannot here be construed as instruction from Scripture.

¹⁷ Whether ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς ("in all the Scriptures) refers to the writings (סְפָרִים) portion of the Hebrew canon (e.g., Butler, 425) or simply sums up the entirety of the Tanak (Robert H. Stein *Luke*. electronic ed. Logos Library System; The New American Commentary, vol. 24 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001], 612), clearly all three designations in this verse have the entire Hebrew canon in view here. See the more specific reference to the סְפָרִים under the designation Ψάλλοι in v. 44. For further comments, see section 6 of this paper, "Canonical Divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures."

strong desire to share the information with others (cf. Jeremiah 20:9 ; Psalm 39:3); and (2) they returned joyfully to Jerusalem to proclaim the risen Lord Jesus. The third appearance (24:36–49) was to all the disciples¹⁸ assembled in Jerusalem. Like the second appearance, this one involved Jesus’ teaching of the disciples from the entirety of the Hebrew canon of Scripture (verse 44, “the Law of Moses,” “the Prophets,” “the Psalms”¹⁹). It is significant to note that in this third post-resurrection appearance, though the disciples recognized Him before His expounding of the Scriptures, their initial response was, “They still could not believe it” (verse 41), but after Jesus’ teaching from the Scriptures, it is recorded that they waited patiently for “the promise of the Father” (verse 49). Thus one may discern in the three post-resurrection appearances a progression of faith. Jesus appeared on all three of these occasions, but faith only accompanied the exposition of the Scriptures.

2. Geographical Considerations

The location of Emmaus is disputed. Luke appears to give a clear designation of the place in verse 13 where he describes Emmaus as sixty stadia distance from Jerusalem (ἀπέχουσαν σταδίους ἑξήκοντα ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ). Sixty stadia is approximately seven miles. The traditional site of Emmaus, Nicopolis-’Imwas, is located some twenty-two miles from Jerusalem, near the modern-day city of Latrun. This is the site that Eusebius affirmed in his *Onomasticon*.²⁰ Likely because of this, some later manuscripts²¹ have Luke 24:13 placing Emmaus at 160 stadia from

¹⁸ According to verse 33, “the eleven” were assembled together; however, according to John 20:24, Thomas was absent. Apparently the expression “the eleven” was used somewhat loosely to refer to the entire company, even though only ten of them were actually present. John 20:26 records that Thomas was present with the other ten some eight days later when Jesus again appeared to the entire group.

¹⁹ Psalms, standing at the head of the ׀תת׀ב ׀ת׀ב section is evidently used here as the title for the entire section.

²⁰ Eusebius *Onomasticon*, 90:15.

²¹ ⲛ Ⲁ Ⲙ* Ⲙ H Syr^{pal} arm.

Jerusalem. If this is the Emmaus of Luke 24:13, it is difficult to comprehend how the disciples could have returned to Jerusalem after the evening meal, for not only is the distance formidable, but the terrain is steep and rocky, traverses numerous ravines, and constitutes an 1,800-foot rise in elevation.²² However, the United Bible Society's fourth edition is probably correct in favoring the shorter reading of sixty stadia.²³ The apparent discrepancy may be resolved by accepting an alternate site for Emmaus. Josephus speaks of a smaller village of Emmaus located a mere thirty stadia from Jerusalem.²⁴ Thirty stadia is a mere three-and-a-half miles, a site within the modern municipality of Jerusalem (though well outside the old city walls). Though this is just half the distance recorded by Luke, the evangelist may have had in mind the total round-trip distance when he referred to sixty stadia.²⁵ Josephus's alternate site seems to be a much more satisfactory solution to the location of Emmaus than Eusebius' Emmaus-'Imwas.

Granting the location of Emmaus at this village a mere three and a half miles from Jerusalem, one may easily grasp how these two disciples could have rushed back after supper to the others to report the wonderful news. One also has a clearer understanding of how much time Jesus likely spent with the two disciples as He interpreted for them "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (verse 27). The entire three and a half miles can be easily walked in about an hour, perhaps a bit longer at a leisurely pace. Luke does not disclose how far along the path the disciples were before Jesus joined them, but presumably they had made some

²² Emmaus-'Imwas is at approximately 730 feet elevation, while Jerusalem is at about 2,500 feet elevation. An elevation rise of 1,800 feet in twenty-two miles would be a considerable accomplishment for an all-day hike. For these two disciples to accomplish the feat after their evening meal involves quite a stretch of the imagination.

²³ Based on the reading in A B D p⁷⁵.

²⁴ Josephus, *Wars* 7:217.

²⁵ Anson F. Raney and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 368.

progress. Luke also reveals that there was some dialog between the disciples and Jesus after He joined them, but before He began His exposition of the Scriptures. It is likely, therefore, that the entire exposition took only thirty to forty-five minutes—no doubt a most fascinating class session in Bible survey! This observation is instructive when attempting to understand the extent to which christocentricity may be pressed. If Jesus’ exposition covered “*all* the Scriptures,” it must necessarily have been in summary fashion. There were references to be found to His death and resurrection in each of the three major divisions of the Hebrew canon (Torah, Prophets, and Writings), but this is not to say that direct reference must be found to Christ in every verse of the Bible. At most, it can be said that christocentricity is a general principle relating to the broad scope of Scripture.

3. Canonical Divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures

Luke 24:27 describes a breakdown of the Hebrew canon into parts, but scholars are divided over whether Luke designated two parts (Moses and the Prophets) or three parts (Moses, the Prophets, and the Scriptures). Traditionally, it was held that the three-part division of the Hebrew canon into “Law,” “Prophets,” and “Writings” (*Torah*, *N^evi’im*, *K^etuvim*) was officially adopted at the Council of Jamnia. Today there is scholarly debate as to whether there ever *was* a late-first-century Council of Jamnia at which the final shape of the Hebrew canon, and specifically admission to the canon of the *K^etuvim*, was authorized.²⁶

Regardless of any councils, the New Testament (Luke’s Gospel in particular) appears to affirm the existence of the threefold division. The threefold division may be in view in Luke 24:27, “Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets . . . in all the Scriptures” (ἀρχάμενος

²⁶ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 237–40.

ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν . . . ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς), but the point is debated. Marshall sums up the issue as follows:

The clause may be construed in two ways: 1. It may mean that the speaker started from the law and the prophets in finding things written about himself. 2. More probably it means that he searched in *all* the Scriptures, but starting from (i.e. principally from) the law and the prophets. If we adopt this latter view, then ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς will refer to the books of the OT generally (24:32, 45; Acts 17:2, 11; 18:24, 28; A. Oepke, TDNT I, 752). The view that the phrase refers purely to the third part of the OT canon, the ‘writings’ (Grundmann, 446; cf. 24:44) is difficult syntactically.²⁷

If the threefold division is not explicit in Luke 24:27, it appears to be so in Luke 24:44: “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled’” (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς). Here “Law,” “Prophets,” and “Psalms” are syntactically equivalent, all three comprising the compound object of the same preposition. That ψαλμοῖς should designate the third division of the Canon is not surprising, since it was common practice to name an extended portion of Scripture after the initial word in that section. “Psalms,” being the first book in the Writings section, would naturally serve as the title for the entire section.²⁸ That the remainder of the books of the third section were also acknowledged in the New Testament era seems to be implied by Christ’s words recorded in Luke 11:48–51 (and the parallel in Matthew 23:34):

So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, “I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the

²⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Exeter, England: Paternoster Press, 1978), 897.

²⁸ John Bond, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 157; Stein, 620; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Lk 24:44.

world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.”

The “blood of Abel” is clearly a reference to Genesis 4:8, but what about the “blood of Zechariah”? This is not a reference to the post-exilic prophet Zechariah, who authored the book in the Minor Prophets; rather, this is the Zechariah whose death at the hands of King Joash was recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20–21. The significance of this reference is that 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Writings section of the Hebrew canon. Thus, in referring to both Cain and Zechariah in the same sentence, it is as if Jesus were referring to the entirety of the Hebrew canon, from the first book of the first section to the last book of the last section. Thus we see all three sections of the Hebrew canon referred to implicitly once again in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke’s fairly explicit reference to the three sections of the Hebrew canon in 24:44, and his implicit reference to the entire extent of the Hebrew canon in 11:51, make it a reasonable inference that the language of 24:27 includes all three sections of the Hebrew canon—the Law, Prophets, and Writings. If, as has been shown in the previous section, Jesus’ exposition of the Scriptures occurred over a period of time under an hour, the christocentric principle of interpretation cannot be pressed to such an extent as to require that Christ be the focal point of every verse of the Bible. Rather, it shows that in numerous places throughout all three sections of the Hebrew canon, references may be found to the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah.

4. Progression of the Passage

The way Luke refers to the various emotional responses of the disciples in the post-resurrection appearances is quite interesting and appears to focus attention on the Emmaus Road experience. As noted in the first section of this paper (“Contextual Setting”), there are three chronological settings for the resurrection day appearances: early morning, late afternoon, and

evening. These three chronological settings set the stage for appearances to (1) the women, (2) Peter (who witnesses the empty tomb, but does not actually see Christ), (3) the Emmaus disciples, and (4) the entire company of the disciples. In response to each of these four resurrection day experiences, Luke records a wide variety of emotional responses. Consider the following outline:

1. Discovery of the body's absence—first day of the week, early morning (τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ὄρθρου βαθέως) (24:1–12)
 - a. By the women (vv. 1–11)
 - i. Response:
 1. perplexed at the empty tomb (ἀπορέω), to be in doubt, uncertain, at a loss (v. 4)
 2. terrified by the two angels (ἔμφοβος), afraid, startled (v. 5)
 - b. By Peter (v. 12)
 - i. Response:
 1. marveled at the empty tomb (θαυμάζω), to wonder at, be astonished, be amazed (see verse 41 below)
 2. solitude (ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν). However, note verse 24; apparently Peter did go on to share with the others what he had seen. Verse 12 occurred early in the morning. Between verses 12 and 13, Peter must have rejoined the disciples for further discussions.
2. Jesus appears, unrecognizable at first, to the Emmaus disciples, late afternoon (24:13–35)
 - a. Response:

- i. sad by being asked what they were discussing (σκυθρωπός), gloomy, sullen, dark (v. 17)
 - ii. amazed (ἐξίστημι), a description of their earlier response to the women's testimony; ἐξίστημι, to be confused, amazed, astounded, astonished (v. 22)
 - iii. hearts burned when Jesus taught them from the Scriptures (καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν) (cf. Jeremiah 20:9; Psalm 39:3 for the expression) (v. 32)
3. Jesus appears recognizable to the disciples in Jerusalem, evening (24:36–49)
- a. Response:
 - i. startled and frightened, thought they saw a ghost (πτοέω), to terrify, frighten; (ἔμφοβος) afraid, startled, terrified (v. 37)
 - ii. troubled and doubted in their hearts (ταράσσω), to disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion; (διαλογισμός ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ), reasoning, opinion, dispute, doubt (v. 38)
 - iii. joyful and amazed at realizing that Jesus was really present with them (χαρά), joy, gladness; (θαυμάζω), wonder at, be astonished, be amazed—see verse 12 above (v. 41)
4. Ascension, no temporal deixis (vv. 50–51)
- a. Response: great joy (μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης) (v. 52)

The various expressions used to describe these emotional responses can be summarized in the following list:

1. ἀπορέω—be in doubt, uncertain, at a loss (v. 4)
2. ἔμφοβος—afraid, startled (v. 5)
3. θαυμάζω—to wonder at, be astonished, be amazed (v. 12)

4. ἀπῆλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν—solitude (v. 12)
5. σκυθρωπός—sad, gloomy, sullen, dark (v. 17)
6. ἐξίστημι—to be confused, amazed, astounded, astonished (v. 22)
7. καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν—hearts burned (v. 32)
8. πτοέω—to terrify, frighten (v. 37)
9. ἔμφοβος—afraid, startled, terrified (v. 37)
10. ταρασσω—trouble, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion (v. 38)
11. διαλογισμός ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ—reasoning, opinion, dispute, doubt (v. 38)
12. χαρά—joy, gladness (v. 41)
13. θαυμάζω—wonder at, be astonished, be amazed (v. 41)
14. μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης—great joy (v. 52)

This variety of emotional responses proceeds from fear at one extreme to joy at the other extreme. Between these two extremes, we find such things as wonder and amazement. But only in response to the teaching of Jesus do we find the remarkable expression of the “burning heart.” Understood in the light of Jeremiah 20:9 and Psalm 39:3, this speaks of the intense desire to share with others what is being learned. This response is unique in this chapter and is just about in the center of the account, thus drawing attention to its significance. It is in response to the exposition of the Word of God that such an intense burning was kindled in the disciples’ hearts. And this burning occurred even before Jesus had revealed Himself personally! It was indeed a christocentric teaching of the Word of God that produced a joyful, confident, and evangelistic zeal.

Conclusion

Jesus' exposition of Scripture to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus provides us with a crucial reference for the christocentric principle of hermeneutics. By examining the context of this passage, as well as the specific language used to describe both the canonical divisions of Scripture and the emotional responses of the disciples on the resurrection day, it has been shown that Christ appealed broadly to all divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures to prove that they prophesied of His death and resurrection, and to inspire the disciples to faithful, joyful, evangelistic service. Excessive appeal to the christocentric principle has gone far beyond the practice of Jesus and has provided a faulty basis for an allegorical interpretation of many portions of Scripture. May we be careful to follow the balanced approach to exegesis modeled by our Lord on the Emmaus Road, adhering to a literal hermeneutic, and proclaiming the Word in such a way as to set the hearts of Jesus' disciples ablaze with a burning desire to spread the good news of our risen and returning Lord!

Appendix 2

Structural Diagram of 1 John 4—5

1 John 4—5 (UBS4)

1	¹ Ἀγαπητοί, μὴ παντὶ πνεύματι πιστεύετε	
2	ἀλλὰ δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα	[adv → 1]
3	εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,	[cnd → 2]
4	ὅτι πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφήται ἐξεληλύθασιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον.	[cau → 2]
5	² ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκετε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ·	[ind / asn, con → 1&2]
6	πάν πνεῦμα ... ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,	[epx → 5]
7	... ὁ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα	[RC → 6, πνεῦμα]
8	³ καὶ πάν πνεῦμα ... ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν·	[con → 6]
9	... ὁ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν	[RC → 8, πνεῦμα]
10	καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ [sc. πνεῦμα] τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου,	[con → 8]
11	ὁ ἀκηκόατε	[RC → 10, πνεῦμα]
12	ὅτι ἔρχεται,	[ID → 11]
13	καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν ἤδη.	[con → 12]
14	⁴ ὕμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστε, τέκνια,	[ind] ¹
15	καὶ νενικήκατε αὐτούς,	[con → 14]
16	ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.	[cau → 15]
17	⁵ αὐτοὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου εἰσίν,	[ind] ²
18	διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου λαλοῦσιν	[inf → 17]
19	καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν ἀκούει.	[con → 18]
20	⁶ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν,	[asn, adv → 17]
21	ὁ γινώσκων τὸν θεὸν ἀκούει ἡμῶν,	[asn, con → 20]
22	ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀκούει ἡμῶν.	[asn, adv → 21]
23	ἐκ τούτου γινώσκομεν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης.	[ind] ³
24	⁷ Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους,	[ind]

¹ Though grammatically independent, this line is conceptually adversative to the thought in lines 8–13. The flow of thought could be paraphrased as follows: “The antichrist is coming—and there are already antichrists—but you are of God.”

² Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter.

³ Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter.

25	ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν,	[cau → 24]
26	καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται	[con → 25]
27	καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.	[con → 26]
28	⁸ ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν,	[asn, adv → 26]
29	ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.	[ID/cau??? → 28]
30	⁹ ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερῶθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν,	[ind ⁴]
31	ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ ἀπέσταλκεν ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν κόσμον	[epx → 30]
32	ἵνα ζήσωμεν δι' αὐτοῦ.	[pur → 31]
33	¹⁰ ἐν τούτῳ ἐστίν ἡ ἀγάπη,	[ind ⁵]
34	οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεόν	[epx → 33]
35	ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς	[adv → 34]
36	καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.	[con → 35]
37	¹¹ Ἀγαπητοί, ... καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν.	[asn, inf → 30–35]
38	... εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς,	[cnd → 37]
39	¹² θεὸν οὐδεὶς πώποτε τεθέαται.	[ind]
40	... ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν μένει	[ind]
41	καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν τετελειωμένη ἐστίν.	[con → 39]
42	ἐὰν ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ...	[cnd → 41]
43	¹³ Ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν	[ind]
44	ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ μένομεν	[ID → 43]
45	καὶ αὐτὸς [sc. μένει] ἐν ἡμῖν,	[con → 44]
46	ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν.	[cau → 43]
47	¹⁴ καὶ ἡμεῖς τεθεάμεθα	[con → 46]
48	καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν	[con → 47]
49	ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου.	[ID → 48]
50	¹⁵ ... ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει.	[ind]
51	καὶ αὐτὸς [sc. μένει] ἐν τῷ θεῷ	[con → 50]
52	ὃς ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃ αὐτῷ]	[RC → 51, αὐτὸς /50,
53	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ...	[ID → 52]
54	¹⁶ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν	[con → 50&51]
55	καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην	[con → 54]
56	ἣν ἔχει ὁ θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν.	[RC → 55, ἀγάπην]
57	Ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν,	[ind]
58	καὶ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐν τῷ θεῷ μένει	[con → 57]
59	καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει.	[con → 58]
60	¹⁷ ἐν τούτῳ τετελείωται ἡ ἀγάπη μεθ' ἡμῶν,	[ind]

⁴ Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter.

⁵ Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter.

61	ἵνα παρρησίαν ἔχωμεν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως,	[epx → 60]
62	ὅτι ... καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ.	[cau → 61(60?)]
63	... καθὼς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν	[com → 62]
64	¹⁸ φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ	[ind]
65	ἀλλ' ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον,	[adv → 64]
66	ὅτι ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει,	[exp → 65]
67	ὁ δὲ φοβούμενος οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.	[adv → 65]
68	¹⁹ ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν,	[ind]
69	ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς.	[cau → 68]
70	²⁰ ... ψεύστης ἐστίν·	[ind]
71	... ἐάν τις εἴπῃ	[cnd → 70]
72	ὅτι Ἀγαπῶ τὸν θεὸν	[DD → 71]
73	καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶ,	[con → 72]
74	ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ... τὸν θεὸν ... οὐ δύναται ἀγαπᾶν.	[exp → 70]
75	... ὃν ἐώρακεν,	[RC → 74, ἀδελφὸν]
76	... ὃν οὐχ ἐώρακεν	[RC → 74, θεὸν]
77	²¹ καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐντολὴν ἔχομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ,	[con → 68] ⁶
78	ἵνα ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ.	[epx → 77]
79	^{5.1} Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ... ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται,	[ind]
80	... ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός,	[ID → 79]
81	καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ.	[con → 79]
82	² ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν	[ind]
83	ὅτι ἀγαπῶμεν τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ,	[ID → 82]
84	ὅταν τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπῶμεν	[TC ⁷ → 82]
85	καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ ποιῶμεν.	[con → 84]
86	³ αὕτη γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ,	[exp → 85]
87	ἵνα τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν,	[epx → 86]
88	καὶ αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ βαρεῖαι οὐκ εἰσίν.	[con → 87]
89	⁴ ὅτι πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον. [cau → 88]	
90	καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον,	[con → 89]
91	ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν.	<epx → 90>
92	⁵ τίς [δέ] ἐστὶν ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον	[ind] ⁸
93	εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων	[exc → 92]

⁶ καί has resumptive force, following a digression in lines 70–76.

⁷ The temporal particle really has conditional force.

⁸ If δέ is original, the clause is adversative to line 90.

94	ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ;	[ID → 93]
95	⁶ Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, [ind]	
96	οὐκ [sc. ἦλθεν] ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον	[asn, con ⁹ → 95]
97	ἀλλ' [sc. ἦλθεν] ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι·	[adv → 96]
98	καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν,	[con → 95–97]
99	ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια.	[cau → 98]
100	⁷ ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες,	[cau → 99]
101	⁸ τὸ πνεῦμα	<app → 100, τρεῖς>
102	καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ	<con → 101>
103	καὶ τὸ αἷμα,	<con → 102>
104	καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.	[con → 100]
105	⁹ ... ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ μερίζων ἐστίν·	[asn, con → 98]
106	εἰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαμβάνομεν, ...	[cnd → 105]
107	ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ θεοῦ	[cau → 105]
108	ὅτι μεμαρτύρηκεν περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.	[RC → 107, μαρτυρία]
109	¹⁰ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, [DD → 107]	
110	ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν,	[asn, adv → 109]
111	ὅτι οὐ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν	[cau → 110]
112	ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.	[RC → 111, μαρτυρίαν]
113	¹¹ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία,	[con → 105]
114	ὅτι ζωὴν αἰώνιον ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεός,	[epx → 113]
115	καὶ αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.	[con → 114]
116	¹² ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν·	[ind ¹⁰]
117	ὁ μὴ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει.	[asn, adv → 116]
118	¹³ Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν	[ind ¹¹]
119	ἵνα εἰδῆτε	[pur → 118]
120	ὅτι ζωὴν ἔχετε αἰώνιον,	[ID → 119]
121	τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.	<app → 118, ὑμῖν>
122	¹⁴ καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία	[con → 118]
123	ἣν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτόν	[RC → 122, παρρησία]
124	ὅτι ... ἀκούει ἡμῶν.	[epx → 122]
125	... ἐάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ	[cnd → 124]
126	¹⁵ καὶ ... οἶδαμεν	[con → 122]
127	ὅτι ἔχομεν τὰ αἰτήματα	[ID → 126]

⁹ Lines 96–97 have an exegetical force relative to line 95.

¹⁰ Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter.

¹¹ This independent clause is unlike those that precede. This one introduces a kind of concluding section. It yields to the anaphoric force of Ταῦτα.

128	ἃ ἠτήκαμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.	[RC → 127, αἰτήματα]
129	... ἐὰν οἶδαμεν	[cnd → 126]
130	ὅτι ἀκούει ἡμῶν	[ID → 129]
131	ὃ ἐὰν αἰτώμεθα,	[epx → 130]
132	¹⁶ ... αἰτήσῃ	[ind ¹²]
133	Ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, ...	[cnd → 132]
134	καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν,	[con → 132]
135	τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον.	<app → 134, αὐτῷ>
136	ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον·	[ind]
137	οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω	[ind]
138	ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ.	[epx → 137]
139	¹⁷ πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁμαρτία ἐστίν,	[ind]
140	καὶ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία οὐ πρὸς θάνατον.	[con → 139]
141	¹⁸ Οἶδαμεν	[ind]
142	ὅτι πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει,	[ID → 141]
143	ἀλλ' ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ αὐτὸν	[adv → 142]
144	καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς οὐχ ἄπτεται αὐτοῦ.	[con → 143]
145	¹⁹ οἶδαμεν	[ind]
146	ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμὲν	[ID → 145]
147	καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται.	[con → 146]
148	²⁰ οἶδαμεν δὲ	[con ¹³ → 145]
149	ὅτι ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἦκει	[ID → 148]
150	καὶ δέδωκεν ἡμῖν διάνοιαν	[con → 149]
151	ἵνα γινώσκωμεν τὸν ἀληθινόν,	[pur → 150]
152	καὶ ἐσμὲν ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ,	[con → 151]
153	ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ.	<app → 152>
154	οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος.	[ind]
155	²¹ Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων.	[ind]

John appears to establish topic by word repetition. Chapters 4—5 give evidence of four topics with two clear subthemes:

¹² Grammatically independent, but continuing the same subject matter; namely, receiving answers to requests made of God (lines 122–131).

¹³ The conjunction δὲ brings to a conclusion the sequence of five repetitions of οἶδαμεν (lines 126, 129, 141, 145, 148).

1. False prophets, 4:1–6
2. Love, 4:7—5:4
 - 2.1. Subtheme: Abiding, 4:13–15
3. The Spirit’s testimony, 5:6–12
4. What we know, 5:13–20
 - 4.1. Subtheme: What we confidently pray for, 5:14–17

Verses 16–17 are related to the theme of prayer, rather than to the more distant theme of doctrinal purity (sections 1 and 3).

Topic established by word repetition—four topics with two clear subthemes:

1. False prophets, 4:1–6
 - v. 1 πνεύματι, πνεύματα, ψευδοπροφήται
 - v. 2 πνεῦμα, πνεῦμα
 - v. 3 πνεῦμα, ἀντιχρίστου
 - v. 4 αὐτούς
 - v. 6 πνεῦμα, πνεῦμα
2. Love, 4:7—5:4
 - v. 7 ἀγαπῶμεν, ἀγάπη
 - v. 8 ἀγαπῶν, ἀγάπη,
 - v. 9 ἀγάπη
 - v. 10 ἀγάπη, ἠγαπήκαμεν, ἠγάπησεν
 - v. 11 Ἀγαπητοί, ἀγαπᾶν, ἠγάπησεν
 - v. 12 ἀγάπη, ἀγαπῶμεν
 - 2.1. Subtheme: Abiding, 4:13–15
 - v. 13 μένομεν, [μένει implied verb of third clause]
 - v. 15 μένει
 - v. 16 ἀγάπην, ἀγάπη, ἀγάπη
 - v. 17 ἀγάπη
 - v. 18 ἀγάπη, ἀγάπη, ἀγάπη
 - v. 19 ἀγαπῶμεν, ἠγάπησεν
 - v. 20 Ἀγαπῶ, ἀγαπῶν, ἀγαπᾶν
 - v. 21 ἀγαπῶν, ἀγαπᾶ
 - 5:1 ἀγαπῶν, ἀγαπᾶ
 - v. 2 ἀγαπῶμεν, ἀγαπῶμεν
 - v. 3 ἀγάπη
3. The Spirit’s testimony, 5:6–12
 - v. 6 μαρτυροῦν
 - v. 7 μαρτυροῦντες
 - v. 9 μαρτυρία, μαρτυρίαν, μαρτυρία, μεμαρτύρηκεν

- v. 10 μαρτυρίαν, μαρτυρίαν, μεμαρτύρηκεν, μαρτυρία
- 4. What we know, 5:13–20
 - v. 13 ειδῆτε
 - 4.1. Subtheme: What we confidently pray for, 5:14–17
 - v. 14 αἰτώμεθα
 - v. 15 αἰτήματα, ἠτήκαμεν, αἰτώμεθα
 - v. 16 αἰτήσει, ἐρωτήση
 - v. 15 οἶδαμεν, οἶδαμεν
 - v. 18 οἶδαμεν
 - v. 19 οἶδαμεν
 - v. 20 οἶδαμεν, γινώσκωμεν

Appendix 3

Structural Diagram of Hebrews 12:4–17

Hebrews 12:4–17

1	⁴ Οὐπω μέχρις αἵματος ἀντικατέστητε	[TC → 1]
2	πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι.	[con → 1]
3	⁵ καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς παρακλήσεως,	[RC → 3, παρακλήσεως]
4	ἧτις ὑμῖν ... διαλέγεται, ,	[com → 4]
5	... ὡς [sc. πατήρ διαλέγεται] υἱοῖς	[DD → 4]
6	Υἱέ μου, μὴ ὀλιγόρει παιδείας κυρίου	[con → 6]
7	μηδὲ ἐκλύου	[TC (cau?) → 7]
8	ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος·	[cau → 7]
9	⁶ ὄν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει,	[adv → 9]
10	μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα υἱὸν	[RC → 10, υἱὸν]
11	ὄν παραδέχεται.	[ind]
12	⁷ εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομένετε,	[asn, con → 12]
13	... ὑμῖν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός.	[com → 13]
14	ὡς [sc. τις προσφέρεται] υἱοῖς ...	[exp → 13]
15	τίς γὰρ υἱὸς	[RC → 15, υἱὸς]
16	ὄν οὐ παιδεύει πατήρ;	[adv → 12]
17	⁸ ...δὲ ... ἄρα νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε.	[cnd → 17]
18	εἰ ... χωρὶς ἐστε παιδείας	[RC → 18, παιδείας]
19	ἧς μέτοχοι γεγόνασιν πάντες, ...	[con → 12&13]
20	⁹ εἶτα τοὺς μὲν τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν πατέρας εἶχομεν παιδευτὰς	[con → 20]
21	καὶ ἐνετρεπόμεθα·	[con (inf?) → 21]
22	οὐ πολὺ [δὲ] μᾶλλον ... καὶ ζήσομεν;	[cnd ¹ → 22]
23	ὑποταγησόμεθα τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων ...	[exp → 22]
24	¹⁰ οἱ μὲν γὰρ ... ἐπαίδευον [sc. ἡμᾶς],	<time → 24>
25	... πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας	<msr → 24>
26	κατὰ τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτοῖς	[adv → 24]
27	ὁ δὲ [sc. παιδεύει ἡμᾶς]	<goal → 27>
28	ἐπὶ τὸ συμφέρον	<pur → 27>
29	εἰς τὸ μεταλαβεῖν τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ.	
30	¹¹ πᾶσα δὲ παιδεία πρὸς μὲν τὸ παρὸν οὐ δοκεῖ χαρᾶς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, [continuative]	

¹ The future tense ὑποταγησόμεθα has imperatival force here, thus the two clauses in verse 9b have the form of imperative—καί—future indicative tense, which frequently reflects the syntax of a conditional sentence, with the imperative expressing the condition. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 489–90.

31	ὑστερον δὲ καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν τοῖς δι' αὐτῆς γεγυμνασμένοις ἀποδίδωσιν δικαιοσύνης. [adv → 30]	
32	¹² Διὸ τὰς παρειμένας χεῖρας καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε,	[inf → 1–31]
33	¹³ καὶ τροχιάς ὀρθὰς ποιεῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν,	[con → 32]
34	ἵνα μὴ τὸ χωλὸν ἐκτραπῆ,	[pur → 33]
35	ιαθῆ δὲ μᾶλλον.	[adv → 34]
36	¹⁴ Εἰρήνην διώκετε μετὰ πάντων καὶ τὸν ἀγιασμόν,	[asn, con → 32&33]
37	οὗ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὸν κύριον,	[RC → 36, ἀγιασμόν ²]
38	¹⁵ ἐπισκοποῦντες	[man ³ → 36]
39	μὴ τις ὑστερῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ,	[ID → 38]
40	μὴ τις ρίζα πικρίας ἄνω φύουσα ἐνοχλῆ	[pur ⁴ → 38]
41	καὶ δι' αὐτῆς μιανθῶσιν πολλοί,	[con → 40]
42	¹⁶ μὴ [sc. ἡ] τις πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος ὡς Ἡσαῦ,	[con → 40&41]
43	ὃς ἀντὶ βρώσεως μιᾶς ἀπέδετο τὰ πρωτοτόκια ἑαυτοῦ.	[RC → 42, Ἡσαῦ]
44	¹⁷ ἴστε γὰρ	[exp → 42]
45	ὅτι ... ἀπεδοκιμάσθη,	[ID → 44]
46	... καὶ μετέπειτα	<time → 45>
47	θέλων κληρονομήσαι τὴν εὐλογίαν	[cnc → 45]
48	μετανοίας γὰρ τόπον οὐχ εὔρεν	[exp → 45(43?)]
49	καίπερ μετὰ δακρῶν ἐκζητήσας αὐτήν.	[cnc → 48]

² The rel. p.n. οὗ, being both sing. and masc. can point only to ἀγιασμόν, not to Εἰρήνην.

³ Possibly the ptclp is imperatival, making this clause asn, con → 36.

⁴ Subjunctive after verbs of fearing used in warnings and cautions; see Wallace, 477

Appendix 4

Major Confessions Leading up to Westminster

1. Augsburg Confession of 1530 (Lutheran) Begins with Article I, “God,” and has no separate article on Bibliology.

Article I, God

Article II, Original Sin

Article III, The Son of God

Article IV, Justification by Faith

Article V, The Office of Preaching

Article VI, Of the New Obedience

Article VII, Of the Church

Article VIII, What the Church Is

Article IX, Of Baptism

Article X, Of the Lord’s Supper

Article XI, Of Confession

Article XII, Of Repentance

Article XIII, Of the Use of the Sacraments

Article XIV, Of Ecclesiastical Order

Article XV, Of Ecclesiastical Usages

Article XVI, Of Civil Affairs

Article XVII, Of Christ’s Return to Judgment

Article XVIII, Of Free Will

Article XIX, Of the Cause of Sin

Article XX, Of Good Works

Article XXI, Of the Worship of the Saints

Article XXII, Of Both Kinds in the Sacrament

Article XXIII, Of the Marriage of Priests

Article XXIV, Of the Mass

Article XXV, Of Confession

Article XXVI, Of the Distinction of Meats

Article XXVII, Of Monastic Vows

Article XXVIII, Of Ecclesiastical Power

2. Tetrapolitan Confession of 1530 (Zwinglian) begins with chapter I, "Of the Subject-Matter of Sermons," which contains a fairly strong statement on "divinely inspired Scripture" being "profitable for doctrine." Then chapter II is titled "Of the Holy Trinity and the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ."

Chapter I, Of the Subject-Matter of Sermons

Chapter II, Of the Holy Trinity and the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ

Chapter III, Of Justification and Faith

Chapter IV, Of Good Works, Proceeding Out of Faith through Love

Chapter V, To Whom Good Works Are to Be Ascribed, and How They Are Necessary

Chapter VI, Of the Duties of a Christian

Chapter VII, Of Prayer and Fasts

Chapter VIII, Of the Commanding of Fasts

Chapter IX, Of the Choice of Meats

Chapter X, That by Prayers and Fastings We Must Not Look to Merit Anything

Chapter XI, That One God Is to Be Worshipped through Christ

Chapter XII, Of Monckery

Chapter XIII, Of the Office, Dignity and Power of Ministers in the Church

Chapter XIV, Of Human Traditions

Chapter XV, Of the Church

Chapter XVI, Of the Sacraments

Chapter XVII, Of Baptism

Chapter XVIII, Of the Eucharist

Chapter XIX, The Mass

Chapter XX, Of Confession

Chapter XXI, Of the Chants and Prayers of Ecclesiastics

Chapter XXII, Of Statues and Images

Chapter XXIII, Of Magistrates

Conclusion

3. The Scots Confession of 1560 (John Knox, Church of Scotland)

1. God
2. The Creation of Man
3. Original Sin
4. The Revelation of the Promise
5. The Continuance, Increase, and Preservation of the Kirk
6. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ
7. Why the Mediator Had to Be True God and True Man
8. Election
9. Christ's Death, Passion, and Burial
10. The Resurrection

11. The Ascension
12. Faith in the Holy Ghost
13. The Cause of Good Works
14. The Works Which Are Counted Good Before God
15. The Perfection of the Law and the Imperfection of Man
16. The Kirk
17. The Immortality of Souls
18. The Notes by Which the True Kirk Shall Be Determined From the False, and Who Shall Be Judge of Doctrine
19. The Authority of the Scriptures
20. General Councils. Their Power, Authority, and the Cause of Their Summoning
21. The Sacraments
22. The Right Administration of the Sacraments
23. To Whom Sacraments Appertain
24. The Civil Magistrate
25. The Gifts Freely Given to the Kirk

4. The Belgic Confession of Faith of 1566 (Dutch Reformed)

1–2, The Doctrines of God

3–7, Scripture

8–13, The Doctrines of God

14, Humanity

15, Sin

16–17, Salvation

18–21, Christ

22–26, Salvation

27–36, The Church

37, The End Times

5. The Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 (Church of England)

1. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity
2. Of the Word or Son of God, Which Was Made Very Man
3. Of the Going Down of Christ into Hell
4. Of the Resurrection of Christ
5. Of the Holy Ghost
6. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation
7. Of the Old Testament
8. Of the Creeds
9. Of Original or Birth-Sin
10. Of Free-Will
11. Of the Justification of Man
12. Of Good Works
13. Of Works Before Justification
14. Of Works of Supererogation
15. Of Christ Alone without Sin
16. Of Sin After Baptism
17. Of Predestination and Election
18. Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation Only by the Name of Christ
19. Of the Church
20. Of the Authority of the Church
21. Of the Authority of General Councils
22. Of Purgatory
23. Of Ministering in the Congregation
24. Of Speaking in the Congregation in Such a Tongue as the People Understandeth
25. Of the Sacraments
26. Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, Which Hinders Not the Effect of the Sacraments
27. Of Baptism
28. Of the Lord's Supper
29. Of the Wicked, Which Eat Not the Body of Christ in the Use of the Lord's Supper

30. Of Both Kinds
31. Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished Upon the Cross
32. Of the Marriage of Priests
33. Of Excommunicate Persons, How They Are to Be Avoided
34. Of the Traditions of the Church
35. Of the Homilies
36. Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers
37. Of the Power of the Civil Magistrates
38. Of Christian Men's Goods, Which Are Not Common
39. Of a Christian Man's Oath

6. Formula of Concord of 1577 (Lutheran)

1. Original Sin
2. Free Will
3. The Righteousness of Faith Before God
4. Good Works
5. Law and Gospel
6. The Third Use of the Law
7. The Holy Supper of Christ
8. The Person of Christ
9. Christ's Descent into Hell
10. Church Ceremonies
11. The Eternal Foreknowledge and Election of God
12. Other Heresies and Sects

7. Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 (Presbyterian)

1. Of the Holy Scriptures
2. Of God, and of the Holy Trinity
3. Of God's Eternal Decree
4. Of Creation

5. Of Providence
6. Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof
7. Of God's Covenant with Man
8. Of Christ the Mediator
9. Of Free-Will
10. Of Effectual Calling
11. Of Justification
12. Of Adoption
13. Of Sanctification
14. Of Saving Faith
15. Of Repentance unto Life
16. Of Good Works
17. Of the Perseverance of the Saints
18. Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation
19. Of the Law of God
20. Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience
21. Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day
22. Of Lawful Oaths and Vows
23. Of the Civil Magistrate
24. Of Marriage, and Divorce
25. Of the Church
26. Of the Communion of Saints
27. Of the Sacraments
28. Of Baptism
29. Of the Lord's Supper
30. Of Church Censures
31. Of Synods and Councils
32. Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead
33. Of the Last Judgment

8. Gospel Coalition Confessional Statement

1. The Triune God
2. Revelation
3. Creation of Humanity
4. The Fall
5. The Plan of God
6. The Gospel
7. The Redemption of Christ
8. The Justification of Sinners
9. The Power of the Holy Spirit
10. The Kingdom of God
11. God's New People
12. Baptism and the Lord's Supper
13. The Restoration of All Things

Tetrapolitan Confession, Chapter I, of the Subject-Matter of Sermons

First, therefore, since about ten years ago, by the remarkable goodness of God, the doctrine of Christ began to be treated with somewhat more certainty and clearness than before everywhere throughout Germany, and hence among us, just as elsewhere, many doctrines of our religion were publicly controverted, and to a constantly increasing extent, among the learned and those especially who held the position of teachers of Christ in the churches; and hence, as was necessary, while Satan was undoubtedly plying his work, so that the people were very dangerously divided by conflicting sermons, considering what St. Paul writes, that “divinely inspired Scripture is profitable for doctrine, that where there is sin it may be detected and corrected, and every one be instructed in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished for every good work,”—we also, influenced and induced to avoid all delay, not only from the fear of God, but from the certain peril to the state, at length enjoined our preachers to

teach from the pulpit nothing else than is either contained in the Holy Scriptures or hath sure ground therein. For it seemed to us not improper to resort in such a crisis whither of old and always not only the most holy fathers, bishops and princes, but also the children of God everywhere, have always resorted—viz., to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. For, to their praise, St. Luke mentions of some such that they were more noble than those of Thessalonica, since they examined the Gospel of Christ, which they had heard according to the Scriptures, in which Paul most earnestly desired that his scholar Timothy be exercised, and without which no pontiffs have ever required obedience to their decrees, nor fathers credit to their writings, nor princes authority to their laws, and from which only the great council of the Holy Empire assembled at Nuremburg in the year 1523 decreed that holy sermons should be derived. For if St. Paul has taught the truth when he said that by Holy Scripture the man of God is made perfect and furnished for every good work, he can lack nothing of Christian truth or sound doctrine who strives religiously to ask counsel of Scripture.

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