

CREDO

Issue 2 - January 2012

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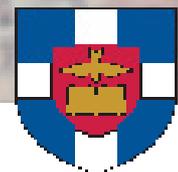


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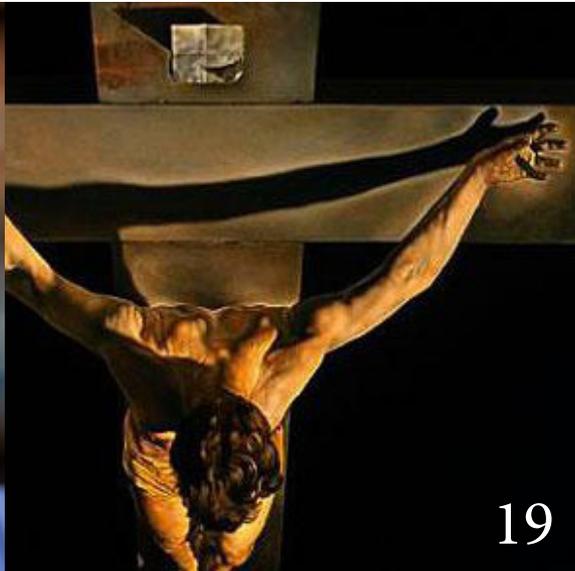
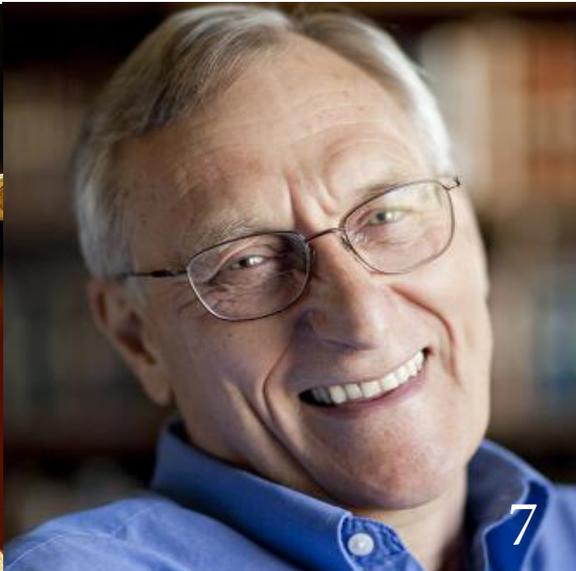


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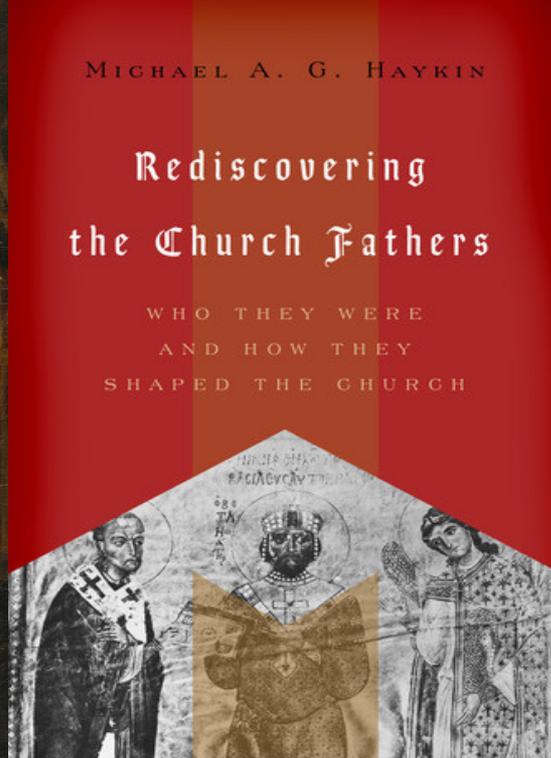
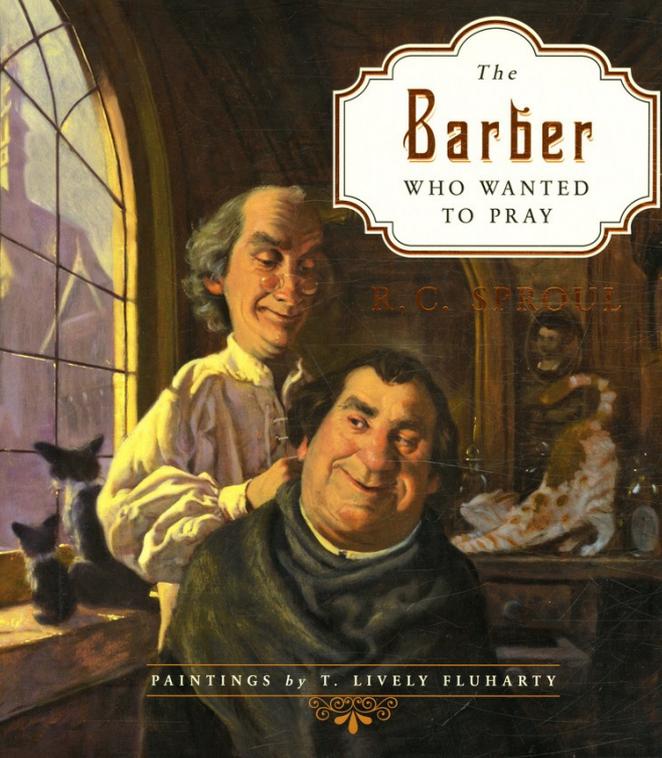
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What is Inclusivism?

What is inclusivism? While inclusivists believe Jesus is the only Savior and that no person can be saved by anyone but Jesus, what sets the inclusivist apart is his belief concerning the necessity (or lack thereof) of sinners to trust in Christ for their salvation. For the exclusivist, it is necessary that a sinner have faith in Christ to be saved. However, for the inclusivist, while faith in Christ is best, it is not the only way to be saved. In other words, those who have never heard of Christ may very well be in heaven one day since they responded genuinely to the general revelation that was available to them.

As you might have guessed, the debate over inclusivism has caused quite a stir in evangelicalism. The theological contours of the debate cannot be quarantined either. Everything is impacted by an inclusivist view, including general revelation, divine justice, one's view towards world religions, one's understanding of Old Testament "pagans," and the nature of saving faith itself.

And it would be naive to think that inclusivism has not affected Baptists as well. While many Baptists have affirmed the exclusivity of the gospel, other Baptists have differed. Terrance Tiessen, Clark Pinnock, and Stanley Grenz have all made the argument that the unevangelized may be saved through general revelation. Even those in other religions can be saved through general revelation, though other religions are not a means of salvation. Other Baptists, like Mark Heim, go even farther, arguing that not only general revelation but other religions contain truth sufficient for salvation.

But is this what Scripture teaches? In this issue of Credo Magazine we shall argue that inclusivism cannot be supported by Scripture. To the contrary, Scripture teaches that faith comes by hearing the gospel message of Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Christ that a sinner can be saved from hell and the wrath of God. Therefore, it seems appropriate to title this January's issue, "In Christ Alone."



Matthew Barrett
Executive Editor

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10 Questions

Professor and author **David Wells** discusses John Stott, evangelicalism, and growing up in the African bush.

You are a veteran professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. What part of teaching do you enjoy the most?

Teaching is a craft and it is about communication and I enjoy both aspects about equally. I spend a great deal of time getting my lectures ready and I work on them just as cabinet-makers once did on their pieces. But it is also about drawing one's listeners into the world of which you have been speaking so that, as they enter it, they make it their own and become excited about it.

You were born in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). How long did you live there and how has this upbringing impacted your life and ministry?

I stayed until I had finished my first degree which was in architecture but since all building had ceased because of the political difficulties, I had to emigrate and went to London. I grew up in the bush without electricity, TV, or any of the other aspects of modern life. The benefit today of this begin-

ning, I think, is that I can still stand outside of this modern world and look at it as an outsider.



Many may not know that you are on the board of the Rafiki Foundation and that you travel to Africa to work with orphans. Tell us about this ministry and how you got involved.

Rafiki is in ten African countries where it is rescuing and educating some of the orphans left behind by AIDS and sometimes by civil wars. What has happened in Africa is a tragedy of colossal proportions and Rosemary Jensen, a friend, who started Rafiki, saw that what was needed was for someone to come in, pick up these kids, and do what can be done to enable them to become leaders who will know God and serve him in good ways.

Is postmodernism on the way out or is it still thriving?

The postmodern mood is constantly morphing into new shapes and moving off in new directions. It is not inevitable that those of us who live in highly modernized contexts like our own will look at life in a postmodern way; but our context of affluence, technology, and our knowledge of the whole world, will always incline us to do so. I think it will always be part and parcel of the modernized world which also means that as the non-Western world moves in this direction we will see fresh varieties of this mood springing up. The answer is

a Christian orthodoxy that is robust but which also has cultural discernment.

You are somewhat of a prophet when it comes to evangelicalism. What concerns you most about where evangelicals are headed in the next ten years?

We are in the late evening of the boom in evangelical believing that began in the early post-War years. As I argued in “Courage to be Protestant,” two of evangelicalism’s three main constituencies—the church marketers and the emergent—are now disintegrating and what remains is the third constituency --the heirs of traditional orthodoxy. Can this be reinvigorated and where will the next generation of leadership come from? These are my questions and concerns.

To many leading evangelicals, you are a father figure in many ways. But when you first entered the teaching ministry who did you look up to the most?

I was deeply shaped by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, whose church I attended twice a week in London, by Schaeffer with whom my wife and I worked, by John Stott with whom I lived for five years, and I always had the highest regard for Carl Henry. I never found him incomprehensible as others said they did but, on the contrary, he was for me a model of what theologians should be doing. I always wished that Karl Barth’s immense talent and majestic vision had

been worked out a little differently but I always appreciated reading him even when I had to argue with him.

One of your books was in tribute to John Stott. How well did you know him?

I was a radical student at the University of Cape Town and went to hear him when he visited to do a university mission. I was converted a little later though I actually walked out of his address. When I went to London, alone and a bit bereft, he took me in and I stayed in the All Souls rectory until I married. I served on the John Stott board for twenty-five years. He was a dear friend and I miss him a lot.

What do you think Stott’s greatest legacy was on evangelicalism?

His doctrinal clarity in which he made historic orthodoxy so appealing; his utter personal integrity; his resurrection of expository preaching when it was all but lost; his balance between belief and practice. In all of this, he was more like a (moderate) Puritan born out of due time.

Is it true that your five volumes with Eerdmans on Evangelicalism are now being turned into a film project?

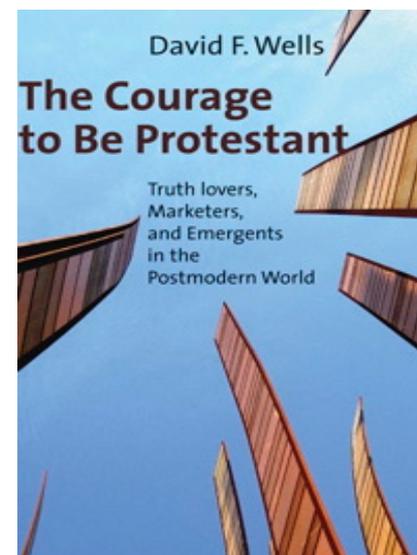
It is true that I am working on this and am hopeful that it will come about. I want to do what I can to bring the things I have learned into the churches in a way that is accessible to more people than the books are. However, the economic climate

has not been friendly to projects like this.

Please don’t tell us you are a New England Patriots fan, are you?

Regrettably, an avid Pats and Red Sox fan. But don’t hold that against me when the Pats head to the Super Bowl at the end of this season. Just remember that all of the joys that go with that are more than offset by all of the dismay that attends Red Sox fan!

David Wells is Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous books, including No Place for Truth, God in the Wasteland, Above All Earthly Powers, Losing Our Virtue, and The Courage to be Protestant.



Read *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, the most recent book by David Wells on current state of evangelicalism.



[Inclusivism] *and* Its Effects

by **Trevin Wax**

[J]esus is the only way to God.” “One must place faith in Christ in order to be saved.” Most evangelicals affirm both of these statements as representative of biblical teaching. However, a number of evangelical leaders teach that Jesus is the only way to God (affirming statement 1), but that hearing and believing the gospel is not always necessary for salvation (denying statement 2). We call this position “inclusivism.” In other words, sincere adherents of other religions may be saved unknowingly through Jesus’ work.

Perhaps some find this view attractive because it softens the exclusive claims of Jesus without completely doing away with them. We can go right on saying “Jesus is the only way” while acknowledging the possibility that people outside the Chris-

tian faith may still be saved. Unfortunately, adopting the inclusivist approach does harm to our Christian witness by lessening the urgency of taking the gospel to people who have never heard of Jesus Christ. It also represents a capitulation to Western notions of “fairness,” subjective views of faith, and worldly descriptions of “goodness.”

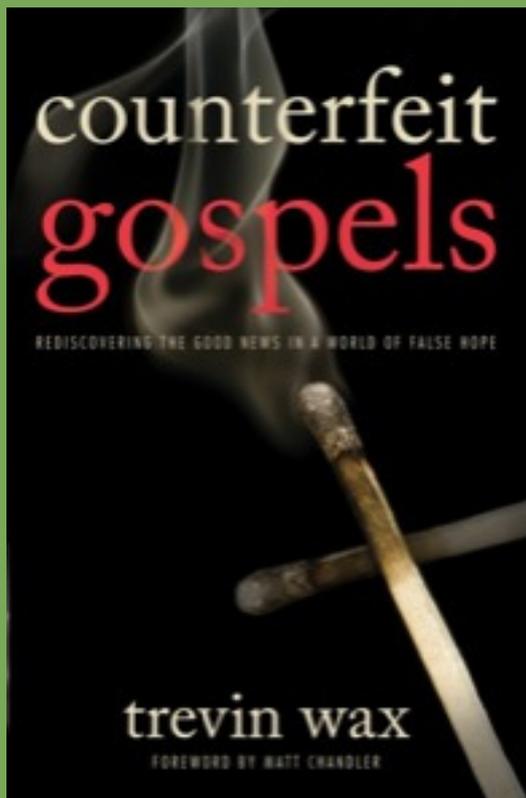
Evangelism

Evangelism for the inclusivist isn’t telling people, “Trust Jesus before it’s too late!” Instead, it implies that even though it may not matter what one does with Jesus in this life for one’s eternity, Jesus is still better than all the other religious options. Many non-Christians find this view patronizing. It’s offensive to claim that Hindus or Jews wind up in heaven through Jesus when they most assuredly did not believe in Christ.

Inclusivism lightens the burdened conscience of the Christian who is not active in fulfilling the Great Commission. It does not soften the offense of the gospel to those who want nothing to do with Christ.

Fairness

Inclusivists believe it is unfair for some people to have access to God’s salvation while others perish without ever hearing the gospel. But even if the gospel were accessible to everyone, would the good news be accessible to every person equally? Is it not unfair that a person who lives sixty years may have more opportunities to hear the gospel than the person who dies suddenly at the age of thirty? The inclusivist position fails to show how a view of universal accessibility of salvation resolves the issue of “fairness.” In fact, inclusivism fails to show how God must be



In his recent book, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope*, Trevin Wax argues that some of the most serious dangers facing the church are threats from within. He identifies six counterfeits: Therapeutic, Judgmentless, Moralistic, Quietist, Activist, and Churchless. These counterfeits leave us impoverished.

“As wrong food, however nice-tasting, can threaten bodily health, so defective gospels always threaten spiritual health. Wax offers a bracing, health-oriented review of current defective gospels in order to wean us off them. Here is good medicine for the church.”

- J. I. Packer, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College

It is because of the exclusive nature of Christianity that the offer of the gospel is so radically inclusive. Christ calls all people everywhere to repentance.”

- Trevin Wax

held accountable to this notion of fairness in the first place.

Faith

Today’s world tends to see “faith” as a purely subjective emotion, divorced from objective content and made effective by the intensity and sincerity with which a person exercises belief. By adopting a similar stance, inclusivists downplay the importance of faith’s objective content. Biblical faith, in contrast, finds its expression in both the objective content of the Christian gospel (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and the subjective feelings that indicate true heart transformation (trust and sincerity).

Goodness

Inclusivists are distressed by the idea that good people who adhere to other religions would be consigned to hell. But lurking behind this protest is the unbiblical assumption that heaven is somehow deserved. Furthermore, who determines what is good? We cannot simply adopt the world’s standard of “goodness” and apply it uncritically to the people around us.

Scripturally speaking, the problem is not that good people do not go to heaven; the problem is there are no good people.

Instead of adopting an inclusivist position, evangelicals ought to be “inclusive exclusivists.” We believe that Jesus is the only way to God and that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation (exclusivism), and we evangelize because the call to salvation is radically inclusive. We are to call all people everywhere to repentance and faith: people from every tongue, tribe, and nation; people of every color, ethnicity, and background; yes, even people who claim other religious identities. It is because of the exclusive nature of Christianity that the offer of the gospel is so radically inclusive. Christ calls all people everywhere to repentance.

Trevin Wax (M.Div., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is managing editor of The Gospel Project at LifeWay Christian Resources. He is the author of Holy Subversion and Counterfeit Gospels. Read Trevin’s blog at trevinwax.com



Flickr photo by Icadrew

[Outside] the Church There is *no* Salvation... *Sort of*

by **Chris Castaldo**

[T]he doctrine that "Outside the Church there is no salvation" (*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*), first expressed by the third century martyr/bishop, Cyprian, and to this day by the Roman Catholic Magisterium, is a matter of much confusion. At face value (when expressed by Rome) it points to the Catholic Church institution as the single location where humanity encounters divine grace. But it's not that simple. In what follows, we will briefly consider how the exclusivity of Cyprian's dictum relates to the inclusive emphasis of today's Catholic Church.

The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1964, is a helpful place to start: Those also can attain to salvation

who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. (*Lumen Gentium*, 2.16; cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 1.22)

The necessary foundation of implicit knowledge is "invincible ignorance"—the state in which one is without access to Christian revelation. This is, for example, the pigmy, aborigine, or post Christian European who has never heard the gospel. Since such people have not received

an opportunity to understand and respond to the explicit teaching of Christ, they are "inculpable." Assuming this ignorance is genuinely outside of their control (that it is not due to prejudice or neglect) and that there is perfect contrition and a desire to do God's will, then, moved by divine grace, these persons may pursue and lay hold of salvation through their conscience.

Perhaps the biggest exponent of this concept was the twentieth century theologian, Karl Rahner: The "anonymous Christian" in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in a state of Christ's grace through faith, hope, and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ... There must

be a Christian theory to account for the fact that every individual who does not in any absolute or ultimate sense act against his own conscience can say and does say in faith, hope and love, Abba within his own spirit and is on these grounds in all truth a brother to Christians in God's sight. (Theological Investigations, Vol. 14, Chp. 17.)

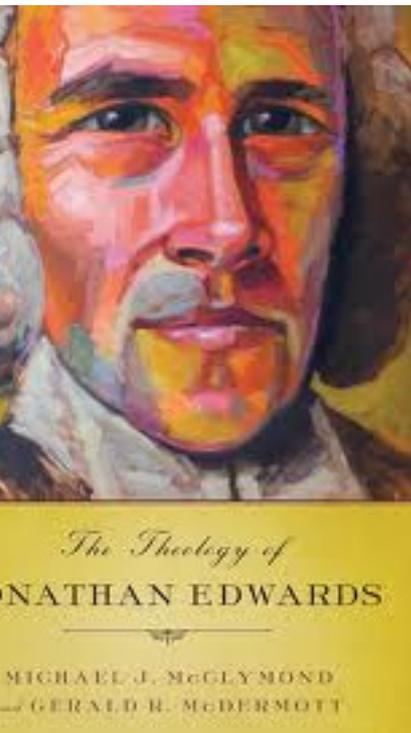
This view seeks to reconcile God's universal will, as expressed in passages such as 1 Tim 2:4 (that "God desires all people to be saved") with the necessity of faith in Christ (Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus). It implies that all people have some opportunity to believe, precisely because God is at work in all people. Where is the locus of this work? It is through general revelation, which includes other

religions and one's moral sensibilities. It may even apply to the atheist insofar as such a person is motivated by grace with sincere contrition. How the atheist is said to believe in God introduces the category of anonymity. Thus, because it is God who manifests himself through one's conscience, a person can genuinely believe, even though he or she perceives the object of belief to be something other than God. Accordingly, one's encounter with transcendent reality (anonymous as it may be) is regarded as a divine experience. The theory of anonymous Christianity has fit like hand-in-glove in today's relativistic culture where the subjective reputation of truth is the plat du jour. In this epistemological universe, doctrine is regarded as

the product of one's own creation. Perhaps it is for this reason that sociologists of religion at Catholic University recently reported that 88% of American Catholics say "how a person lives is more important than whether he or she is Catholic." In addition to demonstrating the practical significance of theology, it offers new meaning to Cyprian's nulla salus.

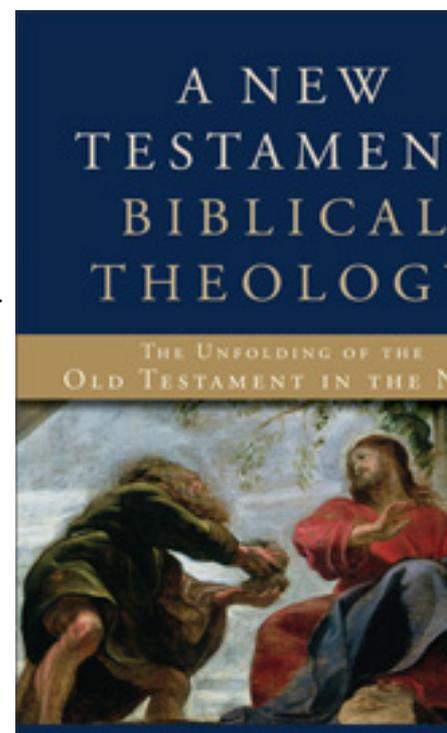
Chris Castaldo serves as director of the Ministry of Gospel Renewal for the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. He is the author of Holy Ground: Walking with Jesus as a Former Catholic and a main contributor to Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism (January 2012).

Tony Reinke's Top 2 From 2011



The Theology of Jonathan Edwards by Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott. In last few years Yale has completed their online archive of the writings of Jonathan Edwards, so it was only a matter of time before we saw attempts to bring theological synthesis to his writings. This is the first major attempt. I'm certain more will follow in the future, but this is the best synthesis to date -- a very readable, enjoyable, and comprehensive look at the many God-centered facets of Edwards' thinking.

A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New by G. K. Beale. The theme of "inaugurated eschatology" is not new one in theology, but there doesn't seem to have been many attempts to center a full theology of the Bible around this theme. Enter Beale. Beale's work is a massive and excellent contribution, arguing that eschatology is not something relegated merely to the future. For Beale, the end-time new creation has already begun. And he's spot on.



Tony Reinke is author of Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books

From the Horse's Mouth

Does Inclusivism Fall Within the Boundaries of Evangelicalism?



Paul Helm

Regent College

Author of *The Providence of God*; *John Calvin's Ideas*; *Calvin at the Centre*; *Calvin and the Calvinists*



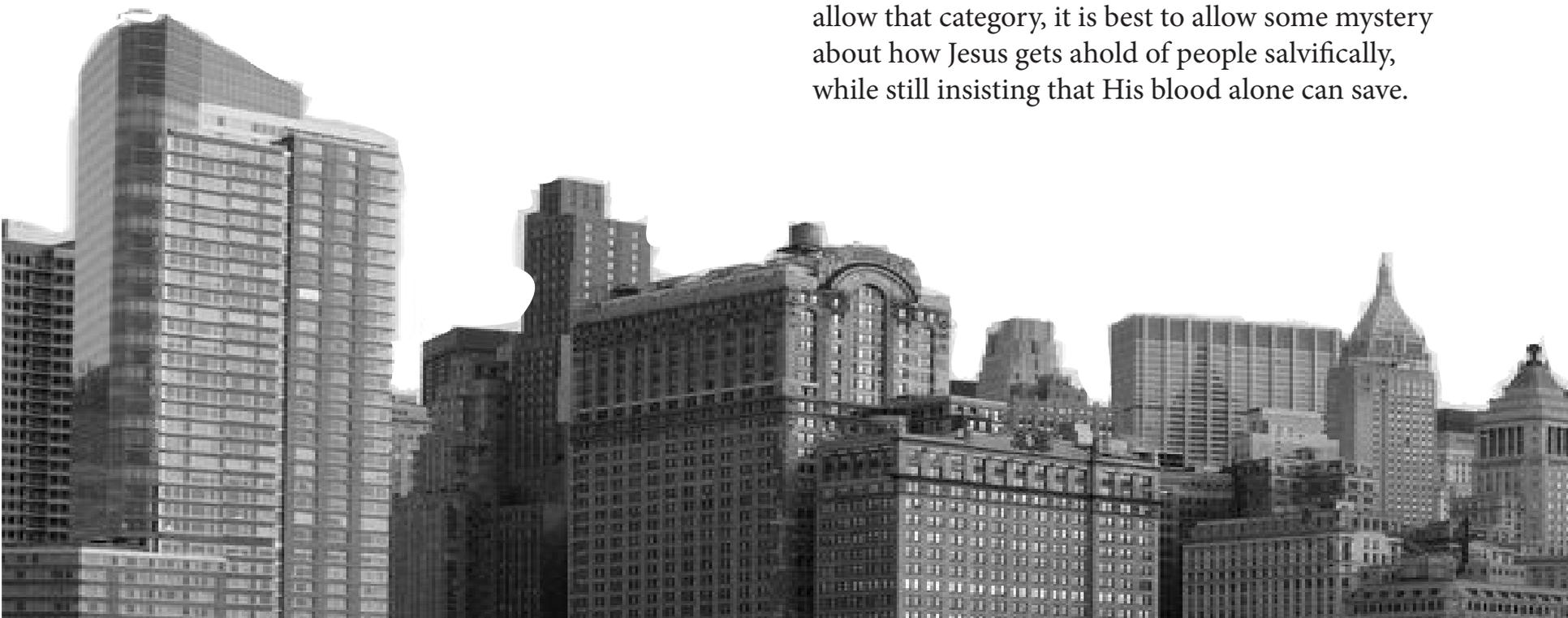
Richard Mouw

President of Fuller Theological Seminary

Author of *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*; *Abraham Kuyper*; *Uncommon Decency*

The claims of Jesus are clearly exclusive. But we are foolish if we attempt here and now to make a map of where the boundary lies: Many who are first will be last, and the last first. And, do not pronounce judgment before the time.

If to be an inclusivist means that one holds that people can be saved through the atoning work of Jesus Christ without having a conscious faith in Him, then all of us who hold that little children who die before that kind of conscious faith still go to heaven--all of us are inclusivists. For me, once you allow that category, it is best to allow some mystery about how Jesus gets ahold of people salvifically, while still insisting that His blood alone can save.





Stephen J. Wellum

The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

Contributor to *The Deity
of Christ; Beyond the
Bounds; Believer's Baptism
Beyond the Bounds*

Assuming that we define evangelicalism theologically, i.e., as maintaining a robust historic Christian theology as summarized by the Protestant confessions indebted to the Reformation, and assuming that we understand inclusivism as the position which contends that Scripture teaches that responsible people may receive salvation apart from explicit faith in the covenant promises of God which are now centered in Christ, the answer is no. Scripture teaches that salvation is only grounded in the finished, substitutionary work Christ and applied to people in this life by grace through faith in Christ alone. Scripture knows of no salvation for responsible people who are surrounded by the revelation of God, whether in nature or Scripture, apart from hearing and believing the gospel and placing their faith and confidence in God's covenantal promises now centered in Christ.

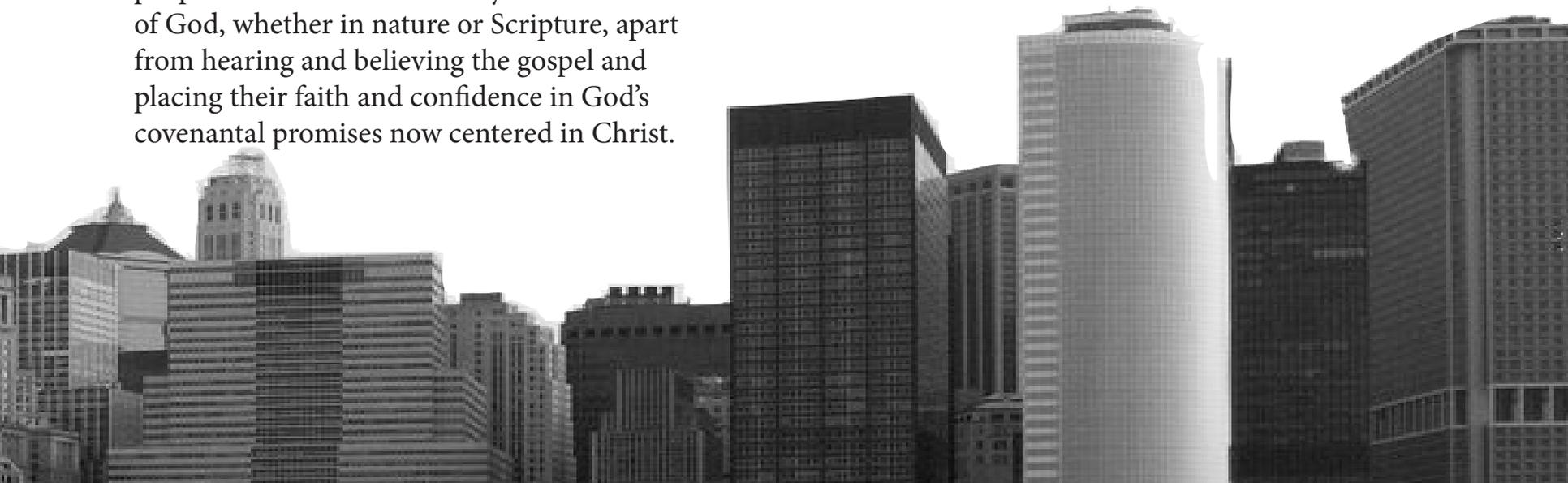


Terrance Tiessen

Providence Theological
Seminary

Author of *Providence and
Prayer; Who Can Be
Saved?*

Yes. Inclusivism fits very comfortably within evangelicalism, where it has deep historical roots. Its conclusions are reached through regard for the unique authority of Scripture; it values the cross as God's only means of reconciling sinners to himself; it asserts the necessity of salvation by God's grace, through faith, and it teaches the urgency of the church's gospel mission.





The [**Cruelty**] of Inclusivism: *a UK Perspective*

by **Michael Reeves**

[W]hat does it look like when a church starts to assume that people can be saved without faith in Christ? If I had been left to guess, I might have said it would look much the same, only a bit flabbier: comforted by the thought that good Buddhists and religious Hindus will be saved, the church would lose its evangelistic zeal, of course – but otherwise, life would go on.

However, the situation in Britain today proves that guess wildly over-optimistic. In the last few decades, the belief that people can be saved without trusting Christ has come to be the standard assumption here, even in relatively conservative Christian circles. And wherever that idea reigns, I am seeing a sickness that goes much deeper than apathy. More

than no evangelism, it means no real evangel. Quite simply, that is because if ‘salvation’ is thought of as something other than being brought to know Christ, then that ‘salvation’ is something quite different to what Christ himself offers.

Let me back up a bit to tease that out. Jesus Christ does not reveal some ‘God-in-general’, nor does he offer some abstract ‘salvation’. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, reveals a God who is, eternally, a Father. And that affects everything. If, for example, God was not a Father, he could never give us the right to be his children. If he did not enjoy eternal fellowship with his Son, one has to wonder if he has any fellowship to share with us, or if he even knows what fellowship looks like. But given that the God revealed in Christ is a Father, the salvation he offers is all about fellow-

ship – knowing him. Thus to say that it is not important to know Christ explicitly is to say that salvation is something else.

This was exactly the sort of thing the early post-apostolic Church fought so hard to get right. Take, for instance, the fourth-century debate between Arius and Athanasius. Arius’ prime error was that, ignoring the way, the truth and life, he defined God without the Son. He did not think he needed to know the Son in order to know God. Now Athanasius would be wonderfully relentless in detailing how catastrophic that idea was. If you do not know the Son, you cannot know that God is a Father, that he is, eternally, loving and life-giving. You cannot know that he is inherently gracious. Thus you will be left with a very thin gruel of religion: a life of self-dependent effort under

the all-seeing eye of a distant and loveless God who is not a Father and not like Christ.

And this is just what I see in Britain today: where faith in Christ is considered inessential for salvation, there people are left with little more than a boiled-down religiosity – a tedious God and a meagre salvation. It may wear Christian clothing – as

Arius did – but anyone that thinks that knowing Christ is superfluous simply cannot have grasped how different the God he reveals is, the nature of his salvation, how great the assurance to be found in him. In which case, no wonder their Christianity seems lifeless and dreary. At first glance, of course it seems more generous and attractive to ‘lower the bar’ of salvation and make

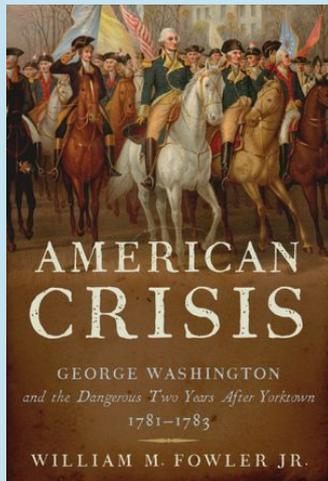
knowledge of Christ unnecessary. But the joyless, unassured lives of so many Christians in Britain testifies to the fact that when knowing Christ is considered insignificant, there is no truly good news left.

Michael Reeves

Head of Theology, UCCF ; Author of The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation

Brandishings

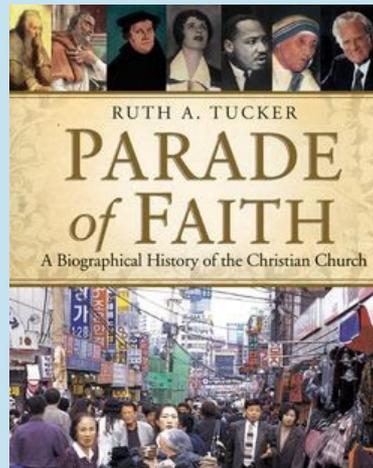
Chad Brand's Picks



American Crisis
By William Fowler Jr.

In *American Crisis: George Washington and the Dangerous Two Years after Yorktown* (2011), William Fowler, Jr. details the two

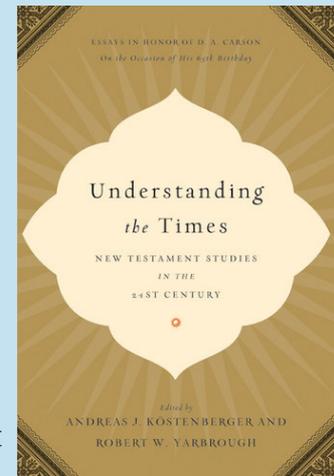
years from 1781-83 and shows how only the indomitable leadership of Washington kept the revolution from falling apart, allowing the British to have the final victory. This is a little-known chapter of the American revolution, and Fowler narrates the story with great skill and insight.



Parade of Faith
By Ruth Tucker

I have been a perennial fan of Ruth Tucker, who has taught at both Trin-

ity Evangelical Divinity School and Calvin Theological Seminary. Her latest book, *Parade of Faith* (2011), is subtitled, *A Biographical History of the Christian Church*. The book is everything indicated by that subtitle and is written in a refreshing and vibrant style. Maybe a new textbook for Church History?



Understanding the Times
Ed. by Kostenberger and Yarbrough

Kostenberger and Yarbrough have rendered a great service in publishing *Un-*

derstanding the Times, a Festschrift for D. A. Carson. Here are twelve sparkling essays on the state of New Testament studies. They cover key theological issues, as well as the nature of New Testament study around the world in our time. Anyone who loves the New Testament or who has appreciated the ministry of Dr. Carson will want to get this book!

Scale of 1 to 10

How difficult is it to Preach on Hell in the 21st Century?

Tom Ascol

Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL

An ever-increasing confidence in the authority, wisdom and power of God's Word makes preaching any biblical topic a welcome challenge. Hell is a horrific reality, but I welcome preaching it because God has often used the compassionate, honest preaching of what the Bible says on the subject to bring people to saving faith in Jesus.

John Kimbell

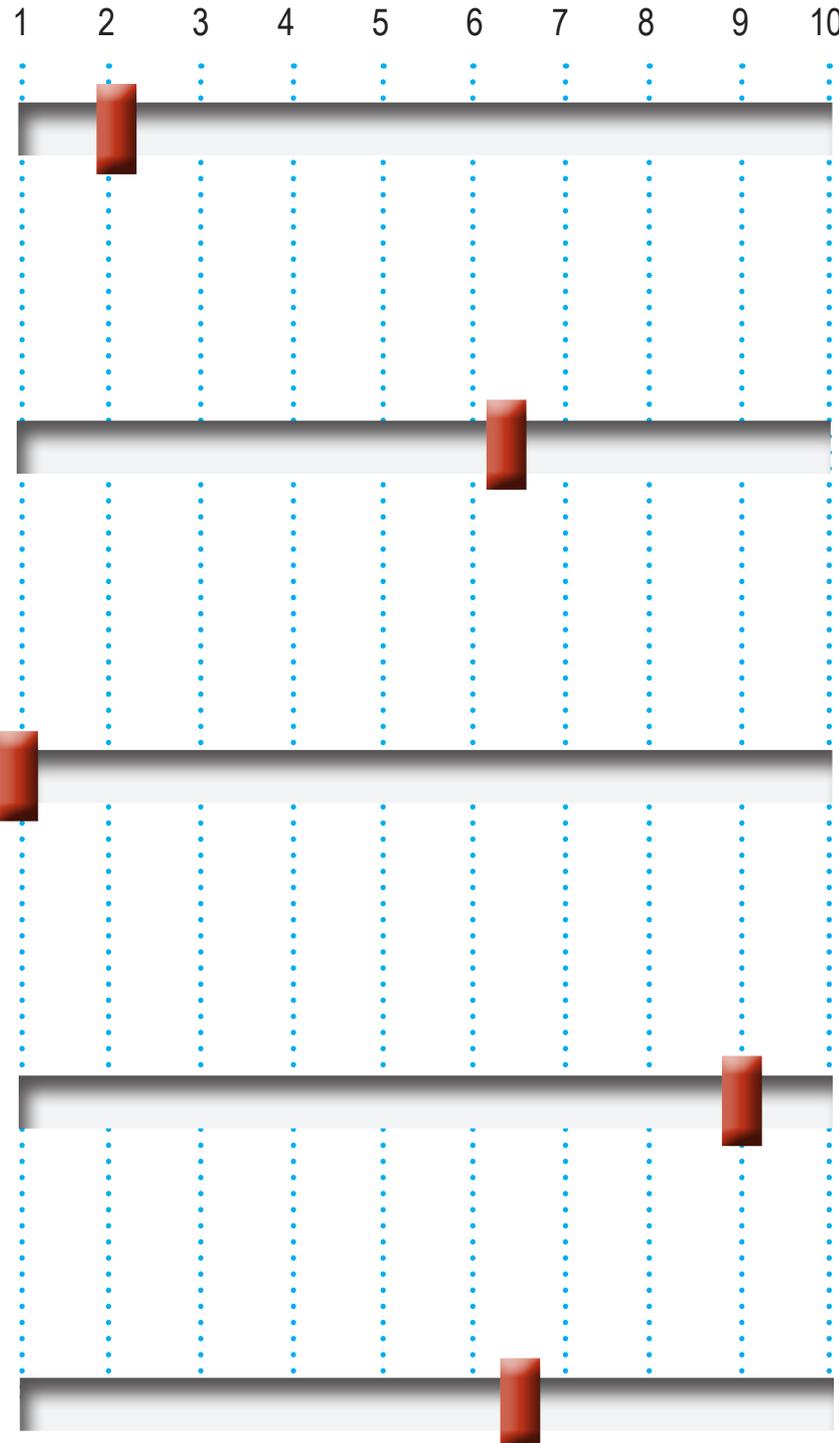
Clifton Baptist Church, Louisville, KY

There is no good news of the gospel apart from the bad news of hell. So it is easy for me to preach on hell, because I am so excited for people to hear the good news of the gospel.

Tony Merida

Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, NC

Choosing to preach on hell is not that difficult if you are committed to preaching through books of the Bible. I do think it is difficult in terms of the weightiness of the topic, however. We bring with us a sense of God's holiness and speak about matters of eternity when the text speaks about this subject.



J. Kent Edwards

Author, 'Deep Preaching'

The major obstacle is that hell tangibly communicates God's unyielding and ferocious opposition to sin and people don't understand why God can't just 'forgive and forget.' People won't gain a better understanding of hell until they gain a better understanding of God.

Michael Reeves

Christian Colleges Fellowship

To preach hell faithfully takes real mind and heart, for here the preacher needs both great compassion and a grand, clear theology that can show how hell is the product of a loving God.

Inclusivism and the Gospel

An Interview with Robert Peterson

By Oren Martin

How did you first become interested in studying the subject of inclusivism?

By studying and writing concerning eternal destinies, especially hell, for many years.

What is inclusivism, how is it different than pluralism and exclusivism, and why is it important for Christians to think biblically about this issue?

Like exclusivism, inclusivism rejects pluralism, the view that all religions lead to God. Also like exclusivism, inclusivism holds that Jesus is the only Savior of humankind. But unlike exclusivism, inclusivism does not hold that one must trust Jesus as Lord and Savior in this life to be saved. Inclusivists have a variety of reasons for this position, although not all inclusivists hold to all of the reasons. It is important for Christians to think biblically about this issue because the necessity of unsaved persons hearing the gospel in this life is at stake.

Who are the major players in each camp?

There are three major inclusivists: (1) Clark Pinnock (A Wideness in God's Mercy, now deceased) and (2) John

Sanders (No Other Name) defended inclusivism as open theist Arminians. (3) Terrance Tiessen (Who Can Be Saved?) defends inclusivism as a Calvinist. Daniel Strange answered Clark Pinnock's inclusivism in *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelised*. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson co-edited *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, in which nine contributors answered the inclusivism of Terrance Tiessen.

How does Scripture answer the question, "Must a person explicitly believe the gospel of Christ in order to be saved?"

Scripture's answer: Yes, especially based on key biblical texts such as John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:17-18. For example, Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Likewise, Peter says in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

What about those who never hear the gospel?

They are lost and therefore we need to get them the gospel. After writing

Hell on Trial in 1995 I became a board member of a mission board. After co-editing *Faith*

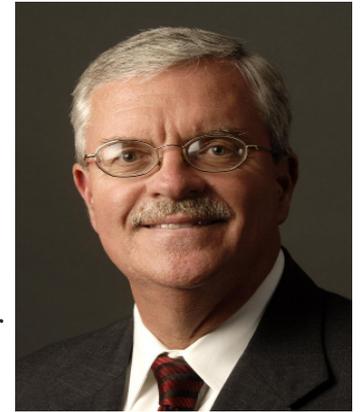
Comes by Hearing I began to support Trans World Radio which beams the gospel into many places where missionaries are not welcome.

Is there a category for "holy pagans" in the Bible?

No. Inclusivist Terrance Tiessen admits that all the biblical figures others have claimed to be "holy pagans" (that is, people somehow saved apart from special revelation) actually had special revelation according to scriptural witness.

What role does general and special revelation play in the debate?

Exclusivists claim that special revelation, even the gospel, is necessary for salvation. All inclusivists claim that it is possible for unsaved persons to be saved through a positive response to general revelation. The problem is Scripture does not indicate that there is such a response, e.g., in Romans 1.



I am concerned that if inclusivism continues to grow, it will indeed harm evangelism and missions. Why should believers risk their lives or their children's lives if unsaved persons do not need to hear the gospel to be saved?"

- Robert A. Peterson

Does inclusivism damage the biblical understanding of evangelism and missions?

In fairness I must admit that some inclusivists support evangelism and missions. But I am concerned that if inclusivism continues to grow, it will indeed harm evangelism and missions. Why should believers risk their lives or their children's lives if unsaved persons do not need to hear the gospel to be saved?

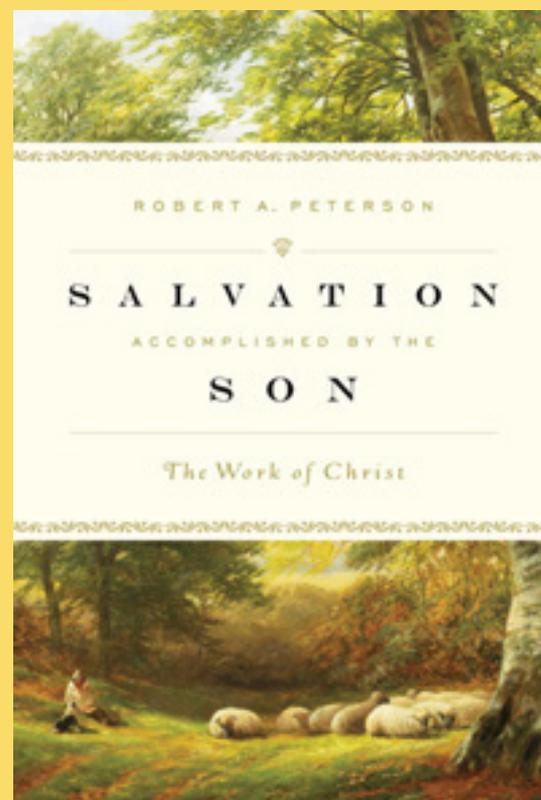
How has inclusivism impacted evangelicalism today and will such a view be around in the future?

Inclusivism has indeed impacted evangelicalism today as many Christians have found it attractive. I expect it to grow in the future as more and more people base their faith on what they want to be true rather than on the teaching of Scripture, which is sometimes hard.

What advice would you give to pastors and students as they, in the words of Jude, "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints"?

I would advise them to work hard to consistently and deliberately base their beliefs on Scripture rather than on their desires. I would encourage them to love inclusivists and to treat them as they would want to be treated. I would encourage them to invest their lives in promoting the gospel of Christ at home and abroad.

Robert Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary. He is the author of Holy Ground: Walking with Jesus as a Former Catholic and a main contributor to Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism (January 2012).



In Robert Peterson most recent book he has written an extensive study about the work of Christ. Peterson argues that a proper understanding of the redemption accomplished by the Son will lead to worship.

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-Thomas R. Schreiner,
James Buchanan Harrison
Professor of New Testament
Interpretation, The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary



The Evangelistic Nerve of John Calvin

by Jeff Robinson

What does the theology of John Hick and John Calvin have in common? Much, if some voices within popular evangelicalism are to be believed. Hick, of course, is a well-known inclusivist and Calvin is one of the heroes of the Reformation. Theologically, the two seem to be polar opposites, but it is Calvin's adherence to the biblical doctrine most closely linked with his name, predestination, that some argue puts him in league with Hick and other inclusivists, for both inclusivism and predestination taken to their logical end scuttle the necessity of missions and evangelism.

Televangelist Jerry Falwell once said Calvin's theology has been respon-

sible for sending "untold millions" to a godless eternity because it has nothing to say to the lost. But those charges are not limited to popular evangelicalism. The scholarly community has joined the chorus of voices charging Calvin and his theology with lacking evangelistic nerve.

The late William Estep, a renowned church historian, argued in a 1997 article in the *Texas Baptist Standard* that predestination is "logically anti-missionary" and "renders the Great Commission meaningless." Calvin's soteriology means that every person is "programmed" to be damned or saved and "makes a person a puppet on a string," he further argued. Estep's main critique of Calvinism hinges on a perceived inconsistency

with Christ's command in Matthew 28:19, a passage that universally compels Christians to evangelize all people and all nations.

Contrary to popular evangelical opinion, Calvin's theology, including his subscription to predestination, is anything but anti-missions and evangelism. The entire concern of the Reformation was the recovery of the heart of the gospel, justification by faith, so that lost humanity might come to a saving knowledge of the one true God.

Calvin's exegetical writings make it clear that his theology has no kinship with inclusivism and, to the contrary, views Christ as the only way to reconciliation with God, a truth that

must be proclaimed promiscuously before lost humanity.

For example, commenting on 2 Peter 3:9, a text often commandeered as evidence against God's election of individuals for salvation, Calvin is very clear as to the expectation that every Christian is to do the work of an evangelist: "This is a very necessary admonition to give us so that we may learn to rightly use time, for otherwise we shall suffer a just punishment for our idleness. He is not willing that any should perish, Peter tells us. So wonderful is his love toward mankind that God would have all saved and is himself prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But we

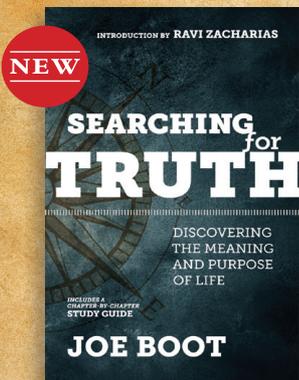
are to notice that God is ready to receive all to repentance so that none may perish. Therefore, everyone who is desirous of salvation must learn to enter by this way."

Similarly, of the classic predestination passage in Ephesians 1, Calvin expresses a clear and heartfelt desire that the nations receive God's matchless grace in Christ, "Let us also pray that it may please him to grant this grace, not only to us but also to all people and all nations."

Writing of Ephesians 4:16, a passage that speaks of all the gifts of Christ's body being used together in concert to build up the church in love, Calvin demonstrates a strong

desire to see the Gospel shine forth and bring light into the darkness of a world captive to sin's dark night: "We should not willfully separate ourselves from the world, but, as it were, stretch our arms out to bring in all who yield themselves willingly to obedience of God so that we may have one faith together. Let us work to bring this to pass." John Calvin is inclusivist only in the sense that he believed that Gospel proclamation should include every tribe, tongue and nation.

Jeff Robinson (Ph.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL.

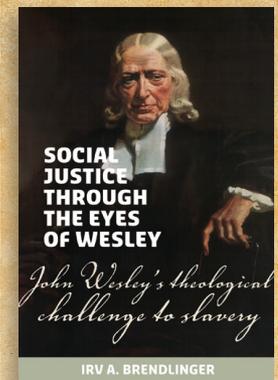
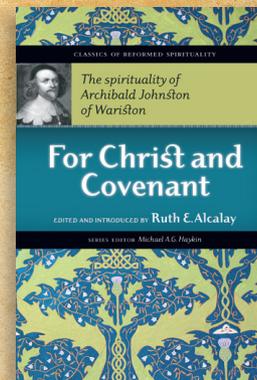
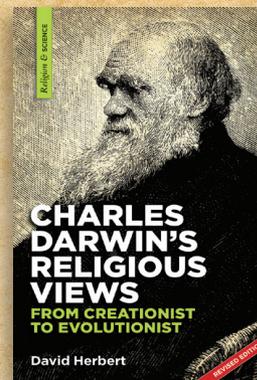


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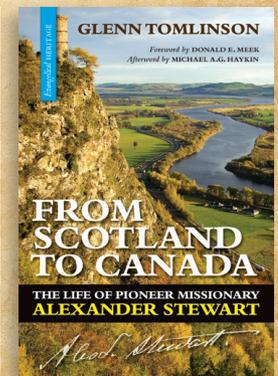
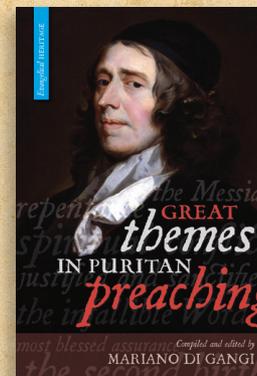
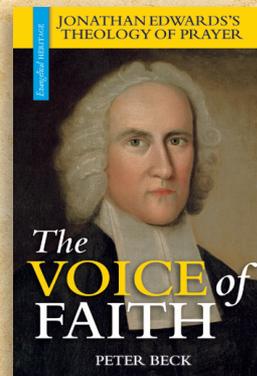
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DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT

SPEAK

*TO PEOPLE APART
FROM CHRIST?*

BY
GERALD BRAY

What happens to people who do not accept the Gospel of Christ? This question has recurred throughout the history of the Church as Christians have wondered about the fate of those who have never heard about Jesus. It was a problem from the very beginning, because when the Apostles first stood up to preach that salvation could come only through the shed blood of Jesus, nobody knew what they were talking about. The world of the early Church was a sophisticated one, in which there were many ancient religions and advanced philosophies that offered their adherents some insight into the meaning of life, and the notion that the spiritual problems of humanity had been solved by the recent death and resurrection of a Jewish carpenter seemed preposterous. If the Gospel message was true, why had God waited so long to communicate it? Surely a message of universal significance would have been given to everyone, if not in precisely the same way, then at least in forms that were equally ancient and mutually compatible.

It was this belief that led many educated Greeks and Romans to try to synthesize the wisdom of the different nations, because they were convinced that the truth was the same everywhere. They could not accept that an individual of little education and no worldly achievements could be superior to what they had known all along, nor that their sincere efforts to achieve a good, just and peaceful existence had been fundamentally misguided. From the beginning, the message of the cross was a hard one to swallow, and that is still the case today.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Two thousand years further on, we now know how the message of Christ developed and spread. From its origins in the Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire, it conquered medieval Europe and then went around the world with European colonization. Though not a “Western” religion in origin, Christianity has been associated with the spread of Western civilization both by those who have preached it and by those who have heard it preached. Now that the colonial era has come to an end, the Christian faith is spreading faster than ever in the so-called “developing world” whereas it appears to be in decline in the West. Ironically, it tends to be Western intellectuals, who are critical of their past and doubt the superiority of their inherited culture, who are most likely to question the claims of Christianity and deny that it is superior to other religions and beliefs.

Only a few of these people actually become Muslims or Buddhists, but many more are sympathetic to the idea that those religions are just as valid as Christianity and think that the Christian claim that no one can be saved apart from Christ is an expression of the insufferable arrogance that so often afflicts Western society in its deal-

ings with the rest of the world. Faced with this challenge, some Christians have been attracted by the idea that God may be at work in other religious cultures, speaking to them in their own terms and leading their adherents to salvation without mentioning the name of Jesus Christ. Like many ancient Greeks, they think that truth is present everywhere but expressed differently, so we can legitimately say that the Holy Spirit who is at work in us may also be present in people who have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

What can we say about this? It is undoubtedly true that there are many people in the world who have not heard the Gospel, often through no fault of their own. It is also true that the Christian Church has not always done everything it can to spread the message, and that many Christians have failed to live up to their calling as believers. It is not difficult to find “good” Hindus like Mahatma Gandhi, set them alongside “bad” Christians, and conclude that it is the Hindus who are closer to the teachings of Christ than his so-called followers are. It is particularly easy to do this in Western countries, where “bad” Christians are easy to find and representatives of other religions may well be gurus teaching in university departments of religion, who are far removed from the “bad” adherents of their own faith. It is tempting to judge the truth of a message by the example its followers set, but important as that is, it is not enough. We must also examine the message itself and consider whether all religions really do embody the same principles, which Christians believe have been manifested with particular clarity in Jesus Christ.

JESUS: THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Who was Jesus? In human terms, he was a Jewish teacher who emerged from relative obscurity, preached for a few years to his own people, and was put to death for claiming to be God, or at least for claiming to have a relationship with God that Jewish thinkers of the time believed no human being could have. Some people were attracted to him because they sensed that he had a supernatural power which



they wanted to tap into. He was a miracle-worker, and many people came to him for healing. He was a teacher of righteousness, and that appealed to others. He was a man of the people and accessible in ways that the Jewish leaders were not – it is hard to imagine someone like Caiaphas bothering to talk to Mary and Martha, for example, let alone the woman at the well in Samaria. His disciples were ordinary people like Peter, James and John, or improbable ones, like Matthew the publican. This unusual combination has always had a certain appeal, and over the centuries men and women have been attracted to Jesus as a great moral and spiritual guide.

But is that enough? One of the remarkable things about the New Testament is that it tells us that in human terms, Jesus was a failure. The crowds that followed him to see his miracles turned against him when he was arrested and put on trial. His disciples ran away. At the end, only a thief on the cross next to him and a Roman centurion who watched him die seemed to have any idea who he was, and neither of them was ever heard from again (Luke 23:39-43; Matt 27:54.). Had the Christian Church been nothing more than a society dedicated to the memory of a great but failed teacher, it would never have survived – or even got off the ground in the first place. The Church came into being because the Holy Spirit came into the hearts of Jesus' erstwhile disciples, convicting them of the truth of what he had taught them about himself and empowering them to proclaim that message to others.

Before his death, Jesus had told them that this would happen. The disciples were upset when he said that he would have to go away from them before the Spirit could come, but he promised them that when that occurred they would be able to do greater things in his name than he had done while he was still with them (John 16:6-7). Jesus said that the Spirit would take his teaching and apply it in their lives, guiding them into an experience of the truth that he had proclaimed during his earthly ministry (John 16:12-15). This truth was not an abstract set of principles or a moral code, but a personal knowledge of Jesus himself. Jesus had not hidden this knowl-

edge from them but the disciples were unable to bear it on their own. Peter had actually confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, but Jesus had pointed out to him that this was not his own doing. It was only because God the Father had revealed it to him that Peter was able to say what he did (Matt. 16:17). Philip wanted Jesus to show them the Father, and Jesus pointed to himself: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Earlier, he had said the same thing to his Jewish critics: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Jesus also told his disciples that he was the way, the truth and the life, and that no one could come to the Father except through him (John 14:6).

Jesus was not just one revelation of God among many; he was unique. In him the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily (Col 2:9). In him, the disciples saw the glory of God fully manifested (John 1:14). In him they saw the love of God at work, providing the means by which human beings could come to the knowledge and experience of eternal life (John 3:16). This way was open to everyone, both Jew and Gentile, and it was the same for all (Rom 1:16). Those who had worked all day in the vineyard (the Jews) got exactly the same reward as those who appeared at the eleventh hour (the Gentiles); there was to be no discrimination or second-class citizenship in the kingdom of God (Matt 20:1-16; Eph 3:6). In the Church, the Holy Spirit who was poured out on the disciples on the day of Pentecost was given in equal measure to every believer, because in Christ Jesus the barriers that previously divided one person from the next had been broken down and everybody was united in him (Gal 3:28).

THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION

The Apostle Paul was very clear about what this means: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal 4:6-7). This is what salvation is all about. It is not a matter of doing good

in the hope that God will recognize that and reward us accordingly. It is not even a matter of believing the right doctrines or of having the best intentions. Those things have their place, but they are the result of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and not the basis on which he comes. The Gospel is a message of salvation proclaimed to those who are unworthy to receive it. A man can keep all the commandments but turn away from Christ in sorrow because he is missing the one thing necessary (Mark 10:17-22). A woman can give up everything she has in order to be healed, but without the saving touch of Christ it will all be in vain (Luke 8:43-44).

When Christians look at other religions and their adherents, this is how we must see them. A good Muslim or Hindu may be a moral person living according to the light that has been given to him, but that light is not enough to lead him to Christ. Judaism and Islam are monotheistic, “Abrahamic” faiths, but they have both rejected the claims of Christ. For Jews he is not the Messiah and for Muslims he is not God in human flesh. Even if they are too polite to say so, Jews and Muslims regard Christian claims about Jesus as blasphemous, which they would hardly do if the Holy Spirit was present in them. The great Asian religions are more distant from us in theological terms, but they have little understanding of a personal God and Buddhism is actually atheistic. This does not sound like the work of the Holy Spirit!

THE SPIRIT WHO MAKES KNOWN THE SON

The Christian belief is that the Spirit has come into the world as the agent of the Son, with the specific purpose of making him known to us. His mission

depends on the ascension of Christ to the right hand of God the Father, where he has taken up his kingly rule over all creation and the mediatorial role that he exercises on our behalf in the Father’s presence. His work cannot be understood apart from that context.

It is true that there were Spirit-filled people in ancient Israel who did not know Jesus personally, but that was because they lived before his coming. When he appeared, those who were still alive recognized him, like Simeon and Anna, who had waited patiently for him in the Temple (Luke 2:25-38). Occasionally we hear stories

about people in previously unreached tribes who have responded to the Gospel like this, because God had been preparing their hearts for the message and they recognized it when they heard it.

If the Holy Spirit is able to do that, why does he not prepare those who believe in other religions in the same way? As Christians, we do not insist that Christ is the only way to salvation

because we think that we are morally or spiritually better than other people. We do not deserve the light that has been given to us, and if we are going to heaven we know that this is only because God has loved us in spite of ourselves. In human terms, followers of other religions may well be better people than we are, just as there are many admirable atheists and agnostics who put us to shame in many ways. But it is by the grace of God that we are saved and not by our works (Eph 2:8-9). I cannot offer myself as a model for others to follow into the kingdom of God and would not try to do so. My calling is to preach Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and invite others to receive him, not me, into their lives (Eph 3:7-13).

I do this because as a sinner I have a need of salvation



Photo by Natesh Ramasamy

that only he can meet and I believe that the same need is common to every human being. If I cannot save myself by my own efforts, then neither can anyone else, however good and admirable they may be. In short, it is because I know that God loves non-Christians and wants the best for them that I am moved to preach the Gospel, not because I am superior to them and feel some obligation to reach out to those who are less fortunate than I am. It is the love of God and not a sense of superiority that compels me, as it compels all of us, to preach the saving Word of Christ to everyone, without exception or discrimination. Some of us may plant the seed, others may water it, and still others may reap the harvest, but however it works out in human terms, it is God who brings the work to fruition and not our human efforts (1 Cor 3:5-9). "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the

same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7).

This is how the Holy Spirit works in the world and this is how we detect his presence among us. As the Apostle John so succinctly put it: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:2-3). It follows therefore that those who follow the spirit of non-Christian religions and ideologies do not have the Spirit of God in them, and that Christians who think otherwise have failed to exercise the discernment that John so strongly recommends to us.

Gerald Bray is Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University.

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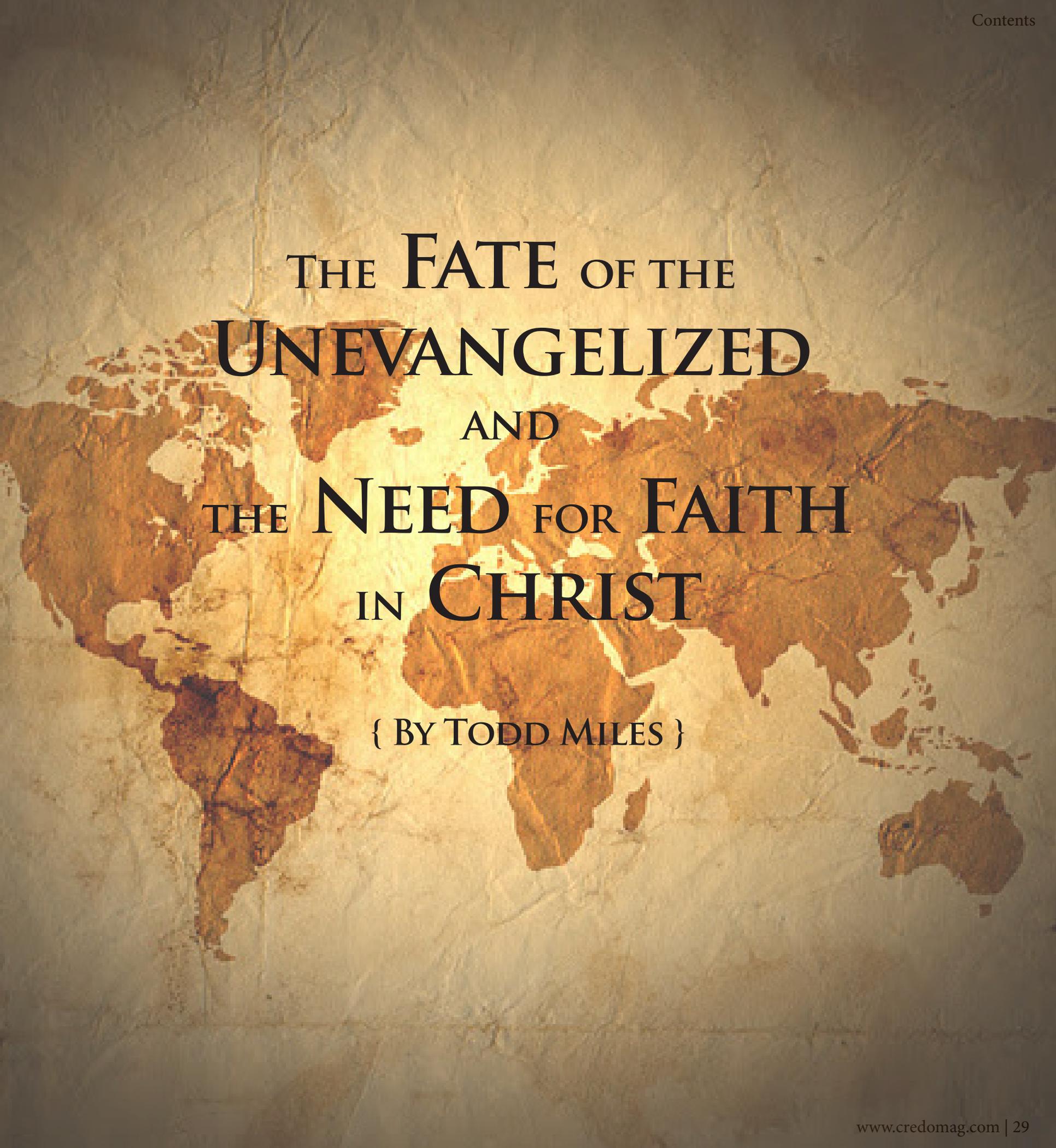
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THE FATE OF THE
UNEVANGELIZED
AND
THE NEED FOR FAITH
IN CHRIST

{ BY TODD MILES }

In recent years, particularly the last century, the question of the fate of the unevangelized has bothered many in the church. The questions are all the more acute in our current post-modern context where religious others live next door as quality neighbors and requirements of belief in Christ seem hopelessly out of date, narrow, and intolerant. For some, lack of acceptable resolution to this issue has been a stumbling block and defeater of the Christian faith. For others, the question has led to speculation on alternative ways that the atoning work of Christ could be applied to those who have never heard the gospel. Does the Bible really teach that one must actually possess conscious faith in Christ in order to be saved? Must we really put such a rigid requirement on all people? Have we not progressed as a society to the point where such intolerant convictions can be abandoned? As these questions find traction, I fear that we depart further and further from the biblical testimony. The result is our salvation is not quite as great, our Lord is not as glorious, and our zeal to proclaim his gospel is not as fervent.

Of course, it is the height of chronological snobbery to believe that our sensibilities are more refined and godly than that of previous generations. And I daresay that men such as Peter, Paul, and John were more compassionate and wise than me. Yet they clung doggedly to the truth that the only hope that anyone, anywhere, has to be saved is by repentance and faith in Jesus. To the biblical authors, the answer to the question, “What about those who have never heard the gospel?” was “Go tell them!”

EXPLICIT STATEMENTS

The most compelling argument for why explicit faith in Christ is necessary for salvation is that there are a number of passages that explicitly say so. Such affirmations are found throughout the Bible and I have selected three from different authors: John, Paul, and Luke.

1 John 5:11-12. John’s first letter is consistent with the themes that he developed in his Gospel, and the emphasis of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is no exception. For example, John 3:15 states that it is those who believe in the Son of Man that will have eternal life. It is those who look on the Son and believe in him that have eternal life and will be raised on the last day (John 6:40). Jesus gives his sheep who hear his voice and who are known by Him and who follow him eternal life (John 10:27-28). And we could go on and on. Indeed, the very

purpose that John wrote his Gospel was that those who read it “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing” they “may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

So it should come as no surprise that John makes the emphatic statement in 1 John 5:11-12, “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” This passage is all-encompassing. That is, it accounts for all people. There are those who have the Son and those who do not have the Son. The group that has the Son is the exact group, without remainder, that has life. The group that does not have the Son is the exact group, without remainder, that does not have life. There is no place for one who has life, but does not have the Son. One might suggest that it is possible to “have the Son” without believing in him, but that argument will not go far in 1 John. The letter starts with the announcement that Jesus, in all of his historical particularity, was proclaimed to the recipients for the purpose of fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:1-3). Language of belief, confessing, and abiding permeate the book. Finally, having the Son is directly tied to believing in the Son (5:10).

Romans 10:9-17. The Apostle Paul was likewise committed to proclamation of the gospel so that those who heard might believe and be saved. In Romans 10:9-17,

Paul taught that salvation comes through confession that Jesus is Lord and through belief that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9-10). Jesus is to be the object of this confession and belief, the saving Lord of all, whether one is Jew or Gentile (Rom 10:12). “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord,” that is, the Lord Jesus, “will be saved” (Rom 10:13). Here Paul, quoting Joel 2:32, equates Jesus Christ with the Lord, the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is significant that Paul begins with the one Lord, Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all, whether Jew or Gentile, and the only one who can save. Everyone, regardless of background, who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved, but it is impossible to call upon him in order to be saved if the gospel is not preached so that it can be believed (Rom 10:14–16). As Paul works down the chain from calling through believing and hearing, notice that the referent of the pronoun “they” in 10:14 remains the

same - “everyone,” without remainder or addition. Those who are saved are those who call. Those who call are those who believe in Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus are those who hear the proclamation of the gospel. He saves all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who call on his name. There is no provision mentioned for salvation by anyone else nor is there provision mentioned by any means other than belief in Christ.

Acts 4:12. Perhaps the strongest statement of the exclusivity of Christ in the entire Bible is found in Peter’s proclamation, recorded by Luke, in Acts 4:12: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.” Several aspects of this verse emphasize the need for conscious faith in Christ in order to be saved. First, the phrase “under heaven” demonstrates just how extensive Peter’s exclusion of all other names actually is. No matter where one is, there is no other name available at

Angelico, Fra ca. 1440-1445



all, anywhere. Second, notice that Peter does not localize the statement with, “no other name given to you” or “no other name given to Jews.” Rather, Peter announces that there is no other name “given to people.” Third, the words “we must” (δεῖ, “it is necessary”) and “other” (ἕτερον) speak to the total degree of exclusivity in view. If salvation is to occur it must, by necessity, be accomplished by Jesus. Any other name presented will not and cannot save. Finally, the use of the word “name” points to far more than source. Instead, name points to the totality of all that Jesus is and did (being and work). Jesus is identified as the “name . . . given to people” (the object of faith, which speaks to the epistemological necessity of the cross) who is also the means by which they are saved (the one who effects salvation, which speaks to the ontological necessity of the cross).

Such clear teaching from Scripture (and the examples could have been multiplied) should be sufficient to settle any debate about the fate of the unevangelized. Indeed, such teaching was sufficient to guide the church through much of its history. In the event that one is not convinced by the exegesis above, a number of other biblical arguments can be made. I recognize that these arguments may not be sufficient by themselves to settle debates, but they do present a cumulative case that is compelling. There is a logic to the exclusivity of Christ that is rooted in the uniqueness of the one God who controls redemptive history and his plan for the salvation of his people. That logic grounds the biblical storyline and echoes across the pages of Scripture in the mouths, convictions, and actions of the Lord’s servants.

THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES

The apostles, commissioned by Jesus, acted as though one needed to hear the gospel in order to be saved. In fact, they left no room in their gospel presentations for any other options. Following Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, his audience asked what they should do in response. Peter answered, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for

JESUS’ LANGUAGE IN JOHN 14:6 IS EMPHATIC. “NO ONE” LITERALLY MEANS “NO ONE.” THERE IS NO WIGGLE ROOM IN HIS LANGUAGE FOR ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO THE FATHER.

the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). So single-minded (and dare we say, intolerant) were the apostles in their proclamations, that the Jewish leaders “charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18, cf. 4:40-41). Philip proclaimed the Jewish Christ to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5) and to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35). Peter preached to Cornelius and the Gentiles that “everyone who believes in (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:42). When the Philippian jailor asked “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31). Other clear statements that forgiveness of sins is possible only through faith in Christ are found in Acts 3:19-20; 4:12; 13:38; 22:16; and 26:17-23. The apostles had ample opportunities, particularly in the Greco-Roman context, to speak of other ways of being saved, if any existed. Such a modified message surely would have been more palatable to the sensibilities of the audiences. But the apostles stayed on message regardless of the context and the reception. I suspect they did so because they had no alternative means of salvation to offer.

PROGRESS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY NECESSITATES FAITH IN CHRIST FOR SALVATION

Salvation under the Old Covenant was by grace through faith in the promises of God. This is established with Abram in Genesis 15:6 and Paul cites that passage as the paradigm for New Covenant salvation as well in Romans 4. The means of salvation does not change. It has always been by grace through faith. What has changed is the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation and plan, enacted in history. As demonstrated earlier, under the Old Covenant, the prophets could

declare that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32), but after Jesus finished his work, the Lord who is to be called upon for salvation is specifically identified as Jesus (Rom 10:9-13).

When Peter was summoned to the home of the Gentile Cornelius, he faithfully preached that Jesus was the fulfillment of all that was announced by the prophets and that salvation, in continuity with the prophetic message, is available to all who believe in Christ (Act 10:42-43). It is important to keep in mind that if Cornelius had lived just a bit earlier, he would have, by appearances, been doing everything correct. He is described as “a devout man who feared God” (clearly the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and his piety was evident in prayers and generosity (Acts 10:2). Yet when Peter reported his encounter with Cornelius to the church in Jerusalem, he said that an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who will “declare to you a message by which you will be saved” (Acts 11:14). The Greek word, σωθήση, translated “will be saved,” is a future tense verb. The language is clear: Cornelius, despite his piety and charity, was not saved until he heard the proclamation of the gospel and believed.

Paul made the exact same point to the Athenians in his Areopagus address, when he proclaimed “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). Whatever the days of ignorance that God overlooked were, there is no confusion about the fact that with the advent of Christ, they are over. Redemptive history progressively developed under the sovereign planning and mastery of God, and with the coming of Jesus things changed for everybody everywhere.

JUDGMENT IS GIVEN TO THE SON

Following Jesus' Sabbath healing of the lame man at the pools of Bethesda, Jesus defended his actions by appealing to his unique status in redemp-

tive history. He does, Jesus claimed, only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), and the nature of the tasks that he shares with the Father are those that only God by rights can do. Just as the Father gives life to whom he will, so it has been granted to the Son to give life to whom he will (John 5:21). The right to judge is exclusively the Father's, but he has given the authority to exercise judgment to the Son of Man (John 5:27). Just as Paul proclaimed to his hearers at the Areopagus, so Jesus himself testifies that the end points of everyone's histories belong unilaterally to the Son. He is the Lord of the destinies of all people, everywhere, without exception. All people in all places must repent and deal specifically with the one before whom they will stand in judgment.

THE SON UNIQUELY REVEALS THE FATHER

An essential element of Trinitarian theology is the affirmation that the Son is coeternal and coequal with the Father. John 1:18 makes the remarkable claim that though no one has ever seen God, Jesus, the Word become flesh, “has made him known” (ἐξηγήσατο, we might say that Jesus has “exegeted” or “interpreted” God). Jesus was not just one of many God-like figures to appear on the scene who could give helpful insight into the nature and actions of God. To see Jesus was to see God the Father and to know Jesus is to know God the Father (John 14:7-9). Jesus is of such singular importance in making God known, that to misunderstand Jesus is to misunderstand God. To reject Jesus is to reject God. Therefore it is not surprising, and ought not to be unsettling, that Jesus would say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus' language is emphatic. “No one” literally means “no one.” There is no wiggle room in his language for alternative ways to the Father. Jesus said it another way in John 5:23. “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” Regardless of how pious one might appear to be, unless one is honoring Jesus Christ, one is not honoring God.

THE SON IS TO BE WORSHIPED

God's emphatic desire that all worship the Son is another argument that one must consciously believe the gospel to be saved. It is astounding that the same God who will not give his glory to another (Isa 48:11) has granted such profound glory to the Son. Jesus accepted worship without blushing or correction (Matt 21:9-16; 28:9-10, 17; Luke 19:37-40; John 9:38; 20:28ff). This is so, because it is the divine right of the Son to receive worship and God has "so highly exalted and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth" (Phil 2:9-10). This same priority of worship is found in Revelation 4 and 5, where the Lamb of God is worthy to receive worship and the reason is explicitly tied to the gospel and to judgment. Jesus Christ, is worthy to "take the scroll" (that we later find out is the execution of judgment and the culmination of redemptive history), because he was slain and by his blood he "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and (he has) made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev 5:9-10). Heaven is

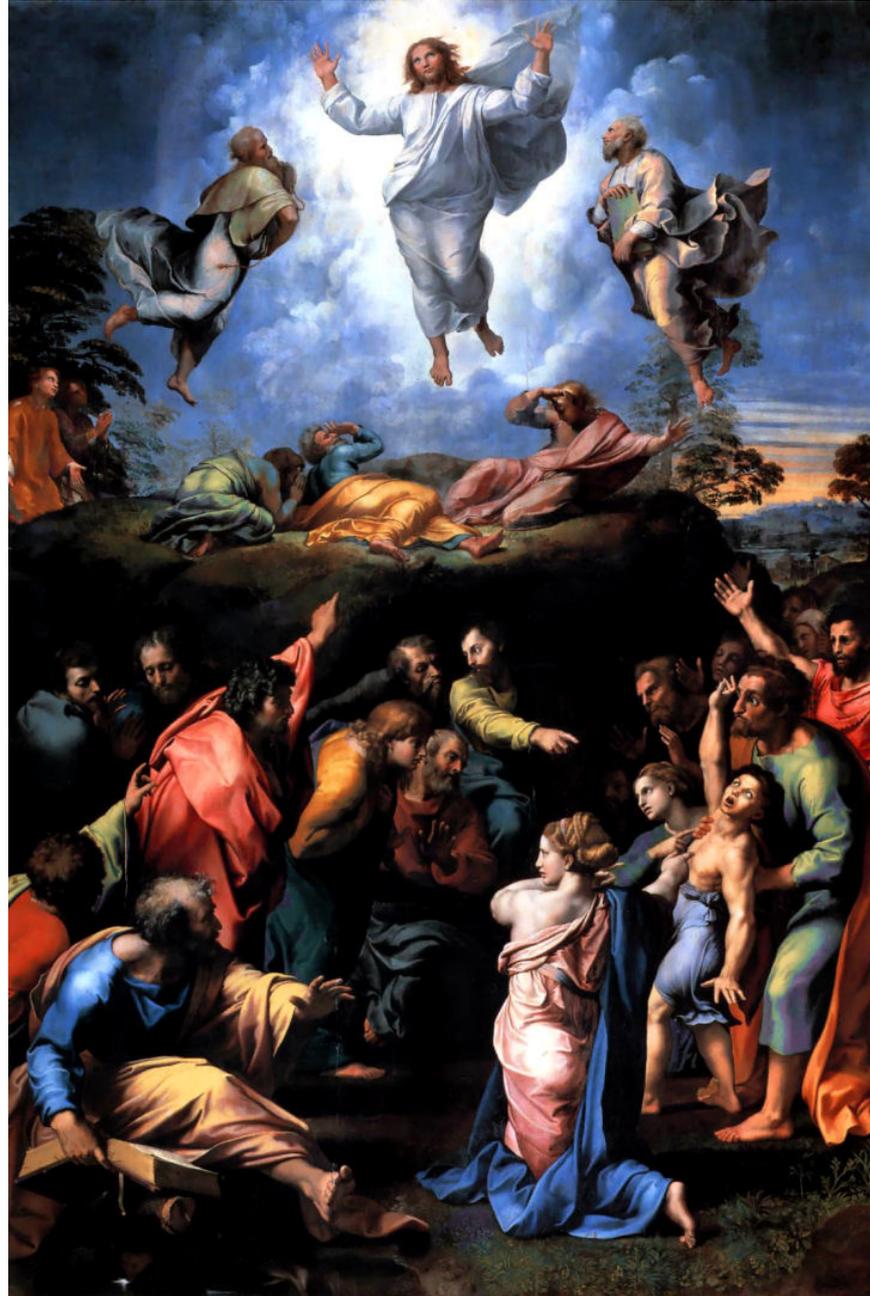
united in their praise of Jesus Christ for his atoning and redeeming work on the cross. It is the destiny of all to bow before Jesus Christ and confess him to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Given this, one wonders about the legitimacy of proposals where one enters into right

relationship with the God who has highly exalted Jesus without simultaneously believing and bowing to that same Jesus.

THE CHRIST-GLORIFYING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

During the upper room discourse of John 13-16, Jesus told his disciples that though he was going away, he would send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to lead and guide them in his absence. He told them that it was to their advantage that he do this; that in God's economy it is better to have the Spirit than to be in the presence of Jesus himself without the Spirit (John 16:7). He then explicitly connected the ministry of the Holy Spirit to himself by proclaiming of the Spirit, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and

declare it to you." In so doing, Jesus did not merely set the agenda for the Spirit moving forward, but actually described the nature of the ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout all of redemptive history. I have developed elsewhere (chapter eight of *A God of Many Understandings?* and my 2011 ETS paper) the biblical evidence for



the Christocentric role of the Holy Spirit prior to Christ's first advent. During Christ's first advent, it is manifestly clear that when the Spirit was active, the result was the glorification of the Son (Luke 4:14-15). Jesus also tied the future work of the Spirit in the world explicitly to himself (John 16:8-11). It should not be surprising that when Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, preached the first Christian sermon after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, that he proclaimed Christ and the result is that thousands repented and believed the gospel (Acts 2:14-41; cf. John 14:12). The Holy Spirit, the agent of regeneration, calling, and conviction, now relentlessly works to transform those reconciled to God into the image of Jesus Christ. He always works to glorify the Son. Is it possible that the Spirit would apply the work of Christ to those who possess no Christ-honoring faith in Jesus? Those who suggest that faith in Christ is not necessary to be saved are making this very claim.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE SON IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

Jesus saw himself as the hinge upon which all of human history turns and the focal point of the biblical story line. He criticized the Jews by saying, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." The Jews were rightly looking to the Word of God, searching for life, but they so fundamentally misunderstood both God and his redemptive purposes that they failed to recognize the very One to whom those same Scriptures pointed.

After Christ's resurrection, he found two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus who were puzzled over the events of the recent days. Without allowing them to recognize him, Jesus rebuked them for being "unwise and slow" to believe in their hearts "all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). They were "slow of heart" because they did not understand the redemptive purposes of God. Jesus then, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," interpreted for them "in all the Scrip-

JESUS CHRIST DOES NOT SAVE PEOPLE UNLESS PEOPLE HEAR OF HIM AND THEY REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.

tures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). From Luke's inspired perspective, the ministries and teachings of Moses and all the prophets point toward the suffering Christ and his glory (Luke 24:26). Only later, after the Lord opened their eyes to see him, did the two disciples recognize him who sat in their midst (Luke 24:31).

The same kind of scene is repeated later in Luke 24:36-49. Christ claimed that his ministry was the focal point and fulfillment of all the Scriptures, that is, "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Just as Jesus had opened the eyes of the two disciples earlier, he then "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). This parallel demonstrates that one understands Scripture correctly only when one sees and recognizes Jesus as the central figure in all that the Bible testifies to, the divine drama upon which all of human history hangs.

Jesus is no bit player in redemptive history. Nor is he merely the most important actor in a drama with a large cast. Jesus is the central figure who gives definition and significance to all other participants in the redemptive story. I wonder whether those who try to imagine scenarios where one might participate savingly in God's redemption, while rejecting, ignoring, or being ignorant of Christ, are attentive to the overwhelming priority of Jesus in the biblical storyline.

THE URGENCY OF GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

A final argument for the need for conscious faith in Christ in order to be saved is found in the urgency of Jesus' disciples to take the gospel to the

I WONDER WHETHER THOSE WHO TRY TO IMAGINE SCENARIOS WHERE ONE MIGHT PARTICIPATE SAVINGLY IN GOD'S REDEMPTION, WHILE REJECTING, IGNORING, OR BEING IGNORANT OF CHRIST, ARE ATTENTIVE TO THE OVERWHELMING PRIORITY OF JESUS IN THE BIBLICAL STORYLINE.

nations. Immediately after Pentecost, the disciples were marked by a supernatural courage and divine desire to preach the gospel, even in the face of deadly opposition. In Acts 13, Paul preached the gospel in a Jewish synagogue in Antioch. Many of the Jews ultimately opposed him and his message. Paul's reaction was to rebuke the Jews and turn to the Gentiles. As he did so, he quoted Isaiah 49:6, "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:47). Isaiah 49:6 is clearly a messianic prophecy. Jesus Christ is the light of the world and the only hope of Gentiles for salvation. Paul certainly understood this, but he applied this messianic prophecy to himself. The one who heralds the Messiah, his redemptive work, and his Kingdom, is the light of salvation for the Gentiles. Paul's application of the messianic prophecy to the herald is significant because it demonstrates that the work of Christ is inextricably tied to its proclamation. Jesus Christ does not save people unless people hear of him and they repent and believe the gospel.

We must remember that the gospel was not anymore popular in Paul's day than it is in ours. Then, like now, it was casually dismissed by many of its hearers as foolishness and the strange product of babblers and pseudo-intellectuals (Acts 17:18-19). Then, like now, it also offended the sensibilities of some hearers, and was a stumbling block to many (1 Cor 1:23). And yet, thank-

fully, Paul and the apostles endured. Opposition and lack of response may have been frustrating, but it did not cause them to alter their message because many of them had seen first hand the peoples' response to Jesus. Christ himself had warned that most would not be interested: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt 7:13-14). If Jesus was not optimistic about the relative numbers of those who would be saved, then we should not be surprised by negative responses nor should we spend time and resources theologizing about a wider hope for the unevangelized.

Paul was utterly convinced of this truth, that unless one hears the gospel and believes it, one can not be saved, and to interfere with his gospel proclamation was literally to keep people from being saved (1 Thess 2:16). He was indelibly marked, from just after his conversion (Acts 9:20) all the way to his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30-31), by a sense of urgency to proclaim the gospel, especially where it had not been preached (Rom 15:20). May the Spirit of God see fit to empower another generation of Christ-followers who are likewise convicted, and may their questions regarding the fate of the unevangelized compel them to preach the gospel of God with courage, perseverance, and urgency.

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5 Minutes *with* Todd Miles

by Oren Martin

[I]n light of the debate over hell, universalism, and pluralism, should priority be given to certain attributes of God (e.g., holiness, love)?

It is the elevation of some attributes over others that has created much, if not all, of the confusion over the reality of hell and the fate of the unevangelized. What is needed is a recovery of the doctrine of divine simplicity which states that God is always and totally who he is all the time, that he is simultaneously ALL that ALL of his attributes reveal. When we give priority to one attribute over another, we ignore the biblical presentation of God and end up distorting the character of God to the point of creating a God based on our own preferences, sensibilities, and desires. The biblical word for such creation is idolatry. Ironically, when we emphasize one attribute over another, like love over holiness, we not only distort who God is, but ironically we do not even get the attribute we are emphasizing correct. A telling example of this is Rob Bell's book, in which he criticizes the doctrine of hell, appropriately titled, "Love Wins." Bell presents an ultimate being, void of holiness, justice, and righteousness, based largely upon his own sentimentalities. The result is a god who more closely resembles a neighbor we think we would like to have than a transcendent being worthy of devotion, fear, and praise.

The key to holding love and holiness together is to allow God to define not only who he is, but to allow him to define the nature and scope of each of his attributes. The biblical presentation of the love and holiness of God is coherent and it is manifest beautifully at the cross of Christ. Fortunately, the God who spoke the universe into existence and sovereignly governs it is not limited by my capacity to understand exhaustively who he is and what he does.

[H]ow can the discipline of biblical theology help in rightly seeing the Holy Spirit's work in the world and/or other religions?

The discipline of biblical theology encourages us to look to the Bible for the categories and vocabulary of theological inquiry. When we develop a biblical theology of the Holy Spirit, we find that the divine presentation of the work of the Spirit focuses on the glorification of the Son (John 16:4). This is not only the case now, but has been since creation and will be through to the consummation of all things. Many pluralists and inclusivists are currently turning to Pneumatology to justify their proposals. They hope that the Spirit might work in and through other religions (apart from the Son) to save those who have not placed their trust in the Son. The problem with this is that the Bible's own presentation of the Holy Spirit will not allow for that kind of separation. Biblical Theology forces us to recognize that the Bible is not pre-theoretical, but provides the forms and content of its own interpretation. Our theological inquiry and systematic constructions must be submitted to the authority of Scripture. Faithful Christians are not free to conjure up scenarios or experiment with new ideas, no matter how "compassionate" or "hopeful" the motivation, that run contrary to God's own self-revelation.

[H]ow do the religions of the world fit into God's plan of redemption? Is there truth in non-Christian religions?

These are really two different questions. With regard to the first, I would say that insofar as other religions do not tell the story of Jesus then they do not play a necessary role in God's plan of redemption. In that way, they "fit" into God's plan of redemption the way that sin and idolatry do. I appreciate Daniel Strange's definition of non-Christian religions: "Non-Christian religions are

sovereignly directed, variegated and dynamic human idolatrous distortions of divine revelation behind which evidence demonic deception. Being antithetically against yet parasitically dependent upon the truth of the Christian worldview, non-Christian religions are 'subversively fulfilled' in the gospel of Jesus Christ." [D. Strange, "For their Rock is not as our Rock," ETS National Meeting, 2011] With that definition in mind and in answer to the second question, we should expect there to be some truth in other religions. It would be folly and ignorance to deny it. We are all created *imago Dei* and we are all witnesses to God's powerful self-revelation through creation and conscience. For example, other religions contain insights that mirror biblical wisdom on such topics as ethics, virtue, family maintenance, social justice, financial planning, etc. But Christianity, at its core, is not any of these things. Unless the story of Jesus is told, as presented by Jesus through his apostles, and unless there is encouragement and divine enablement to follow Jesus, then it is to that degree that other religions are fatally misleading, regardless of how "helpful" they may appear to be.

[H]ow should a Christian respond to the so-called universal atonement texts (e.g., John 12:32; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2)?

By reading those texts in context. Unless one gets incredibly lucky, cherry-picking individual verses to justify a theological position while ignoring the immediate, book, and canonical contexts is always a recipe for disaster. A quick check of the context of these verses may not settle all the disputes about the extent of the atonement, but it is sufficient to reject universalist positions that demand that these verses teach that all will certainly be saved. For example, John is crystal clear in both his Gospel and in his letters that only those who believe in Jesus will be saved and there is a horrific judgment that awaits those who are not reconciled to God (John 1:11-12; 3:16; 5:24, 39; 8:24; 10:25-26; 11:26; 20:31; 1 John 1:1-3, 7; 5:10-13). The writer of Hebrews is also emphatic on the same points (Heb 2:2-3; 6:4-6; 10:26-31). So the affirmations that Jesus draws all people to himself (John 12:32), that

Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2), or that Jesus tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9) cannot entail a universal reconciliation without exception. To cut directly to the chase on these examples, the contexts teach that Jesus draws all without distinction, both Jew and Gentile to himself (John 12:32), that the cross has universal and cosmic implications (1 John 2:2), and that Christ died and a bona fide offer of the gospel is available to all people (Heb 2:9), but not all will believe (note the limiting "many sons" who are brought to glory in 2:10).

[W]hat should be our response to the question, "What about those who have never heard the gospel?"

Exactly what the Bible says - Go tell them! Honestly, it is frustrating to me that some Christians treat the awesome mandate to share the gospel as if it were an embarrassing problem to overcome by philosophizing and theologizing over the state of the unevangelized (which tragically helps no one, least of all the unevangelized). The gospel solves the problem of human sin; it does not create problems! A few inclusivists and most pluralists are on record stating that religious others would be better off not hearing the gospel - it is far better to let them work out their "piety" within the framework of their own religious traditions. But the cross of Christ is a stumbling block, not because it distracts others from reaching God on the alternative path that they are on, but because humans are so sinful that the only means of salvation available is offensive to their fallen and pride-filled sensibilities. And yet, by the grace of God, when those who are called hear the gospel, they repent, believe and are saved. The biblical response to the question, "What about those who have never heard?" is an emphatic and unqualified "Go tell them!"

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Can *Inclusivism* be Supported by the *Old Testament*?

By Todd Borger

The inclusiveness of the gospel is really one option among several that have been debated among evangelicals over the past few decades, most vocally by its proponents Clark Pinnock and John Sanders.¹ Inclusivism is one aspect of a multi-plex attack at the orthodox position concerning the exclusivity of the gospel. The other attacks take the form of an evangelical universalism espoused by Jan Bonda in *The One Purpose of God* and Neal Punt in *Unconditional Good News*.² Also, Gabriel Fackre espouses another position that he calls divine perseverance, but which others call post-mortem evangelism. It is the doctrine that every individual receives a call to repentance and faith either before or after they die. A presentation of his view is contained in the volume *What About Those Who Have Never Heard*?³

Although I am going to restrict my discussion to the use of the OT by inclusivists like John Sanders, the other doctrines—universalism and divine perseverance—are not unrelated and many of the same texts are used by each of the different camps. The reason for the duplication is relatively transparent as each of the three mentioned groups are attempting to broaden the application of God’s salvific grace by appealing either to the effectiveness of an implicit and unconscious faith in Jesus Christ (inclusivism), to an opportunity for the unevangelized to repent after hearing a post-mortem preaching of the gospel (divine perseverance), or to a belief that will ultimately save all individuals (universalism). Despite the variations in each of the three teachings, there are several similarities in their divergence from orthodoxy.⁴

The OT does not provide the basis of the inclusivists’ argument. Sanders and the others principally draw from the NT as well as theological and philosophical discussions. They use the OT largely to provide ancillary support of their general argument. Thus, the texts mentioned in this article will not solve the debate one way or another, but instead will hopefully provide a framework for understanding how inclusivists use the OT in their argument.

THE RADICAL LOVE OF GOD

Sanders uses the OT to demonstrate what he calls the radical love of God. In his discussion of the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, Sanders mentions that the background for the parable is found in Isaiah 25:6-9, which describes a great feast of the Lord that is to be “for all peoples” (25:6). He comments, “By New Testament times Isaiah’s encompassing vision had been curtailed, so that Gentiles were thought of as being largely excluded from the messianic banquet. Apparently the religious authorities thought it was to be an exclusive party, with the invitation list quite short.”⁵

It should go without saying that if the Jews of Jesus’ time read Isaiah 25 as referring to a kosher feast that

was only for the Jews, then they misread Isaiah’s “for all nations.” But should we then conclude that there was no limitation on the feast? Sanders must know that Isaiah continues, after describing the feast for all nations, saying, “For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab shall be trampled down in his place, as straw is trampled down in a dunghill” (Isa. 25:10). So while we should not interpret the feast in Isaiah as being exclusively Jewish, neither can we make the error of saying that it is a universal feast. Just ask the Moabites! Instead, we should read these texts as reflecting an accent on the broadness of God’s love and mercy while holding fast to the reality of God’s wrath and ultimate punishment.

THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES WHETHER GOD’S ACTIVITY ON BEHALF OF OR THROUGH A PARTICULAR NATION NECESSITATES US SAYING THAT GOD EFFECTED SALVATION FOR THAT NATION

God’s description of himself in Exodus 20:5-6 and 34:7 shows us a proper understanding of these “all . . . but not all . . .” texts.⁶ In both places God describes himself as a God who visits “the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but [shows] steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5b-6a). The retelling in Exodus 34 is similar but the order is reversed: “keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex 34:7).⁷ We see in both of these quotes that God limits his wrath to three and four generations of sinners, but expands his love to thousands of generations of the faithful. God affirms that both facets of his personality are valid understand-

ings of him. In a similar vein, we can have statements as we find in Isaiah 25 about a feast for all nations, but which the Moabites will not attend.

PAGAN SAINTS

Inclusivists do not generally exegete many OT texts in support of their view. To a greater extent, they use the OT as a source for examples of persons who apparently were saved without access to special revelation or without specific knowledge of Christ. I will attempt here to respond to the claims of inclusivists concerning the specific nations and persons mentioned by them. The discussions following should not be construed as exhaustive, but exemplary.

Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. God commanded Israel to bypass these three nations on their

way to the Promised Land (Deut 2:4-23). He said that Israel was not to take any land from the three nations because, using language similar to the land promises to the patriarchs, he had given the land to those nations as inheritances. We can infer from these passages, first, that God actively works his plans among all nations, and not simply with Israel. We can infer, second, that God did not want for Israel to take those particular pieces of land because God had given other land as an inheritance for Israel. The lands of Edom, Moab, and Ammon did not belong to Israel. And the text seems to imply, third, that God granted land to Edom, Moab, and Ammon, at least in part, because of the familial relationship between Abraham, Lot, and Esau (Deut 2:8).

Syria and the Philistines. 2 Kings 5:1 and Amos 9:7 state that God fought battles on behalf of Syria and led Syria and the Philistines into their lands. These passages



mean nothing more—but also nothing less—than that God is at work among all the nations. In this case, God was fighting and leading Syria in the same way that he was leading Israel. So Yahweh is not a local God but a universal God who is above all nations. That fact should not come as any surprise to an orthodox faith. The question then becomes whether God’s activity on behalf of or through a particular nation necessitates us saying that God effected salvation for that nation or for particular individuals in that nation. For an answer, we can look to the Assyrians.

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few; . . . When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes (Isa. 10:5-7, 12).

All nations. Sanders finishes his list of nations by a general statement covering all nations. He writes,

And while it is true that God did sometimes call the Gentile nations to account, the judgments he leveled against them were primarily for moral failures rather than religious failures as such (Amos 1:1-2:8; Obad 15; Nah 1:2; Zech 9:1). Furthermore, the fact that God did hold them accountable is testimony that they did have genuine knowledge of God and obligations to him even though their religion did not line up exactly with that revealed to Israel. Inclusivists contend that the Old Testament clearly witnesses to the fact that God is concerned with those outside the special covenant with Israel⁸

Sanders is certainly correct to state that God is “concerned with those outside the special covenant with Israel.” He is simply stating the missiological focus of the Bible. Furthermore, Sanders helps to demonstrate the

exclusivists’ case by pointing out that when God judges the nations, he bases his judgment on the moral behavior of the nations and not on their faithfulness or lack thereof to their pagan religions. In other words, God is not concerned with their religious faithfulness, but only with their moral behavior. Surely in all of Israel’s dealings with foreign nations, there would be one that responded rightly to God’s general revelation, and who, despite their pagan religious beliefs and practices, found pleasure in the eyes of God. But if Israel did find such nations, they did not report on them in Scripture.

Melchizedek and Jethro. By far the greatest debate concerns individuals in the OT who were outside of Israel but who exhibited faith in Israel’s God. Sanders includes in passing a long list of OT saints including Abel, Enoch, Lot, Balaam, and the Queen of Sheba. He mentions four figures that bear special attention and I will deal with those four here. Sanders writes, “Melchizedek is elevated above Abraham in the Genesis narrative and becomes in later biblical history the model of the ideal priesthood. . . . Remarkably, Scripture ascribes the establishment of Israel’s judiciary system to Moses’ father-in-law, the pagan priest Jethro.”⁹ Sanders implicitly assumes in both of these cases that Melchizedek and Jethro have not received special revelation about Yahweh and that they have responded to God’s general revelation. In Jethro’s case (Exod. 18:1), although the OT is not explicit about the source of his faith, given his own testimony about his hearing reports of Yahweh’s deed on behalf of Israel, it is easiest to assume that Jethro’s faith was the result of his reception of special revelation concerning salvation by faith in Yahweh.

Melchizedek’s situation is more difficult since he does not explicitly use Yahweh as the name of his God (Gen. 14:19-20). Abraham, however, attached the name Yahweh to the title that Melchizedek gave to God, *El Elyon*, which Melchizedek implicitly accepted (Gen 14:22). Aside from his silence at this point, however, the source of Melchizedek’s faith is not given in the text. To say that his knowledge of God came through general and not special revelation is as much of an assumption as the opposite.¹⁰

Rahab and Naaman. Sanders writes about these two saints,

Rahab is singled out as an example of faith for all people to emulate (Heb. 11:31), despite the fact that her faith was clearly not theologically well informed. . . . The Bible affirms [Naaman's] faith as genuine, despite the fact that he came to it reluctantly. . . . (2 Kings 5:11-12). . . . The interesting point here is not only that Naaman came to faith in God reluctantly but that he also labored under a serious theological misconception. . . . Inclusivists view God's acceptance of Naaman despite his errors in belief and his persistence in entering a pagan temple as evidence that God is more inclined to grant salvation to those who exhibit faith than to those who are simply adhering to a detailed set of doctrines or liturgical practices.¹¹

The incompleteness of the faith of these OT saints is important to Sanders because of his reliance on the faith principle as the means of salvation.¹² By this principle, a person is judged according to the faith of their response to whatever revelation they have received—general or special. Thus, according to Sanders, the incompleteness of Rahab's faith should not concern us since she was ostensibly responding in faith as well as she could to the limited revelation she had received. In Naaman's case, his incomplete faith is seen in his dubious theological acumen when he took Israelite dirt back to Syria so that he could worship Yahweh there. In both cases, these non-Israelites were the receptors of special revelation by the testimony of Israelites, and they responded to that revelation. Rahab was saved because of her conversion to the Israelite God, not because she was a faithful Canaanite. Naaman was saved, even if reluctantly, not because of his faithfulness to his Syrian gods, but precisely because he had rejected them. Whether they understood the full implications of their faith is moot. Certainly there is no believer who comes to Christ with a fully developed theology.

Sanders is critical of orthodox Christianity because of the requirement that the Christian know a certain set

RAHAB WAS SAVED BECAUSE OF HER CONVERSION TO THE ISRAELITE GOD, NOT BECAUSE SHE WAS A FAITHFUL CANAANITE.

of data—the physical resurrection of the dead and the meaning of the atonement, for example—before becoming a Christian. He notes the similarity between this form of Christianity and gnostic heresies. Of course, Sanders is then hoist on his own petard, as it were, when he says, “I am in no way against knowledge; in fact my definition of faith includes it. The issue is the *degree* of knowledge necessary for entering into a trusting saving relationship with the God of grace.”¹³ What can he mean here except that knowledge is important to faith, as long as it is the knowledge he thinks important. Anything more than that begins to look like gnosticism. Surely Sanders cannot mean that a person only needs to respond to faith according to knowledge of any kind. That belief would lead down a very short path ending in universalism. There must be some degree of specificity to the content of the knowledge that informs the faith of the believer. If we agree on that, then we can debate later what the specific content must be.

A CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTOLOGY

The way that we connect the faith of OT saints to a saving NT faith in Jesus Christ will bear heavily on how we conclude this issue. On the one hand, we can assert, as the writer of Hebrews seems to do, that the faithful in the OT were looking ahead to something that was never fully realized in their own lives, and, we might conclude, perhaps was imperfectly known. “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40 ESV).

On the other hand, we might assert that their faith in Jesus Christ was more direct than that. Paul made a

startling statement in his letter to the Philippians that is easy to overlook if we do not know our Old Testament well enough. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). Paul is virtually quoting from Isaiah 45:22-23, where the prophet wrote, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’” This passage in Isaiah shows a strong monotheistic message, that there is no God on heaven or earth but Yahweh. The connection here is stronger than simply the repetition of the phrase “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess.” When the Hebrew scripture was translated into Greek, the Jews had long adopted the tradition of not uttering the name of God (written here as Yahweh). Instead, they had adopted the practice of substituting the Hebrew word *Adonai* (“my lord”) and then in Greek *kurios* (“lord”). So we have in Isaiah passages that, using the Hebrew name, would read as follows: “I am *Yahweh* and there is no other” (45:5, 6, 18); “I, *Yahweh*, have done all these things” (45:7); and “I, *Yahweh*, have created it” (45:8). The Greek translation, which the early church would have been familiar with, read the same passages “I am *kurios* and there is no other;” “I, *kurios*, have done all these things”; and “I, *kurios*, have created it.” Thus our surprise when Paul takes a Yahweh-focused passage and says, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *kurios* (*Yahweh*?!).” But did Paul understand the Philippian passage in terms of the reference to Isaiah? I believe that he did because Paul elsewhere quotes the same passage from Isaiah but uses it in its original context (Rom. 14:11).

I would conclude from the above discussion that faithful Israelites in the Old Testament who declared faith in Yahweh, and even non-Israelites (Job, Rahab, etc.)

or pre-Israelites (Enoch, Noah, etc.) who had that same faith were proclaiming faith in the future-coming Jesus of Nazareth. They were saved by the God who revealed himself by the name Yahweh, and who later came to save all men by the name Jesus. This same Jesus is who we must proclaim to the world so that they can be saved by faith exhibited in repentance from sin.

Endnotes

- 1 John Sanders, *No Other Name: An investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*.
- 2 Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News: Toward and Understanding of Biblical Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).
- 3 Gabriel Fackre, “Divine Perseverance,” in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 71-95..
- 4 Jan Bonda spends much more time than the other authors above in extended exegesis of Old Testament texts. The texts he discusses, however, are focused more specifically on his universalist agenda and I will not respond specifically to his exegesis in this article.
- 5 John Sanders, “Inclusivism,” in *What About Those Who have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 30.
- 6 Punt, despite his espousal of universalism, shows the proper balanced view of universal statements in the Bible. He writes, “[The] Bible frequently does make universal declarations to which there are exceptions. This is the key to a proper understanding of the universalistic texts” (*Unconditional Good News*, 20).
- 7 These texts form the core of a theological formula that becomes a confession of faith for Israel in the OT. See examples of the reuse of this formula in Jonah 4:2 and Psalm 103:8. See its reversal in Nahum 1:2-3.
- 8 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 220-221.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 219.
- 10 Walter Kaiser, “Holy Pagans,” in *Faith Comes by Hearing*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 133.
- 11 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 219-220.
- 12 Sanders, “Inclusivism,” 36-38.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 38.

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For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scrip-

ture says, “Everyone who be-

Faith Comes by Hearing

The Inclusivists’ Abuse of Romans 10:9-17

By Ardel Caneday

believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are

shame.” For there is no distinction for the same Lord is Lord of all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” in whom they have not believed? him of whom they have never heard without someone preaching unless they are sent? As it is

For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” is a familiar passage of Scripture treasured by many Christians who embraced it from their youth when they first memorized it. Belief in the truthfulness of this passage, followed by the apostle Paul’s consequential argument in Romans 10:13-17 (that flows from his quotation of Joel 2:32—“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”), has persuaded believers throughout church history to bring the good news concerning God’s grace in Christ Jesus to those who have never heard the gospel. The love of Christ constrains them, for apart from hearing the message of the gospel no one can call upon the Lord and be saved but rather they will perish in their sins.

However, some in the church object that to believe this is to render God an exclusivist and his salvation in Christ restrictive. These folks, knowing how to control the conversation in a politically charged environment, emerge from the church to affix a tag of austerity and lack of compassion upon Christians who steadfastly hold the historic belief of the church that God’s wrath rests upon all who never hear the gospel so that unless they hear and believe in Christ they will never be saved but bear eternal shame. This belief and all who endorse it in a world that cherishes inclusivism now wear contemptuous epithets—“exclusivist” and “restrictivist”—that incite images of people who inhabit a gated community.

Those who choose to identify themselves with the more pleasant sounding name, inclusivist, insist that a God who would condemn anyone while not making salvation universally accessible to everyone is harsh and unloving, like exclusivist evangelicals. By way of contrast to exclusivists, inclusivists present themselves as champions both for those who have never heard the gospel and for the wideness of God’s mercy. They doctrinally separate themselves from Christians whose gospel they allege excludes the world’s masses. They distinguish themselves from the historic Christian faith which commonly confesses both the necessity of proclaiming the gospel and the necessity of belief in Christ Jesus in order for anyone to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. Against what they decry as exclusivism, these contemporary inclusivists style themselves as proclaiming “God’s boundless generosity” to the unevangelized masses and “the salvation God so magnanimously gives” even apart from the preaching of the gospel. They advocate what they are persuaded is a kinder and gentler message that they believe is properly called “good news” unlike the harsh and austere gospel they allege most evangelicals embrace.

The late Clark Pinnock and John Sanders have been two leading proponents vying for Evangelicals to accept inclusivism as orthodox. They insist that God’s salvation in Christ Jesus is universally accessible even where and to whom the gospel has never been proclaimed. They contend that no one will ever be saved apart from Christ’s act of redemption but that knowledge of Christ and of the gospel is unnecessary in order to be saved. They claim that individuals who have never heard of Christ Jesus or of the redemption he has accomplished can receive the gift of salvation. Knowledge of the incarnate Christ is not necessary to receive the Lord’s salvation worked out within history. Pinnock and Sanders reason that if God secures redemption through the sacrificial death of Christ Jesus, which is sufficient for all humans, and God designs his salvation for the world not just for Israelites, then every human who has ever lived must have immediate access to this salvation



NOWHERE IN HIS BOOK, *A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY*, DOES PINNOCK ADDRESS ROMANS 10:9-17. YET, HE IS NOT BASHFUL TO ASSERT, "THE BIBLE DOES NOT TEACH THAT ONE MUST CONFESS THE NAME OF JESUS TO BE SAVED" (158).

without regard to when they live, where they live, in what culture they live, and even without ever hearing the gospel proclaimed to them by missionaries.

Knowledge of Christ through Scripture and the gospel is unnecessary for salvation, Pinnock and Sanders insist. All that is necessary to receive salvation in Christ is knowledge of God universally received through general revelation. These inclusivists are profoundly offended at the thought that God's general revelation provides knowledge of him that is sufficient to condemn sinners without excuse but that it does not provide knowledge of God that is sufficient to bring salvation. Such a belief is monstrous to them and makes God out to be a monster. Sanders characterizes inclusivism: "General revelation is salvific because its source is the saving God. . . . Since all revelation is from God, 'all revelation is *saving* revelation. The knowledge of God is always saving knowledge'" (*No Other Name?* 233). Pinnock and Sanders reason, surely the God and Father of the Lord Jesus would never allow salvation to be inaccessible to those who have never heard the gospel because some human failed to bring the gospel of Christ to them.

Nowhere in his book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, does Pinnock address Romans 10:9-17. Yet, he is not bashful to assert, "The Bible does not teach that one must confess the name of Jesus to be saved" (158). Besides passages such as Luke 12:8-9 and Matthew 10:32-33 slipping his memory, it seems that Pinnock has also forgotten the familiar words by Paul, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Sanders does not shy away from Romans 10:9-17. Instead, on Romans 10:9-10 he confidently affirms,

"I do not believe these verses teach the *necessity* of confessing Jesus but rather that if you do you are indeed one of the saved" (*What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 104). Sanders explicitly appeals to this passage, first to correct exclusivists for abusing the passage to shut out the unevangelized from access to God's salvation in Christ without ever hearing the gospel and then to demonstrate that the apostle Paul "believes we can find God through general revelation" and not only through hearing the gospel. Concerning Romans 10:9-10, Sanders explains,

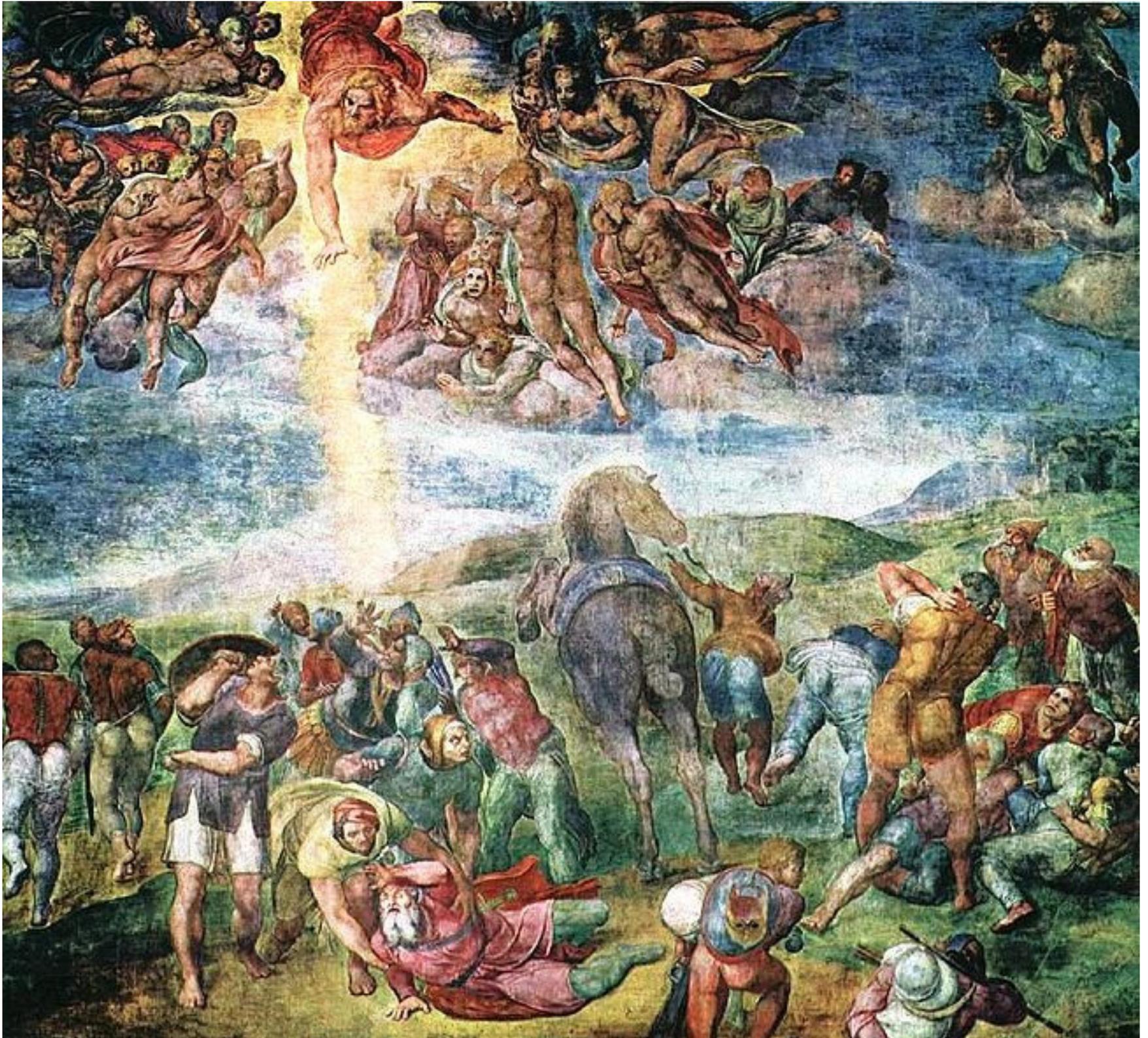
Some believe that Paul asserted the necessity of knowing about Christ for salvation when he said that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (10:9). But logically this means nothing more than that confession of Christ is *one* sure way to experience salvation: Paul does not say anything about what will happen to those who do not confess Christ because they have never heard of Christ. The text is logically similar to the conditional statement, "If it rains, then the sidewalk will be wet." If the condition is fulfilled (if it rains), then the consequent will follow (the sidewalk will be wet). But we cannot with certainty say, "If it is not raining, the sidewalk will not be wet." Someone may turn on a sprinkler, or there may be a pile of melting snow nearby—any number of things besides rain might make the sidewalk wet (*No Other Name*, 67).

Thus, Sanders thinks his logic is airtight. Just as rain is only one sure way among other water sources that may dampen the sidewalk, so "There is one sure way of salvation and that is to accept Christ." But, says Sanders, "these verses do not logically rule out

other ways that Christ may save” (“Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?” 247).

Does Sanders correctly explain the apostle Paul’s reasoning in Romans 10:9-17? Does he properly insist that Christians have long misunderstood the passage to mean that confessing “Jesus is Lord” is *necessary*

for receiving salvation? Is he right to reject the claim that all who will be saved *must* believe that God raised Christ from the dead? Is Sanders correct that the apostle Paul does not mean that hearing the gospel and that calling upon the name of the Lord are *necessary conditions* for the reception of salvation in Christ Jesus? Does he rightly use this passage to insist that, according



Conversion of Saint Paul, Michelangelo.

IT IS CLEAR THROUGHOUT THE APOSTLE'S LETTER THAT THE LAST DAYS' JUNCTURE IN THE STORYLINE OF GOD'S REDEMPTION NOW CLIMAXED IN THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN CHRIST, *ALL WHO CONFESS "JESUS IS LORD" AND BELIEVE THAT GOD RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD IS A GROUP IDENTICAL WITH THE GROUP OF ALL WHO WILL BE SAVED.* PAUL HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS NO OTHER WAY APART FROM BELIEF IN CHRIST JESUS TO RECEIVE DELIVERANCE FROM GOD'S WRATH.

to the rules of logic, the apostle means "that confession of Christ is *one* sure way" to receive God's salvation but not the *only* way and that people who "hear and reject the message are lost," but that the apostle Paul says nothing at all concerning what "will happen to those who do not confess Christ because they have never heard of Christ"?

Is Sanders correct logically and exegetically? If Sanders can demonstrate exegetically and theologically that *all who confess with their mouths "Jesus is Lord" and believe in their hearts that God has raised him* constitute a set of people who is not identical to the set of individuals *who will be saved*, then his logic holds. However, Sanders merely assumes that the two groups are not identical; he has not demonstrated this other than to analyze the passage logically after isolating it from the flow of Paul's argument. Of course, it is equally wrong for anyone who does not embrace inclusivism merely to assume that the two groups are identical (see also D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 95-99).

Contrary to Sanders's reading of Paul's argument, it is clear throughout the apostle's letter to the Romans that he insists that, given the last days' juncture in the storyline of God's redemption now climaxed in the crucified and risen Christ, *all who confess "Jesus is*

Lord" and believe that God raised Christ from the dead is a group identical with the group of *all who will be saved*. Paul has demonstrated that there is no other way apart from belief in Christ Jesus to receive deliverance from God's wrath. There is no "sprinkler," for everyone, apart from Christ, is equally condemned under sin's tyranny (Rom. 3:9). Paul makes clear that God's self-revelation through creation is not sufficient to save (Rom. 1:18-32). Likewise, there are no "piles of melting snow," for the apostle has made clear that God's self-revelation in the law of Moses is insufficient to effectuate salvation (Rom. 2:1-5, 17-24; 3:19-20; 7:7-25). Both God's revelation

through creation and through the law indicts sinners, but neither is sufficient to bring salvation to them.

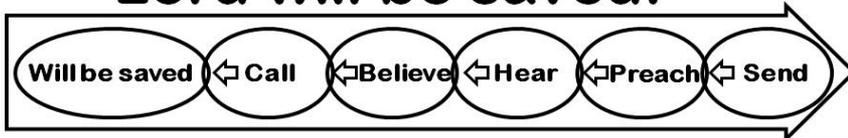
If this does not suffice to counter Sanders's claim, the continuation of Paul's reasoning in Romans 10:9-17 surely makes it entirely clear that the apostle insists that apart from hearing the message of the gospel no one will ever be saved. Trace Paul's argument through 10:13-17.

Concerning Romans 10:13-17, nineteenth century theologian and exegete, Charles Hodge, comments, "As invocation [calling upon the Lord] implies faith, and faith requires knowledge, and knowledge instruction, and instruction teachers, and teachers a mission, it is evident not only that God wills that teachers should be sent to all those whom he is willing to save, when they call upon him, but that all parts of this divinely connected chain of causes and effects are necessary to the end proposed, viz., the salvation of men" (*Romans*, 351; see also *Systematic Theology*, 2:648). Hodge accurately expresses the traditional and dominant Christian belief, that it is necessary to confess "Jesus is Lord" and to believe that God raised him from the dead in order to be saved, but also that it is necessary that the church send human teachers, that teachers proclaim the gospel, that sinful humans under God's wrath hear

the gospel, that these same sinful humans believe the gospel, and that these same humans call upon the Lord in order that they might be saved from their sins and from God’s wrath. Christians have long affirmed that, apart from the unbroken chain of cause and effect stated so clearly by Paul, all who have never heard the gospel will perish in their sins under God’s wrath. Christians have appealed to Romans 10:9-17 as perhaps the most potent sequence of reasoning in all of Scripture that affirms the necessity of the church’s mission in God’s purpose to bring salvation to this lost world of sinful humanity.

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S REASONING

**“Everyone who calls
on the name of the
Lord will be saved.”**



“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”

The illustration above portrays the apostle Paul’s reasoning with regard to what is *necessary* in order for those who have never heard the gospel so that they might receive God’s salvation in Christ Jesus. The large arrow, pointing to the right, represents the movement of Paul’s reasoning from climax (receiving salvation from the Lord) through, in reverse order, to the beginning of five *necessary* actions. Thus, each of the five smaller arrows, pointing leftward, represents *necessary* sequential actions appointed by God that he employs to bring his good news to

humans through which he delivers them from his wrath, beginning with churches sending ministers to proclaim the good news followed by each subsequent action that climaxes in the Lord’s saving those who call upon him. Knowledge of Christ the Savior is essential in order to call upon the Lord to receive salvation. The saving of humans is God’s work throughout, including each human action—the sending and preaching which bring hearing that yields believing which invokes the Lord who saves.

Thus, the apostle Paul’s reasoning in Romans 10:9-17 is “exactly opposite of what inclusivists are proposing. For Paul, it is impossible to call on the true God without believing in Jesus” (Richard, *The Population of Heaven*, 67). In the words of the ancient prophet, the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims God’s unequivocal promise: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Yet, God has ordained that calling upon him for salvation requires knowledge of him that transcends that which may be received either through all that he has made or through the demands of the law of Moses which testifies concerning God’s righteousness revealed in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:21-22). Therefore, God appoints preachers to be sent by the church, his people, to bear the good news of salvation in Christ in order that those who have never heard may call upon the Lord and be saved. Does not Romans 10:9-17 make it abundantly obvious that only by hearing and welcoming this message concerning Jesus Christ, will God’s grace ever be inclusive to those who have not yet heard? Is there any passage in all of Scripture that more clearly or more urgently appeals to the church to bear the good news of God’s saving grace in Christ Jesus to Adam’s perishing descendants?

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Does a belief in
Inclusivism weaken
motivation for **Missions**
and **Evangelism**?

By Timothy Beougher



With none to heed their crying
For life, and love, and light
Unnumbered souls are dying
And pass into the night.
-Frank Houghton

Or do they? Do all people who die without acknowledging Christ as their Savior really “pass into the night?” Or should that hymn, which embodies traditional evangelical thought about the fate of those who die apart from trusting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, be abandoned along with other “outdated” beliefs? Should traditional Christian teaching concerning the exclusivity of the gospel be “brought up to date,” modified to fit the tolerant spirit of the times?

The heart of the matter can be summed up with this question: “Must persons exercise conscious faith in Jesus Christ in this life in order to be saved?” While historically evangelicals have answered that question with a resounding “yes,” some professing evangelicals in recent years have answered the question with a firm “no.” While various positions could lead one to answer “no” to that question (e.g. a belief in “post-mortem evangelism” or a belief that there are many ways to God), this article focuses on the belief known as inclusivism.

Inclusivism teaches that while Jesus is the only Savior, people do *not* need to hear and respond to the gospel message to be forgiven, but can be saved by “implicit” faith in Christ. According to inclusivists, “explicit” faith in Christ in this life is *not* necessary for salvation. It is possible, they argue, for someone who has never heard of Christ to benefit from His atoning sacrifice and be saved. This teaching opposes the historic Christian position known as exclusivism (also variously called restrictivism or particularism), which argues that explicit faith in Christ in this life is necessary for salvation.

This article does not presume to describe all aspects of the inclusivist position or all the arguments set forth by its proponents, nor

will it give corresponding critiques of all those issues from the exclusivist position.¹ The purpose of this article is to ask and answer the question, “Does a belief in inclusivism weaken motivation for missions and evangelism?”

MOTIVATIONS FOR MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

John Stott frames the importance of motivation in missions and evangelism: “In evangelism too we need incentives, for evangelism is difficult and dangerous work. It brings us face to face with the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. . . . Some never begin to evangelize for want of adequate incentives. Others begin, but grow discouraged and give up; they need fresh incentives.”²

What motivations are given by adherents of inclusivism for engaging in evangelism and missions?³ In surveying the lists of mission-

ary motivations from inclusivists, it seems they can be captured under two broad headings: (1) obedience to Christ’s command to go; and (2) a desire for people to experience the abundant life here and now.⁴

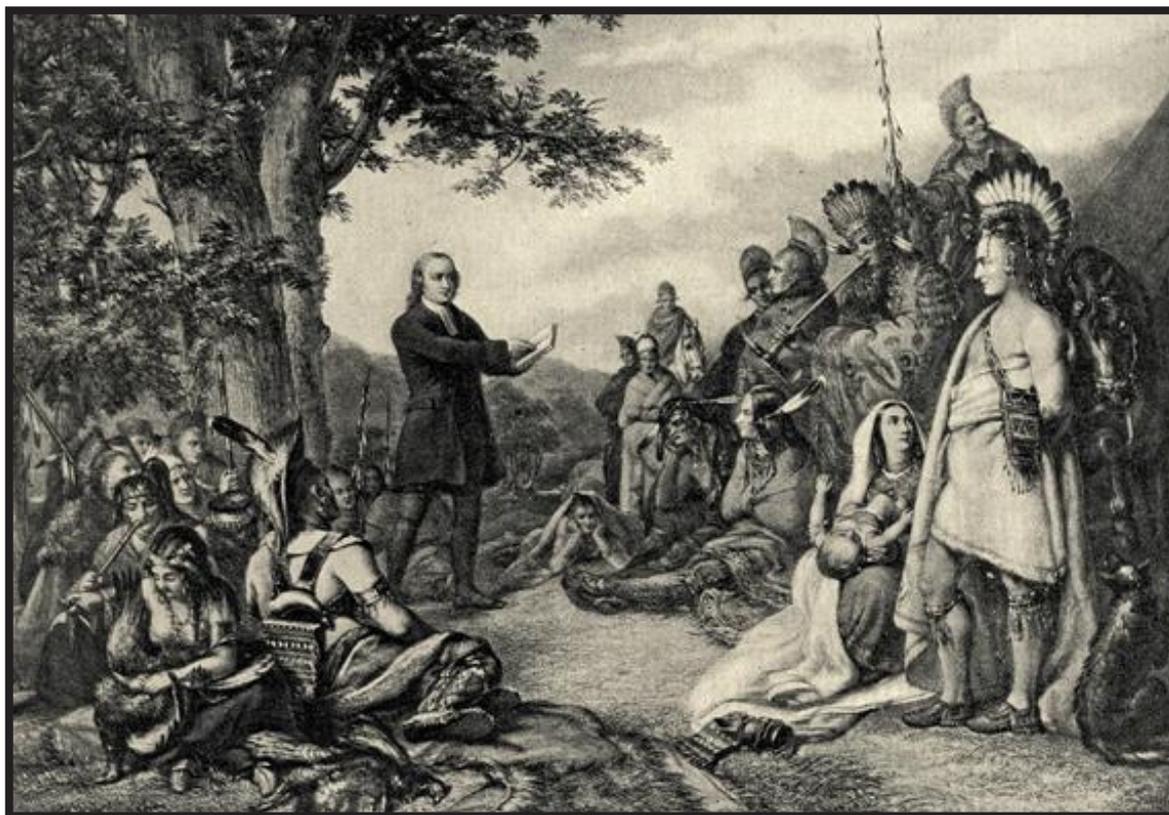
(1) Obedience to Christ’s Command to Go. Inclusivist John Sanders argues that obedience is our primary motivation for evangelism and missions: “The first and most obvious reason is that Jesus commanded us to go and preach the gospel to all people (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark

13:10, 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This command is just as valid for those who accept the wider hope as for those who do not.”⁵ Tiessen agrees, stating “I believe evangelism to be an essential activity of Christian congregations, as mandated by our Lord.”⁶

(2) A Desire for people to experience the Abundant Life Here and Now. Tiessen maintains, “Although God may be saving people beyond the reach of the church’s gospel proclamation, he desires for them a fullness of life, here and now, that is impossible apart from full knowledge of Christ’s blessings and life in a community

of followers of Jesus.”⁷ Sanders’ argument is strikingly similar: “The Bible indicates that God wants to bring the fullness of eternal life into the lives of all people *now*. Even if some of the unevangelized are already believers or all will encounter Christ at the moment of death or after,

it is God’s desire that people experience the joy, love and hope that comes from knowing Jesus and that they not put this experience off to some future time. To have a relationship with the risen Lord is much more satisfying spiritually than simply experiencing God’s universal grace.”⁸ What are we to make of these arguments? I know of no exclusivist who would disagree with those motivations per se.⁹ Exclusivists would not say any less, but they would say more. The “more” that exclusivists would emphasize is that people are lost spiritually and must



hear and respond to the gospel in this life in order to be saved. As Erickson argues, “The strongest motivation for evangelism is attached logically to the exclusivist view, since without hearing the gospel explicitly, people are eternally lost.”¹⁰ That logic is lost on inclusivist John Ellenberger, however, who argues that hell is not a proper motivation for evangelism, instead claiming that “admitting that God is working above and beyond the work of missionaries and pastors enhances our motivation to evangelize the lost.”¹¹

Tiessen goes so far as to claim that an appeal to the eternal lostness of people as a missionary motivation actually can be counterproductive:

If the ecclesiocentric [exclusivist] message is true, we must preach it whether or not it is believed. On the other hand if we have been overzealous in our attempts to motivate people, their refusal to believe the message may actually backfire. If we focus too strongly on a message that they do not accept, we may be in danger of failing to motivate them with a message that conforms better to their intuitions about God’s justice and grace and that will therefore be more powerful.¹²

But do Ellenberger’s and Tiessen’s assertions fit reality? Does inclusivism really offer *more*, not *less* incentive for missions than exclusivism? Piper certainly does not think so:

So I affirm again that the contemporary abandonment of the universal necessity of hearing the gospel for salvation does indeed cut a nerve in missionary motivation. I say “a nerve” rather than “the nerve” because I agree that the universal lostness of man is not the only focus for missionary motivation. Arching over it is the great goal of bringing glory to Christ.¹³

As early as 1981 Harold Lindsell was already noting the missionary “retreat” taking place among many denominations due to “wider hope” viewpoints: “Perhaps the best way to show how dramatic the missionary retreat has been is to look at the percentage decline in the number of overseas missionaries among some of the major denominations between 1962 and 1979”:

Church	% of Decline
Episcopal Church	79%
Lutheran Church of America	70%
United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.	72%
United Church of Christ	68%
Christian Church Disciples	66%
United Methodist Church	46%
American Lutheran Church	44% ¹⁴

The article concludes with a thought-provoking observation:

Though many factors contributed to this decline, it is legitimate to reckon that these figures are a rough index of the depth of conviction about basic Christian doctrine—the nature of the gospel, the lostness of mankind apart from Christ, and the necessity of obeying biblical mandates calling for sacrifice and discipline for the sake of advancing the kingdom of Christ.¹⁵

The presence of other missionary motivations in the Scriptures does not mean that the motivation of rescuing people from hell is somehow insignificant. Richard Baxter, the great seventeenth-century English Puritan pastor, challenged ministers to focus on conversion in their ministries:

We must labour, in a special manner, for the conversion of the unconverted. The work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might. Alas! the misery of the unconverted is so great, that it calleth loudest to us for compassion. . . . He that seeth one man sick of a mortal disease, and another only pained with the toothache, will be moved more to compassionate the former, than the latter; and will surely make more haste to help him,

though he were a stranger, and the other a brother or a son. . . . I confess, I am frequently forced to neglect that which should tend to the further increase of knowledge in the godly, because of the lamentable necessity of the unconverted. . . . O, therefore, brethren whomsoever you neglect, neglect not the most miserable! . . . O call after the impenitent, and ply this great work of converting souls, whatever else you leave undone.¹⁶

THE ULTIMATE ISSUE

This paper argues that a belief in inclusivism weakens motivation for missions and evangelism. Yet, at the end of the day, an increased or a diminished motivation is not the ultimate issue. As both exclusivists and inclusivists point out, we should not argue for a pragmatic “test for truth.” If something is true we should preach and teach it, and if something is not true, we should not preach and teach it, regardless of the seemingly positive “results.”

I WOULD ARGUE FOR A *HERMENEUTIC OF REALISM* – WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES ACTUALLY SAY, AS OPPOSED TO WHAT ONE MIGHT WANT THEM TO SAY?

So is exclusivism or inclusivism taught by Scripture? I believe the Scriptures teach exclusivism. John 3:18 affirms, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” Likewise, Peter declares in reference to Christ: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).”¹⁷

The Apostle Paul emphasized the motivation of the exclusivity of the gospel through his writings and his life. As Piper notes, “Paul’s vocation is to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. The assumption is that salva-

tion is not already at the end of the earth. Paul is to take it. Paul’s message is the means of salvation. There is no salvation without it . . .”¹⁸ In Romans 10:14-15 Paul asks,

But how are they to **call** on him in whom they have not *believed*?

And how are they to **believe** in him of whom they have never *heard*?

And how are they to **hear** without someone *preaching*?

And how are they to **preach** unless they are *sent*?

The logic of Paul’s questions here seems straightforward. No one can call upon Jesus if he does not believe in Jesus. No one can believe in Jesus if he has not heard of Jesus. No one can hear about Jesus unless someone tells him. No one can preach to those without Christ unless he is sent. Paul’s conclusion? “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:15; cf. Isa 52:7).

Inclusivists argue that we should adopt a hermeneutic of “optimism” or “hopefulness” as opposed to one of “pessimism” with regard to the question of salvation apart from explicit faith in Christ.¹⁹ I would argue for a *hermeneutic of realism* – what do the Scriptures actually say, as opposed to what one might want them to say? We should be suspicious when our “new” hermeneutical insights (wider hope) seem to match perfectly the prevailing winds blowing in the culture (disdain for exclusive truth).²⁰

In the final analysis we must affirm exclusivism and reject inclusivism not because exclusivism spurs greater missionary activity or inclusivism diminishes mission activity (though I believe both of those assertions to be true). We should affirm exclusivism because that is what the Scriptures teach, and we must conform our doctrine and practice to the Word of God, not try and make the Word of God conform to our doctrine and practice.

Erickson maintains that the “strongest motivation for evangelism is attached logically to the exclusivist view, since without hearing the gospel explicitly, people are eternally lost.”²¹ I am thankful for the heritage of godly

missionaries, men and women who have believed the scriptural mandate to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.²² Along with them, I eagerly await the day when we gather around the throne with people from every tongue and tribe and nation (Rev 7:9).

Endnotes

- 1 Helpful resources on inclusivism include: John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); and Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). Helpful resources on exclusivism include: Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008); Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); and Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2002). For a resource that includes various chapters representing both viewpoints see William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, eds., *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).
- 2 John Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 13-14.
- 3 Inclusivists appear very sensitive to the charge that their "wider hope" viewpoint will damage a zeal for missions and evangelism, and their presentations of the inclusivist position include discussion about their motivation for missions and evangelism. See John Sanders, *No Other Name*, 283-286; John D. Ellenberger, "Is Hell a Proper Motivation for Missions?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Baker, 1991), 217-27; Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 176-80; and Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 259-94.
- 4 Some inclusivists also argue for "love" as the primary motivation, but that love is a desire that people will experience the fullness of salvation now, not a love that seeks to keep them from dying lost and spending an eternity in hell.
- 5 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 284.
- 6 Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?* 260.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 259.
- 8 Sanders, *No Other Name*, 284.
- 9 Sanders seems to imply such a disagreement by stating, "Many restrictivists today view their position as giving the only genuine motivation for missions." Sanders, *No Other Name*, 266. I do not know of any exclusivists who argue that the lostness of people is the ONLY genuine motivation for missions.
- 10 Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 268.
- 11 Ellenberger, "Is Hell a Proper Motivation for Missions?," 225. Ellenberger goes on to argue that "love" must be our "primary motivation" and even says of Paul, "he was a missionary motivated by love" and was "himself willing to be damned if that meant salvation for others" (226). Ellenberger apparently misses the irony of using Paul as an example of one who was motivated not by "lostness" but by "love." It was precisely Paul's love for the LOST that led him to express his own willingness to be damned if they could be saved (Romans 9:1-3).
- 12 Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?* 287.
- 13 John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 165.
- 14 See Harold Lindsell, "The Major Denominations Are Jumping Ship," *Christianity Today*, (September 18, 1981): 16.
- 15 *Ibid.* T. F. Glasson tries to counter such charges: "It used to be said that the very lever of missionary endeavour would be broken if there were any deviation from the old eschatology. But this has proved to be untrue. Our grandfa-

thers were impressed with the horror that men should die without Christ. We are more concerned with the tragedy that they should live without Him." See T. F. Glasson, "Human Destiny: Has Christian Teaching Changed?" *Modern Churchman*, ns 12 (July 1969): 291.

16 Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth reprint, 1974), 94-96. Baxter is just one example of the historical inaccuracy of Sanders' claim that "Some restrictivists – though not all – endorse the belief that all the unevangelized are lost as a motivation for missionary endeavors. This argument came into use beginning in the eighteenth century." See Sanders, *No Other Name*, 48. Though Sanders does not cite evidence for his assertion, Tiessen sheds light on the source: "John Sanders told me (in an e-mail message on July 31, 2002) of a D.Min. dissertation in missiology that studied missionary motivation after the Reformation and found that ecclesiocentrism (which he dubbed "restrictivism") was not a prominent motivation until the late nineteenth century." See Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 261 n.8. I would argue the motivation has first century origins (Jesus and Paul), and has been seen throughout church history. Baxter clearly displayed this passion in the mid-seventeenth century.

17 Of course inclusivists interpret these verses in a "non-exclusivist" manner. See Sanders, *No Other Name*, 215-267 and Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 17-47. For an excellent explanation of the exclusivist interpretation of these verses see D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 300-14, and Robert Peterson, "Inclusivism versus Exclusivism on Key Biblical Texts," in *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 184-200. One summary observation seems to be in order. The overall hermeneutic employed by inclusivistic interpreters appears to be to look at a verse that seemingly teaches exclusivity and then argue that it does not speak directly to the issue of the unevangelized. It is true that question could be raised about the immediate context, but in the broader book and canonical context, the inclusivist argument falls short. This approach is similar to how universalists handle texts that "might" teach universalism (e.g. John 12:32). Such verses cited by universalists "might" appear to teach universalism if those were the only verses we had. But when seen in the broader book and canonical context, it is apparent they do not teach universalism, since each of the biblical authors cited in favor of universalism argue that some will be lost. See my article, "Are All 'Doomed to be Saved? The Rise of Modern Universalism,'" *SBJT* 2.2 (1998): 6-24.

18 John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 159.

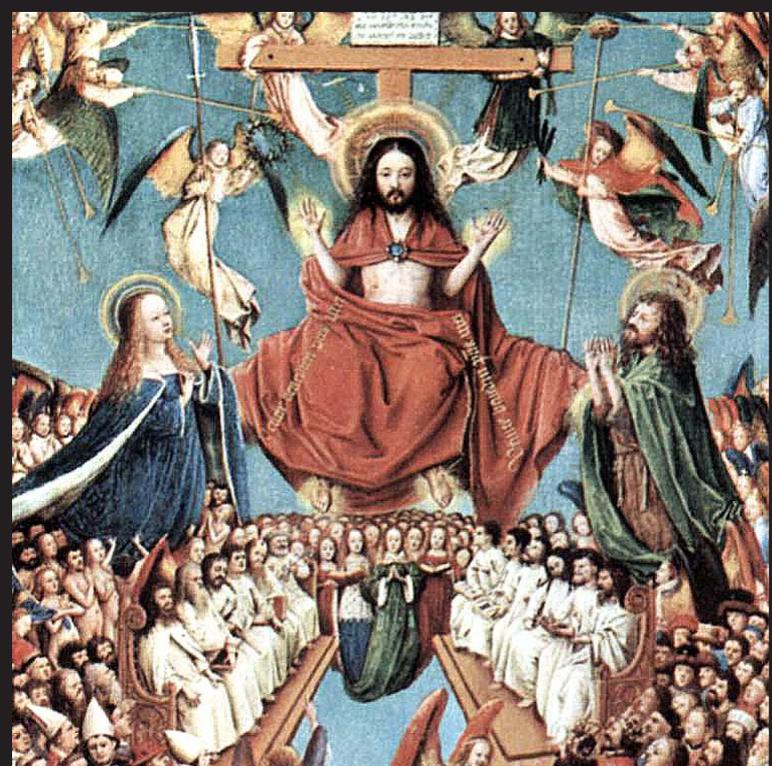
19 Henry Smith, "Salvation in the Face of Many Faiths: Toward a Hermeneutic of Optimism," *SJT* (1993): 26-31.

20 James Hamilton captures this "spirit" in his critique: "These observations [about the discomfort among evangelicals concerning exclusivism] tell us more about how deeply evangelicals have imbibed the spirit of the age than they tell us about sound doctrine." James M. Hamilton Jr., "Who Can Be Saved? A Review Article," *TJ* ns 28.1 (2007): 112.

21 Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 268.

22 For example, see David J. Hesselgrave, "Restrictivism and Inclusivism: Is This Missions Trip Really Necessary?" in *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 53-80. Hesselgrave answers with a "yes," missions is necessary.

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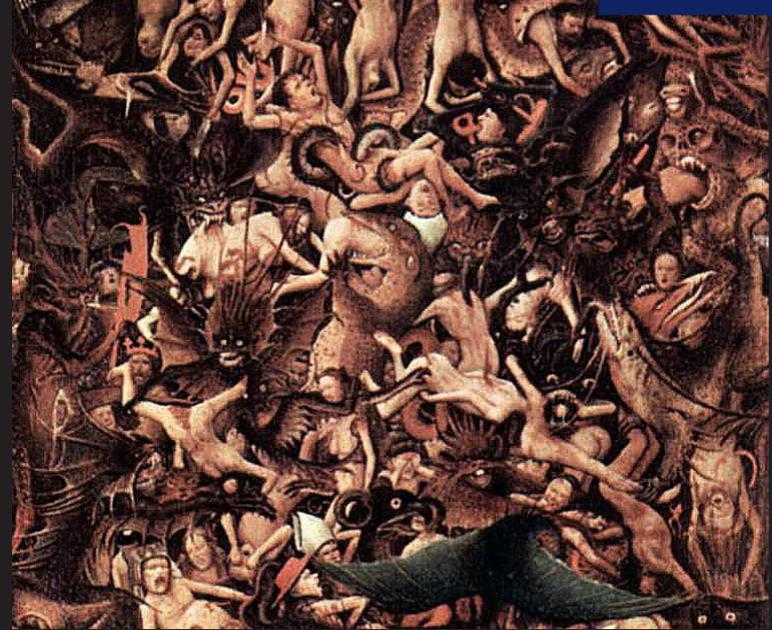


Responding to Bell: Some Lessons for Evangelicals

By Nathan A. Finn



It all began with an online trailer. In February 2011, HarperCollins released a three minute internet trailer for a forthcoming book by megachurch pastor and bestselling author Rob Bell. The book's title was *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (HarperOne, 2011). In that trailer, Bell argued that Christians are too quick to make judgments about heaven and hell. He further suggested that we can't be certain who is in heaven or hell, how one gets to heaven or hell, or the relative ratio of people in heaven versus those in hell. To many observers, it sounded like Bell was flirting with the doctrine of universal restoration, more commonly known as universalism.



Upon its publication, the book itself became a runaway best-seller; at the time of this writing, *Love Wins* is still the ninth bestselling title in Amazon's "Christian Books & Bible" category. Bell denied being a universalist, but many readers were convinced the popular pastor was at least questioning the traditional Christian understanding of the afterlife, especially the nature of hell. *TIME* magazine asked "Is Hell Dead?" on the cover of its April 14, 2011 issue. Other media outlets, both Christian and secular, interviewed Bell or provided coverage of the debate swirling around *Love Wins*. In September 2011, Bell announced he was leaving his ministry at Mars Hill Bible Church, the Michigan congregation he founded in 1999. The controversial former pastor is now launching a national speaking ministry and co-producing and co-writing a spiritually themed television drama for ABC.

This article isn't a formal review of *Love Wins*; many others have critiqued the book from a variety of perspectives, as will be evidenced below. Nor will I provide readers with a comprehensive history of the controversy surrounding Bell's views. My intention in this article is twofold. First, I want to introduce readers to the debate over Bell's book, with emphasis upon evangelicals in North America. Second, I hope to offer some thoughts on what lessons we can learn from *Love Wins* and the responses it has engendered among various evangelicals. As a general rule, I'll be descriptive in the first section, while the latter section will be more prescriptive in nature.

EVANGELICAL RESPONSES

Many evangelicals have raised concerns that Bell is iffy on hell, advocates post-mortem opportunities for salvation, and at least tends toward universal restoration. Some began responding to *Love Wins* even before the book hit the shelves. Bloggers such as Justin Taylor, Kevin DeYoung, Denny Burk, and Trevin Wax offered initial criticisms of Bell's views based upon the promotional trailer, while pastors such as John Piper and Josh Harris criticized Bell via social media. The preemptive criticisms led to accusations from other evangelicals such as Roger Olson and Rachel Held Evans that too many Christian leaders were criticizing a book they hadn't actually read. In an interview with Sarah Pulliam Bailey of *Christianity Today*, Scot McKnight suggested that the criticisms played into a clever, controversy-driven me-

dia strategy employed by HarperCollins.

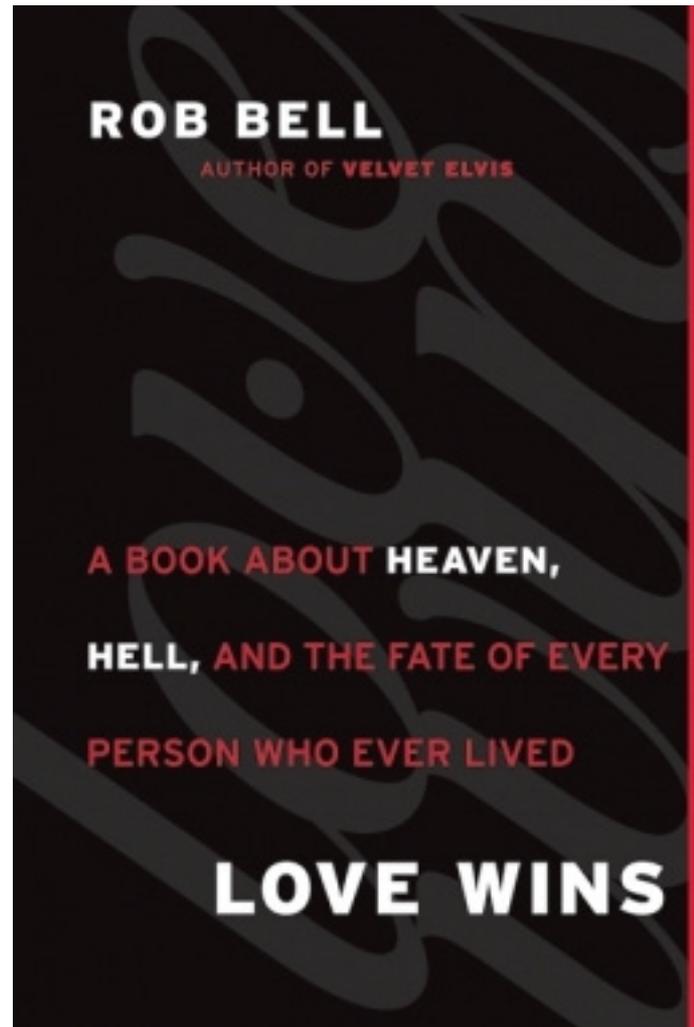
Once *Love Wins* was actually published, many evangelicals wrote formal reviews of the book itself. Some Calvinistic pastors and scholars such as Tim Challies, Michael Horton, and DeYoung wrote blistering critiques of Bell's book. DeYoung's review, published by The

Gospel Coalition, is the most extensive written to date.

Arminian theologian Roger Olson also wrote a critical review of *Love Wins*, though he makes clear his opinion that the book's more Calvinistic critics have mischaracterized Bell's views and owe the pastor an apology. In her review written for *First Thing's* Evangel blog, Sarah Flashing laments that Bell takes on the tone of a skeptic and is far too rationalistic in his exegesis. Ryan Hamm's review for *RELEVANT* magazine also disagrees with Bell's views, though Hamm appreciates the way Bell raises provocative questions that presumably many evangelical are at least privately pondering. British evangelical Stephen Holmes wrote a critical, though irenic review that he followed up with at least ten blog posts

that further engaged the chapters of *Love Wins*. In his review for *Christianity Today*, Mark Galli compared Bell's trajectory to that of classical theological liberalism.

Before long, critical reviews were complemented by a spate of books. Thus far, all of the titles have strongly challenged the view of the afterlife suggested by *Love Wins*. Some critics offered shorter, self-published book-



lets. These include Larry Dixon's *Farewell, Rob Bell: A Biblical Response to "Love Wins"* (CreateSpace, 2011) and Bobby Conway's *Hell, Rob Bell, and What Happens When People Die* (Random House Digital, 2011). These books are more or less extended book review essays.

MCKNIGHT ALSO URGED EVANGELICALS NOT TO DOWNPLAY THE THEME OF "TRIUMPHANT GRACE" THAT PERMEATES THE NEW TESTAMENT, A THEME HE THINKS SHOULD CAUSE US TO AT LEAST ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT MAINSTREAM EVANGELICAL VIEWS OF THE AFTERLIFE.

Several authors offered more comprehensive critiques from a traditionalist position. Michael Wittmer of Grand Rapids Theological Seminary published the first book-length response to *Love Wins*, titled *Christ Alone: An Evangelical Response to Rob Bell's Love Wins* (Edenridge Press, 2011). Pastors Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle co-authored *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We Made Up* (David C. Cook, 2011). Expanding on his earlier book review, *Christianity Today* senior managing editor Mark Galli wrote an irenic book-length critique titled *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better Than Love Wins* (Tyndale, 2011). Galli seems open to a broader spectrum of views than, say, Bell's critics who identify with The Gospel Coalition. Nevertheless, Galli argues that it's difficult to square universalism with the Bible's teachings about judgment and the afterlife. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson co-edited a short collection of essays titled *Is Hell for Real or Does Everyone God to Heaven?* (Zondervan, 2011). In addition to the editors, the volume includes chapters from Albert Mohler, Robert Yarbrough, and J.I. Packer, plus an appendix by Tim Keller. Most of this material appeared earlier as part of a lengthier project titled *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Zondervan, 2004).

Critical reviews and book-length responses aren't the only way evangelicals engaged *Love Wins*. Some raised warning flags through other venues. The Gospel Coalition added a session on universalism to the agenda for their biannual conference. Seminary president Albert Mohler convened a forum on *Love Wins* during a special chapel service at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Pastor David Platt recorded a brief video wherein he made clear his own belief in eternal conscious torment for non-Christians. Danny Akin argued for the traditional view of hell in a presidential forum at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the Evangelical Theological Society's annual meeting in November 2011, the topic was coincidentally (providentially?) "No Other Name." At least one scholar (Wittmer) read a paper critiquing Bell's views, while numerous other scholars made reference to the controversy in their respective papers.

Other evangelicals addressed aspects of *Love Wins* via the blogosphere, op-ed pieces, and interviews. Many criticized Bell and his views. Albert Mohler dedicated several online commentaries to Bell's book and its harmful implications for evangelical theology. Historian Thomas Kidd criticized Bell for suspect historical work and a disregard for the mainstream Christian view. While somewhat sympathetic to the non-exclusivist insights of Karl Barth and C.S. Lewis, Patheos editor Timothy Dalrymple echoed Kidd's historical critique and added his own criticism of Bell's exegesis. Historian Carl Trueman sharply dismissed Bell's attempt to cast Martin Luther as open to universal restoration. John Mark Reynolds offered a humorous critique of *Love Wins* that satirizes Bell's staccato writing style. Numerous evangelicals commented on Martin Bashir's pointed interview of Bell for MSNBC, a conversation that many argued left Bell looking confused and evasive.

Others responded more positively, or at least less negatively, to Bell and his views. In a couple of thoughtful blog posts, Scot McKnight argued that a majority of his students were at least "soft" universalists, provided a helpful taxonomy of the different positions on heaven



and hell that various Christians have advocated throughout church history, and noted that Bell is simply engaging questions with which many younger evangelicals are wrestling. Without advocating universalism, McKnight also urged evangelicals not to downplay the theme of “triumphant grace” that permeates the New Testament, a theme he thinks should cause us to at least ask questions about mainstream evangelical views of the afterlife. Like McKnight, Richard Mouw, Eugene Peterson, and especially Roger Olson defended Bell’s evangelical credentials and pushed back on Bell’s critics, especially those associated with The Gospel Coalition. British scholar N.T. Wright distanced himself from Bell’s views, but took an opportunity to criticize American evangelicals for the latter’s alleged obsession with hell.

Besides the many public responses to *Love Wins*, there are countless discussions that haven’t been aired out in public. As a church historian, I’ve been asked by students to share my thoughts on *Love Wins* itself, to address the validity of Bell’s historical assertions, to share my opinion on whether or not universalism is a valid Christian view, to explain why restrictivist evangelicals

are upset about Bell but give John Stott and other British evangelicals a “free pass” for holding annihilationist views, etc. As a teacher in my local church, I’ve been asked to summarize the controversy and weigh in with my own thoughts about the afterlife. No doubt my experiences are common to many pastors, professors, and other Christian leaders.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE ROB BELL DEBATE

Having completed a mostly descriptive account of the controversy surrounding Bell’s views, I want to be a bit more prescriptive in the latter section of this article. First, let me lay my own cards on the table. I affirm the traditional view that hell is an eternal state of covenantal separation from God where his just wrath against human sin is poured out upon those who’ve definitively rejected Jesus Christ as Lord. Furthermore, I’m a restrictivist who agrees that conscious faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, even as a traditionalist in these matters, I believe there is much we can learn from both *Love Wins* and the ways

evangelicals have responded to the book. The following list isn't comprehensive, but these are the issues I've been pondering in recent months as I've read Bell's book and dozens of evangelical critiques or defenses of his views.

1. While there might be a majority opinion, at least in certain denominations and traditions, on the whole evangelicals enjoy no clear uniformity on questions of heaven, hell, and salvation. To be clear, there are evangelicals with firm views on these matters who argue that what they believe is "the" evangelical position. But I think these claims tend to ring a bit hollow, in part because it's often unclear whether evangelicals are speaking to what was, what is, or what ought to be the case. Some seem content to blur this distinction altogether, acting as though they're the arbiters of authentic evangelicalism and offering semi-papal pronouncements about theological and ethical matters, sometimes excluding even other very conservative evangelicals.

Like it or not, evangelicals are a divided lot on this issue and a host of others. While there is certainly no lack of effort at defining the boundaries of evangelicalism, there remains little doubt that professing evangelicals shake out all over the map when it comes to the afterlife. This doctrinal squishiness among self-confessed evangelicals is one reason we're seeing a renewed emphasis on denominationalism and/or confessionalism among many conservative Protestants. Simply put, it's easier to make definitive pronouncements from within a bounded tradition—something evangelicalism has never been, whatever positions may have held sway at a given point in history.

2. Many younger evangelicals especially are questioning the traditional views of heaven and hell. Like Scot McKnight, I frequently hear from students who aren't necessarily rejecting what they've been taught, but who are asking hard questions. This is especially true as students become aware that some respected Christian thinkers reject traditional views (here's look-

ing at you, C.S. Lewis). I've met very few students who go on to embrace what my denominational tradition would consider to be suspect views, but they are curious as to why it's sometimes considered unspiritual to even ask if God might choose to save all, or save some who've never heard the gospel, or inquire as to whether hell might be temporary, etc.

Those of us who hold to conservative notions of heaven and hell need to be careful that we don't dismiss questions off hand or assume someone is a closet heretic simply for raising a question. These are teachable moments, not occasions to lambast honest questions about sometimes difficult subjects. I want to ask my own pointed, but heartfelt question: how many young adults have we helped push toward aberrant theological positions because too often our first instinct is to denounce rather than dialog?

3. Many evangelical churches haven't done a good enough job of teaching traditional views and/or answering honest questions. I've talked with many students, mostly from Southern Baptist churches, who come from congregations that use heaven and hell as carrots and sticks for evangelistic purposes, but who rarely if ever offer clear biblical exegesis of texts relating to the afterlife. These students are especially vulnerable when they hear serious (even if spurious) exegesis defending alternative views such as inclusivism, post-mortem evangelism, annihilationism, and universalism. They appreciate the evangelistic zeal of their background, but they sometimes sense a lack of theological depth.

There remains an urgent need for expositional preaching and teaching in too many local churches that profess a high view of biblical inspiration and authority. But, and I write this with fear and trembling, expositional preaching isn't enough. We must also intentionally teach our church members, including our teenagers, biblical theology, systematic theology, and basic apologetics, lest in the future they wander away due to winsome presentations of questionable doctrines. It would be a grave

error to assume our church members “get it” because we preach forty-minute expositions and affirm biblical inerrancy.

4. The better part of wisdom suggests it’s best to read a book before offering comments. I know I’m departing from many of my traditionalist friends, but I think Roger Olson and Scott McKnight are right about this one. Olson is right that too many evangelicals assumed Rob Bell was a universalist before they actually read *Love Wins*. This is problematic because it seems relatively clear to me that Bell isn’t arguing for universal restoration, though he is certainly challenging traditional (and I think biblical) notions of heaven and hell. McKnight is correct that many evangelicals played into the hands of the book’s publisher, creating an enormous amount of buzz for *Love Wins* prior to its publication. I know many people who would’ve never read the book had they not read pre-publication critiques on their favorite blogs.

I don’t offer this gentle rebuke out of any sense of animosity—I have personal friends who wrote preemptive critiques of *Love Wins*, in addition to many others bloggers I respect. I’ve certainly done this sort of thing in the past, though I’ve grown to regret it. I, too, was troubled by some of Bell’s comments in the publicity trailer and wondered if he might be a universalist. But a trailer isn’t a book, and in this case, I think it resulted in more than a few very godly brothers looking altogether (and uncharacteristically) uncharitable. Evangelicals need to be extra careful to remain above reproach when it comes to critiquing others, especially those who claim to be part of the family.

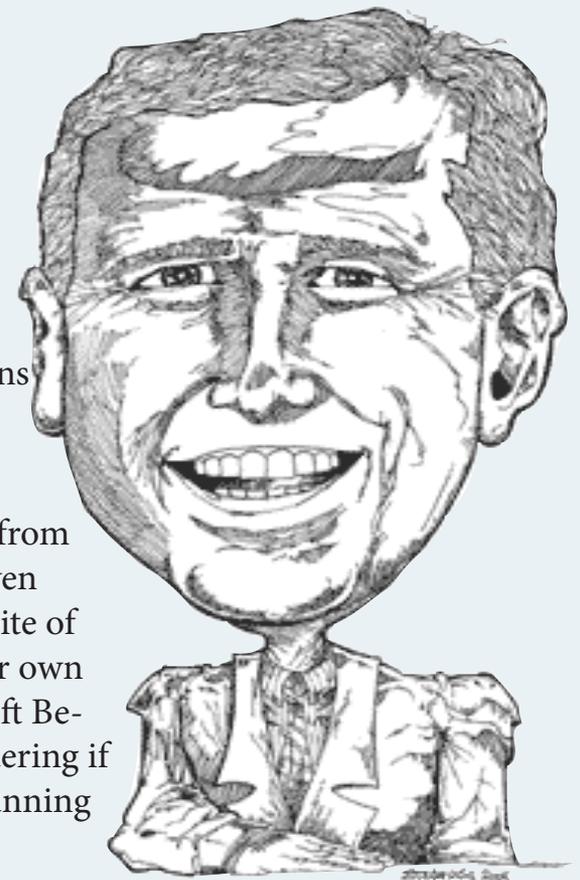
5. Evangelicals need to take care to define terms rather than use them as bludgeons in theological debates. My own Southern Baptist tradition knows a thing or two about this one—we’ve only recently emerged from an internecine controversy where both sides often negatively labeled the other side for polemical

Bell’s Hell

A Review by Michael Horton

Are all of God’s attributes subservient to his love? And does God’s love demand the salvation of everyone? If you answer yes to both, then you’re inclined to agree with everything else in Rob Bell’s *Love Wins*. I say this because traditional views of God, salvation, heaven and hell are not really challenged through argument but are dismissed through a series of rhetorical questions that caricature conclusions that most Christians have historically maintained on the basis of looking at the relevant passages.

To be sure, a lot of us were raised in backgrounds where we expected to be saved from “the late, great planet earth” instead of with creation. Salvation was “going to heaven when you die”—that is, the real you—the soul, sloughing off its mortal coil. In spite of apparent disembodiment, heaven was like winning the national sweepstakes: your own mansion, streets of gold, jewels in your crown, and so forth. Before there was “Left Behind” there was “Thief in the Night,” and I recall waking up in a cold sweat, wondering if my parents had been taken and I was left behind. I know well what Rob Bell is running from—I have too. It’s his destination I worry about. . . .



[Read the rest of Horton’s review!](#)

rather than informative purposes. I've heard more than one person speak of the "heresy" of universalism, but without explaining what they mean by heresy. Do they mean Rob Bell holds to an unbiblical position? Do they mean he denies the gospel? Do they mean he is a false teacher? Do they mean he isn't a brother in Christ? I ask because I really don't know what they mean.

For my part, I think we throw around the word "heresy" far too much because it's useful to us in our polemics. When I study church history, it seems like the term "heresy" is most often reserved for beliefs that, if advocated, make one non-Christian, regardless of their professed Christianity. Think pelagianism and arianism. Views like universal restoration, inclusivism, post-mortem evangelism, and annihilationism have all been denounced by most Christians at various points in church history. Furthermore, I think all of them are unbiblical. But we need to think long and hard before we claim that somebody who holds to an aberrant view of the afterlife is, by definition, an unbeliever. We need a category for beliefs that are wrong—even damagingly wrong—but not damnablely wrong.

6. Evangelicals need to recognize the mathematics of bad doctrine—theological error often multiplies. I confess I've never been a big Rob Bell fan, in part because I perceive him to have a cavalier attitude toward orthodoxy, presumably for the sake of ministering in our contemporary culture. Bell is in many ways representative of the trajectory taken by many who have been identified at one time or another with the so-called emerging church movement(s). To be sure, he's not on the far left of the trajectory—but he has moved increasingly leftward. As I've told my classes, anyone who was reading Bell circa 2006 shouldn't be all that shocked at where he's shaking out in 2011. Some will disagree with my assessment, but it seems like he's moving down a well-worn path of doctrinal accommodation, oblivious to the fact it's a dead end. Mark Galli and Albert Mohler have correctly pointed this out.

We need to remember the lessons of history: bad doctrine frequently begets worse doctrine. Theological error

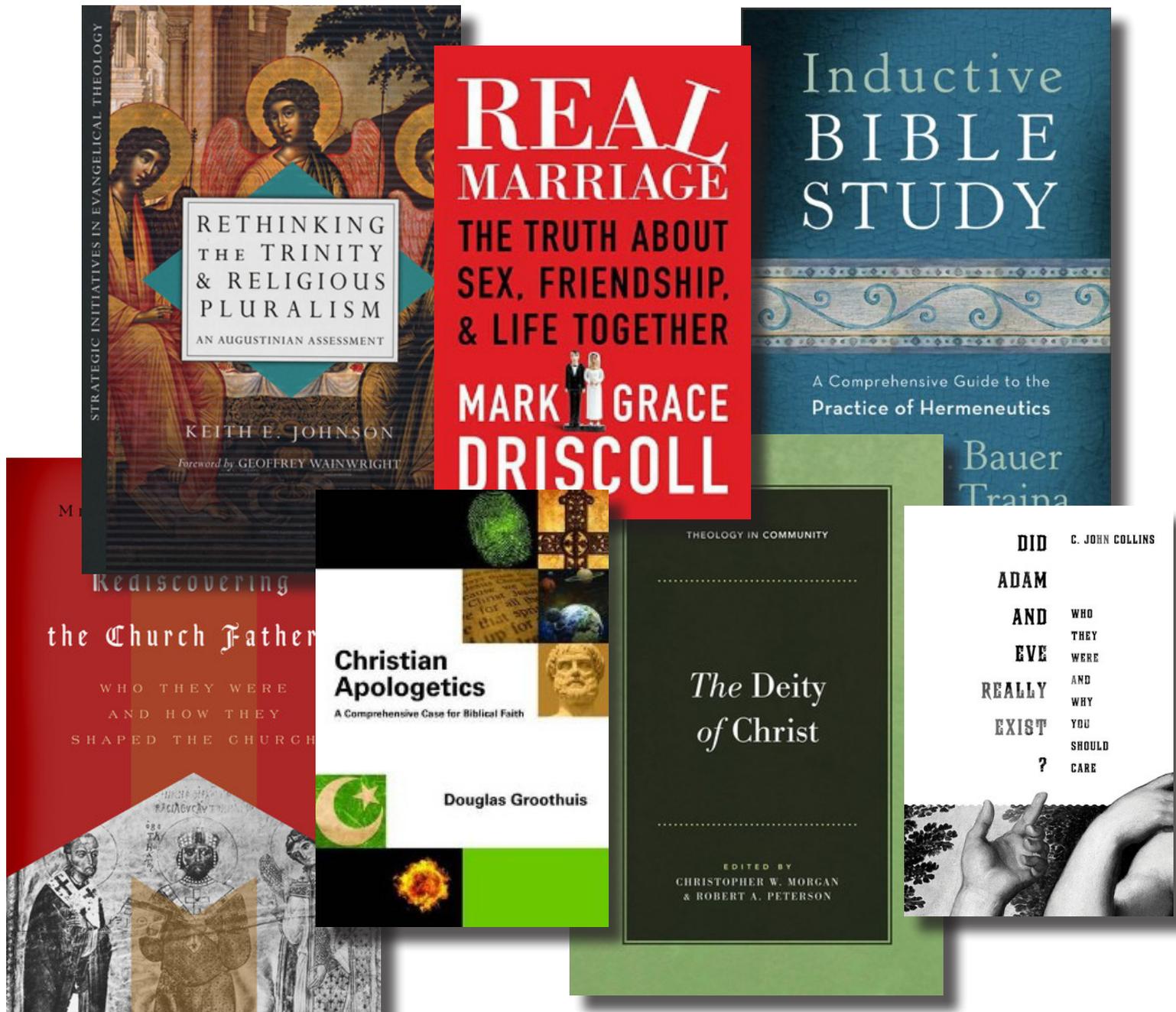
may be birthed out of a genuine desire to reach people—a desire I trust Rob Bell really has, and one which I greatly appreciate. But bad doctrine, especially about matters related to salvation, ultimately undermines the faith, even if unintentionally. At the end of the day, Bell appears to delight in asking questions, even when answers are readily available in the Bible. He seems to revel in sarcastically poking fun at received interpretations and encouraging a sort of "critical-chic" approach to traditional views. This might connect with young hipsters who are raging against their home churches, but it seems pastorally unhelpful and, dare I say, even disrespectful. It won't be surprising if Bell continues to move away from the orthodox orbit, though it's not inevitable and I earnestly hope he course-corrects in a more biblical direction.

CONCLUSION

L*ove Wins* isn't a good book, but it's a helpful book, for at least three reasons. First, it's helpful because, like all such books, it provides an occasion for those of us who hold to traditional views to further nuance and champion what we believe the Bible teaches on these matters. Sound doctrine is often clarified in the crucible of debate initiated by bad doctrine. Second, *Love Wins* is helpful because it provides a glimpse into some of the questions being raised by younger evangelicals—questions we need to be prepared to answer. Finally, Bell has helped us because he has demonstrated yet another theological fault-line among North American evangelicals—personal eschatology. In reality, this has been evident since the 1980s, but views of the afterlife that were once limited mostly to theology classes have made their way into influential evangelical pulpits. Let's hope evangelicals rise to the occasion and offer clear and winsome biblical arguments for the traditional view of heaven and hell.

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••Book Reviews••



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Apologetics / 76 Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?**

Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship, and Life Together

By Mark and Grace Driscoll. Thomas Nelson, 2012. 236pp.

Real Marriage is a hard read. Mark and Grace Driscoll are quite direct about the hardships of marriage, particularly those that are native to a sexually broken culture. They are also unequivocal about the complete surrender to Jesus Christ required to overcome these hardships. No one will be comfortable reading this book.

And that probably fits well into the Driscolls' purpose for it. They want to show that real marriage is a profound and challenging journey of friendship, and this purpose is clear from the opening chapter in which they tell the inglorious history of their own marriage and how they journeyed out of shame and misgiving and into the freedom of forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus Christ.

The book is divided into three parts, though the book largely fits into the first two: "Marriage" and "Sex." The last section, "The Last Day," is a single-chapter practical guideline for evaluating your marriage and making plans to improve it.

The Marriage Section

In chapter 2, "Friend with Benefits," the Driscolls give an overview of the marriage relationship, basing it conceptually on friendship, a basis they point out is overlooked in Christian literature on marriage. In fact, friends is the acrostic they use to convey the various aspects of the marriage relationship, namely: fruitful, reciprocal, intimate, enjoyable, needed, devoted, and sanctifying. Chapters 3, "Men and Marriage," and 4, "The Respectful Wife," are appeals from Mark to men and from Grace to women on fulfilling their proper role in marriage. In his chapter, Mark calls men, based on Genesis 2, to

be productive, hard-working adults who are tough yet tender. In her chapter, Grace describes what respect for one's husband looks like in real life, emphasizing that respect is conveyed outwardly as it is cultivated inwardly. Chapter 5, "Taking Out the Trash" is a hard look at the presence of sin and its effects in marriage. The Driscolls consider sins of commission and omission that fragment marriage, and how they are remedied in the gospel of Jesus Christ through repentance and forgiveness.

The great strength of the marriage section was the many helpful insights into marriage and its practical demands. Particularly strong were the chapters appealing to men and women by Mark and Grace, respectively. Mark's chapter looks men squarely in the eye and calls them to leave the self-centered foolishness that men get away with in our culture and to do the hard work of honoring their wives. Grace's chapter is a gracious appeal to women to be willing to reassess how they relate to their husbands in order to establish godly respect. These chapters are a strong representation of the practice of biblical complementarianism, and in fact stand as the two strongest chapters in the book. The chapter on taking out the trash was also a strong example of what interaction in marriages looks like when each person's need for the gospel frames their worldview.

One hindrance to their presentation of marriage could be pointed out. While drawing attention to the need for friendship in marriage is helpful, and perhaps needed among Christian literature, making it the conceptual foundation of marriage is not necessary. The Driscolls seem to launch their conception that "Marriage is about friendship" (23) from the research of John Gottman, who they quote as saying, "Happy marriages are based on a deep friendship. By this I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other's company" (24). This statement is fine in itself, but not as a conceptual launching pad for understanding the covenant of marriage. The Driscolls know this, and so they utilize their acrostic to put some theological meat on Gottman's insights. But the acrostic felt thin and at times contrived (as is the immutable nature of the acrostic), without any significant

mention of marriage as a covenant. The most robust discussion of covenant occurs later in Mark's chapter addressed to men, where he uses it quite effectively to call men to commitment. So perhaps this is merely an organizational critique, but failing to include a sufficient discussion of covenant in the chapter on the nature of marriage is a significant omission. Marriage certainly involves friendship, but it is also a unique covenant that transcends the principles of friendship.

The Sex Section

This section contains chapter 10, "Can We _____?", which has already garnered in its pre-release a lot of attention. The temptation would be to read the chapter outside the context of the entire section. Reading the whole section will not change the controversial nature of the chapter, but it will display the Driscolls' desire to think biblically about sexuality.

In Chapter 6, "Sex: God, Gross, or Gift?", the Driscolls point out that sex is not something to be worshipped nor to be despised, but to be embraced as a gift from God for the pleasure, oneness, and procreation of a married couple. Chapter 7, "Disgrace to Grace" is largely about sexual brokenness, its effects in marriage, and how to address it with the gospel. Chapter 8, "The Porn Path" considers the realities of living in a pornographic culture and how men and women can practice sexual contentment amidst it. Chapter 9, "Selfish Lovers and Servant Lovers" unpacks the basic principle that marriage is for holiness before happiness in the context of sexuality, showing that self-giving is actually the path to joy in sex.

These chapters take a hard look at the dirt of sexual brokenness and perversion, and do so with wisdom and hope. Chapter 7, which included Grace's testimony of moving from the shame to hope in the gospel, was a powerful consideration of the delicate tension between addressing the pain of sexual abuse and the conviction of personal sexual sin. The solution to both is the cleansing power of a new identity in Christ.

It is precisely the Driscolls' apparent desire to stand

against a sexualized culture that makes Chapter 10 "Can We _____?" so frustrating to read. In it Driscoll attempts to answer questions about what is permissible or not in the marriage bed. He uses 1 Corinthians 6:12 to create a criteria for determining what is sexually permissible in marriage. Of any sexual practice, we should ask: Is it lawful?, Is it helpful?, Is it enslaving? (176). This grid is exegetically problematic for a number of reasons I lack space to address, the main one being that Paul was not presenting a criteria for the evaluation of sexual activity here. He was addressing the misuse of Christian liberty. A catchy phrase was being thrown around in Corinth at the time, "All things are lawful for me" to justify sexual immorality. Paul counters this phrase twice in 6:12 and in the following verses by saying basically, "Yeah, but not all things are profitable to the body, which belongs to the Lord. And sexual immorality is particularly enslaving." Paul is dismissing sexual immorality wholesale, not trying to discern what is immorality and what is not.

Even if we accept Driscoll's grid, his answers are simplistic to the point of being reckless. With the qualification that both spouses are not shamed and willing to participate, Driscoll allows for a broad range of sexual expression, including anal sex, cyber sex, and role playing. Many things could be said in response, but perhaps most helpful would be to point out that Driscoll frequently answers the question Is it Helpful? affirmatively based on the dangerous assumption that novelty of the sexual experience is the avenue to greater pleasure, that variety gives that edge of intrigue that keeps sex exciting. Driscoll says that anal sex can be helpful "for the variety" (187), role-playing can be helpful to keep things from getting "sexually predictable" (190), sex toys "heighten the pleasure" of sex (191), and cosmetic surgery can "make us more attractive to our spouse" (197).

I have spent many hours counseling couples, undermining this very assumption. A pornographic culture teaches that greater sexual satisfaction comes from hotter methods and better bodies. This does not square with the sexual contentment the Driscolls promote in earlier chapters. Take the example of role-playing. To practice

sexual contentment (152), a husband and wife in bed together pretend to be something other than a husband and wife in bed together? Or take cosmetic surgery. Your spouse is your standard of beauty (108), but she can be surgically changed to be more beautiful to you? Or sex toys. Your wife's body should satisfy you fully (118), but you can use manufactured gadgets to help?

Such an assumption is by its very nature enslaving, for it seeks the pleasure of sex not in the abiding appreciation of a spouse's body, but the more instantaneous thrill of novel experiences. There is enough variety and newness to the marital sexual relationship without adopting modes of sex largely developed in a sexualized culture. Relational engagement with your spouse offers thousands of moods, emotions, mindsets, locations, time-frames, etc. Sex is sometimes tepid, sometimes passionate, sometimes quiet, sometimes comforting, depending on the dynamic state of the relationship, not on the physical mode.

I would make a personal appeal to the author to reconsider this chapter. The previous chapters on sex were helpful because they sought to undermine the false assumptions of a sexualized culture. This chapter gives into many of them, particularly the one pointed out above. I believe that Driscoll sincerely wants to be a missionary to a highly sexualized culture and not shy away from their concerns (175). But there is something to learn from old school Christians who may be scandalized by the conclusions of this chapter. By not being immersed as deeply in a sexualized world, they may have the better cultural vantage point to see its errors. And maybe this is a better way to bring clarity to sexually confused people.

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The Deity of Christ

Edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson.

Crossway, 2011. 320 pp.

Few doctrines are more essential to the Christian faith than the deity of Christ. Throughout church history, this doctrine—along with its concomitant, the doctrine of the Trinity—has been the sine qua non of Christian orthodoxy. Because of its significance for Christian faith and practice, the deity of Christ is constantly in need of fresh defense and articulation, especially in a context of religious and philosophical pluralism, such as our own. *The Deity of Christ*, edited by Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, offers just such a defense from several prominent evangelical scholars. It is the third installment in Crossway's *Theology in Community* series, which explores key Christian doctrines in a multi-disciplinary format.

The editors' introduction sets the stage for the book by exploring some of the contemporary challenges to the deity of Christ, including the recent fascination with the so-called "lost gospels," the expansion of Islam, the rise of religious pluralism, and the abiding influence of various cult groups. The book's first chapter, by Stephen Nichols, continues this reflection on the contemporary context by examining how Christ has been interpreted in American culture, including in the church, in politics, and in the arts. He rightly suggests that a recovery of the true Jesus will be found in submission both to the Christian tradition and to the biblical text.

The next five chapters attempt to make the case for the deity of Christ from Scripture. Raymond Ortlund Jr. presents the case from the Old Testament, focusing especially on Psalm 45, Psalm 110, Isaiah 9, and Daniel 7 (while arguing against the use of Psalm 2 and Proverbs 8 as evidence for Christ's deity). Stephen Wellum contributes two chapters: one on the deity of Christ in the synoptic gospels (ch. 3) and one on the deity of Christ in

the apostolic witness (ch. 5). In his first chapter, Wellum demonstrates how the synoptic gospels teach the deity of Christ both implicitly and explicitly. Christ is implicitly identified with Israel's God because he is the one who fulfills the Old Testament and brings the kingdom promises to pass. But he is also explicitly identified with God by virtue of his titles and his claims. In his second chapter, Wellum examines the evidence for Christ's deity in the New Testament letters, arguing that the Christology of the New Testament exhibits a two-fold pattern: Christ is the divine Son, who is included in the identity of God himself, but he is also the divine Son incarnate—the one who becomes a man in order to fulfill the “roles of previous sons (e.g., Adam, Israel, David) by inaugurating God's long-awaited kingdom and the promised new covenant age” (117).

The Johannine literature (John, 1-3 John and Revelation) is treated in two chapters by Andreas Köstenberger. Building on the work of scholars such as Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado, Köstenberger seeks to place John's presentation of Jesus in its proper context: first century Jewish monotheism. In various ways, John identifies Jesus with Israel's God and presents him as an object of worship—all without surrendering his commitment to biblical monotheism.

This biblical case for the deity of Christ is then followed by chapters on church history (Gerald Bray), systematic theology (Robert Peterson), ministry to cults (Alan Gomes) and world missions (J. Nelson Jennings). Bray's chapter surveys the church's defense of the deity of Christ and its articulation of the person of Christ against the challenges of various heretical views. Peterson's chapter distills the findings of the biblical chapters in a more systematic form. Gomes's and Jennings's chapters apply the orthodox doctrine of Christ to important apologetic and missiological issues.

Not all of the book's arguments are equally compelling, and some valid arguments are either dismissed or ignored by the book. Some will disagree, for example, with Ortlund's assessment of Psalm 2 and Proverbs 8.

Why could one not read Psalm 2 typologically, referring both to the Messiah's royal installation and to his unique and eternal Sonship? Indeed, this seems to be the way that the writer of Hebrews reads the passage (Heb 1:5). Peterson's chapter on systematic theology does a fine job of synthesizing the biblical evidence for Christ's deity, but it leaves unanswered some of the most pressing systematic issues related to this claim. Bray's chapter on church history actually does a better job of pointing up the important Christological issues: person, natures, wills, kenosis, and so forth.

The book's main strength lies in its four chapters on the New Testament. Wellum and Köstenberger offer a compelling case that the New Testament teaches—both implicitly and explicitly—that Jesus Christ is to be identified with the one true God of Israel. Especially convincing is their insistence that Jesus does what only God can do: he establishes the kingdom, fulfills God's eschatological promises, inaugurates the new covenant, forgives sins, saves, judges, and more. The influence of Bauckham and Hurtado is felt in many places throughout the book, as is the underappreciated Christological work of David Wells.

Morgan and Peterson's edited volume does not say everything that needs to be said about the deity of Christ. No book could; nor could a world of books, as John reminds us (John 21:25). But *The Deity of Christ* will, no doubt, serve both pastors and students well, as an insightful, contemporary defense of this most central Christian doctrine.

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Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics

By David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina
Baker, 2011. 446pp.

Before anyone is prepared to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, he must understand how to study the Bible. Before one can preach, counsel, mentor, and articulate an answer for this faith, he must study the Bible. Christian faith assumes the Bible, without which we are rudderless ships.

Here is the irony: God's word is the necessary means for growing in conformity to the image of Christ, and yet there are few comprehensive resources to help people engage this process. Over the years as a pastor, I have typically recommended Fee and Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, which is especially helpful in explaining techniques required of different genres. However, despite its accessible style, some students circled back to me and admitted that there remained ambiguity concerning the initial steps of the interpretive process. This is the strength of Bauer and Traina's book, *Inductive Bible Study*: it starts from square-one by training people to attend to the content of Scripture, to follow a text's argument, map its narrative flow, and grasp its implications.

If you know anything about the legacy of Robert Traina (1921-2010), you will appreciate how readily accessible his approach is. Many years ago, Traina popularized the three-fold method for extracting meaning from the biblical text through "observation, interpretation, and application." So axiomatic is this triad that it can be heard in most small group Bible studies across the land. On one level, the volume under review is that simple; but it is certainly not simplistic. It pushes forward to analyze the nuanced questions that this method naturally begs.

Thanks to coauthor, David Bauer, Professor and Dean at Asbury Theological Seminary, the volume is rife with helpful discussions about the range of contemporary hermeneutical debates. Dots are connected from these technical considerations to the inductive method, resulting in an exegesis handbook that is both practical and substantive.

The book consists of five major sections.

Part 1. Theoretical Foundations

Part 2. Observing and Asking

Part 3. Answering and Interpreting

Part 4. Evaluating and Appropriating

Part 5. Correlation

There are also six appendices which include the role of presuppositions in contemporary hermeneutical discussion, original languages, and outlining (discourse analysis).

The authors express the book's purpose in the Preface:

Our intention is to present rather comprehensively our understanding of the approach to the study of the Bible known as inductive Bible study, and to direct this presentation primarily to seminary students and those engaged in Christian ministry. But we anticipate that this volume will be useful also to scholars who are engaged in advanced study of the Bible and who are conversant with contemporary hermeneutical discussions. (xiii)

In keeping with the authors' intention, this book is not for the new or young Christian. For that person you might consult Howard Hendricks' *Living by the Book* or, a step beyond that, *Grasping God's Word* by Duvall and Hays. Because *Inductive Bible Study* is part hermeneutics, part exegesis, part philosophy, and part logic, it is for the motivated reader. It reads like a textbook, but, then again, it doesn't pretend to be anything else. The upside is its comprehensive scope, fastidious indexing, and bibliography.

Finally, as one whose ministry is often located at the Catholic/Protestant intersection, I see another reason why this book is so critical. The question that I most commonly hear from my Catholic friends concerns the

evangelical position of sola scriptura, particularly how we can claim to have reached an authoritative interpretation of the Bible. In this regard, I think the work of Bauer and Traina is also helpful. Their treatment of the issue is too extensive to reproduce here (you'll need to read the book), but, in this vein, their closing statement bears repeating, "[I]t is potentially helpful to come to the text with a faith perspective only if one is prepared to submit

that faith perspective to the corrective judgment of the text" (384).

Chris Castaldo

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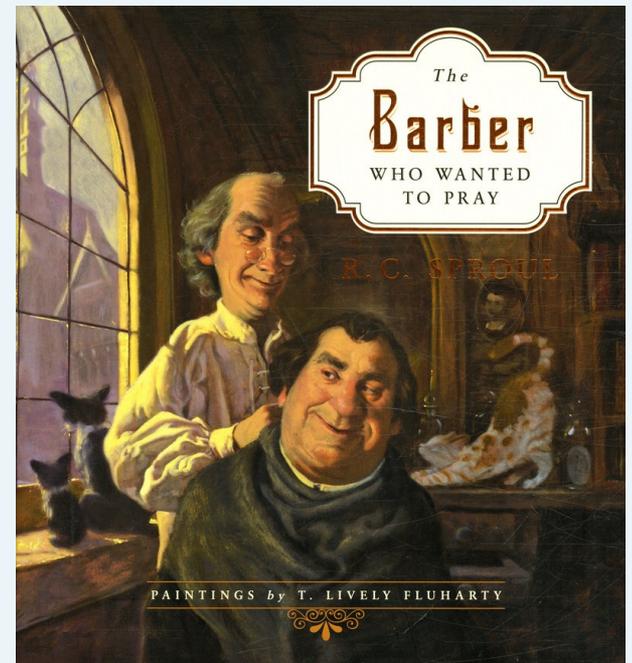
The Barber Who Wanted to Pray

by R. C. Sproul, Reviewed by Jessica Cooper

In his newest book, R. C. Sproul once again uses his teaching talents to transfer wisdom to his audience. However, this time our children receive the benefit of Sproul's teaching as he adds to his growing collection of children's stories with *The Barber Who Wanted to Pray*. This delightful narrative teaches prayer in a way that is simple enough for children to understand yet insightful enough to strengthen the prayer lives of the adults who read along with their children.

The Barber Who Wanted to Pray begins with a frame story where a young girl expresses to her father her desire to pray better. The father then takes readers back to the time of the Reformation with his story of a barber, whose expression of the same desire to Martin Luther, led Luther to write *A Simple Way to Pray*. In the father's story, Luther explains and gives examples to the barber of how

to use the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed as outlines for prayer. Sproul is able to accomplish a great deal in this short narrative. Through the humble admissions of the young girl and the barber, children learn that it is common for both children and adults to feel that their prayers are not good enough, but that the Bible and Christian tradition give believers foundations that they can use to strengthen the way that they pray. The story also shows that this type of prayer life is not reserved for pastors and spiritual giants, such as Luther, but that anyone can bring glory to God through their prayers. Furthermore, through the example of the barber, children see that a layperson with an ordinary profession can honor God through his service, his love for his brother in Christ, and his desire to pray well. In addition to what the story itself



provides, the book contains beautiful illustrations by T. Lively Fluharty and copies of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed for easy access. The book can also be used as a starting point for teaching your children about the Reformation. With all that it provides, *The Barber Who Wanted to Pray* will be a great addition to your child's developing library.

Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church

By Michael A. G. Haykin
Crossway, 2011. 176pp.

The early Protestants looked to the church fathers for their parentage. While Roman Catholics charged that the new heresy was just that, new, Protestants across Europe pillaged libraries to amass copious quotations proving that they were the heirs of the venerable theologians of the early church. Such respect for patristics in the twenty-first century has cooled, and Protestants have been cut off from a key part of their identity. It is therefore with thanks that the church should receive a book like Michael A.G. Haykin's *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*. As with any who have lost their way, Protestants need a guide, and Haykin—an expert in the field—proves to be a reliable one.

This is not to say that Haykin's book is a comprehensive introduction to the early church; rather it goes beyond introductory matters and shows Protestants how to approach ancient texts. The book is as much a model of historiography as it is an introduction to themes in the thought of certain figures. For instance, Haykin studies the controversial Origen of Alexandria and gives a nuanced read of his exegetical program, navigating the so-called allegorical and literal elements of his thought, and proving his importance in the history of hermeneutics. As an historian, Haykin is careful to read Origen in his historical context, while allowing "Adamantius" to speak for himself. Three rules of interpretation are culled that Protestants can apply today: Origen believed the scriptures to be relevant and practical, even as they have profound theological depth; he was self-consciously an exegete who maintained confessional boundaries, notably the *regula fidei*; and, to be a true exegete, he believed

that the interpreter must be "a person of the Spirit." Haykin shows readers how to carefully treat a contestable early theologian and take away principles that are important today. One may have titled this: "Rediscovering the Relevance of the Church Fathers."

As with Origen, in each chapter Haykin takes a subject from a church father and explores it in historical context. He gives readers an apologetics lesson from The Letter to Diognetus (Apostolic Fathers); compares Ambrose of Milan and Cyprian of Carthage on the Eucharist (Latin Fathers); the relationship of Christians to the world in the writings of Basil of Caesarea (Greek Fathers); and the missiology of Patrick of Ireland (Late Patristic/Early Medieval). This is a trove not only for students inquiring about those specific subjects, but also for those who want to learn how to develop themes in a writer, patristic or otherwise. While not every father is treated every major era, tradition and locale is, giving a balanced representation.

Of special interest are the opening and closing chapters where Haykin discusses the need for evangelicals to rediscover the fathers, and his own personal discovery of them respectively. The opening chapter is worth the price of the book as it spurs students, pastors, and theologians to study the early church. The last chapter is interesting because it illustrates how Haykin became interested in his subject. Haykin did his doctoral studies in patristics at Toronto School of Theology under the supervision of John Egan; students learn something about the author, but are also given a solid example of how an interest in patristics can be developed and pursued.

Rediscovering the Church Fathers would make a great supplement to introductory courses in patristics, and it would also be useful for a course in historiography. Beyond the academy, this book would also be good to get into the hands of pastors and church leaders so that they too can regain a sense of their historic roots that stem back to the earliest days of the church.

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Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment

By Keith E. Johnson.

IVP Academic, 2011. 278pp.

Trinitarian theologizing is all the rave today. Trinitarian theology, of course, has always been foundational for any self-respecting Christian, but the desire to apply Trinitarian-shaped methodologies onto every branch of human thought and experience has become particularly fashionable coming on the heels of the twentieth century “Trinitarian Renaissance.” What are evangelicals to make of these developments? Are they a boon or a bust?

Like most things, the “devil is in the details,” and Keith E. Johnson has done the church a tremendous service by auditing one specific attempt to make the Trinity serviceable in the cause of religious pluralism. Johnson tackles the growing trend among self-professing Christian theologians to justify the possibility of salvation apart from Christ on the basis of Trinitarian doctrine. In three main chapters, Johnson interacts with and critiques an assortment of proposals from a Protestant (Mark Heim), a Pentecostal (Amos Yong), and two Catholic theologians (Jacques Deupuis and Raimundo Panikkar). Alongside these others, Johnson includes Augustine as a dialogue partner. In fact, Augustine’s Trinitarian theology frames and grounds Johnson’s overall strategy and interaction with these inclusivist proposals. The primary benefit of Augustine’s presence in the discussion is surely the polemical payoff. Precisely because Augustine is a shared authority in ecumenical circles, Johnson can deploy him with great polemical affect against rival views that boast in their “ecumenical” credentials. As such, Johnson’s work represents two things in one: a commentary on Augustine’s Trinitarian theology and a critique of various inclusivist views that rely on the Trinity in one form or another.

Johnson’s approach could easily become a confusing one, but the reader is helped by his routine introductions, transitions, and summaries. He is always clear about exactly where he is going and how he got there. In the first chapter, he sets the stage with some very helpful background material on the modern “Trinitarian Renaissance” and its impact on ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. The Second chapter introduces us to Augustine and his Trinitarian theology. Here, in addition to summarizing the content of Augustine’s *De trinitate*, Johnson surveys the basic talking points derived from Augustine he will bring up in later chapters. The meat of Johnson’s book is found in chapters three through five where he critiques four inclusivist proposals that press the Trinity into their cause. The general pattern of these chapters is as follows: a summary of the inclusivist proposal, relevant material from Augustine, and Johnson’s own critique often building off of Augustine’s insights.

These chapters are excellent in their own right, but the final chapter is perhaps the most useful of all. Up to this point, Johnson’s thesis has been highly negative—what Trinitarian theology does not say about religious pluralism. Even if somewhat brief, Johnson offers several constructive ways the Trinity informs an evangelical perspective on religious pluralism. Finally, and most helpfully, Johnson provides a section that tackles a question that has gone un-answered through the whole book: how much weight can we place on the Trinity to inform and structure other areas of theology? Or, is the Trinity a methodological principle to which all theological formulation must conform and reflect in some way? The importance of this question can not only be seen in the specific area of religious pluralism, but in a wide assortment of recent proposals: “Trinity and personhood, Trinity and societal relations, Trinity and gender, Trinity and marriage, Trinity and church, Trinity and politics, Trinity and ecology, and so forth” (17).

Johnson proceeds to lay out six rules for evaluating Trinitarian models. All of these rules are extremely helpful. As I see it, they boil down to two main points: 1) Scripture, not speculation, is our ultimate authority for making Trinitarian connections in other areas; 2) Start-

ing with the immanent Trinity, rather than the economic Trinity (as revealed in Scripture), invariably leads to speculative ideas, anthropocentric projection, and confusion between the creature and the Creator.

Towards the end of the book, Johnson has attached a substantial appendix dealing with Colin Gunton's critique of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. Given Johnson's extensive reliance on Augustine as an orthodox source and "evangelical" ally against the inclusivists, the inclusion of this appendix is certainly justified.

Overall, Johnson succeeds in what he sets out to do. Given his angle of using Augustine as a theological sounding board, Readers should be aware that Johnson's main tactic is more indirect than just simple appeals to Scripture. Yet, in the final analysis, that is what Johnson's critiques basically come down to. For all the bewildering novelty of the proposals offered by Heim, Yong, Deupuis, and Panikkar, all of them are hopelessly speculative and un-tethered from Scripture's normative role.

One area that deserves particular care is Johnson's handling of Augustine. Evaluating Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine is complicated not least because *De trinitate* is an incredibly complex piece of work but also, I would argue, because Augustine is not always consistent. Many of the claims Gunton makes against Augustine are outrageous and Johnson's responses in the appendix are cogent and faithful to the great father. However, Johnson appears to assume Augustine has no problem areas whatsoever. While Johnson is right to point out the priority of Scripture for Augustine's epistemology ("faith seeking understanding"), there are other, competing tendencies in Augustine that at the very least befuddle this priority. I believe several lines of evidence from Augustine's writings would support this claim, but at this point our purpose is simply to alert readers to the need for caution when absorbing Johnson's entirely optimistic appraisal of Augustine.

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Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith.

By Douglas Groothuis
IVP Academic, 2011. 752pp.

Christian Apologetics is the distillation of many years of study and teaching. As the subtitle indicates, it is a thorough defense of the Christian faith, though written to serve as a textbook appropriate for both undergraduate and seminary students.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One presents "Apologetic Preliminaries." The introductory chapter raises the question of the meaning of life and the role of worldviews in shaping a person's view of it. Chapter 2 discusses the nature of apologetics, its relation to philosophy and theology, and lays out its biblical basis. Especially helpful were Groothuis's exposition of the nature of saving faith and the contextual nature of real-life apologetics dialogues.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to apologetic method. After defending the objective truth of the laws of logic, Groothuis argues that "the best method of apologetic reasoning is hypothesis evaluation and verification." On this method, the "Christian worldview is taken as a large-scale hypothesis. . . that attempts to explain what matters most" (49). This appears to be identical to what is elsewhere called the "cumulative case" method (60). However, Groothuis does more than weigh the Christian worldview against its competitors via a set of epistemic and aesthetic criteria. He combines this with a rigorous presentation of theistic arguments in the fashion of classical apologetics. Indeed, it is evident that Groothuis sees the hypothesis testing method as a variation on classical apologetics (62).

In chapter 4, Groothuis defines and explains the Christian worldview. He discusses the Christian narrative

(creation, fall, redemption), the doctrine of the trinity, and the human condition (we're "question marks in search of an answer"). Chapter 5 responds to common misconceptions and distortions of Christian beliefs associated with topics such as the alleged war between Christianity and science, racism, homosexuality, and sexism. Chapters 6 and 7 defend the objectivity of truth and its importance against postmodern relativism and nihilism. Chapter 8 closes out Part One with a riveting discussion of the prudential incentives for faith, a topic rarely discussed in apologetics texts. Groothuis convincingly argues that prudential concerns, while not showing that Christianity is true, can help motivate unbelievers to be open to considering the evidence for Christianity.

Part Two presents the case for Christian theism. It begins in chapter 9 with an apologetic for the value of theistic arguments, responding to nine objections to natural theology. Chapters 10 through 17 then present all of the major theistic arguments: the ontological argument (chapter 10), Leibnizian and Kalam cosmological arguments (chapter 11), the fine-tuning design argument (chapter 12), the design argument from biology (chapters 13 & 14), the moral argument (chapter 15), the argument from religious experience (chapter 16), and the argument from consciousness (chapter 17). These chapters provide the most complete presentation of theistic arguments of any apologetics text I'm aware of. Though I'm glad to see such a rare compendium of natural theology, it contains significantly more material than would be covered in most introductory apologetics course.

In chapter 18, Groothuis begins the move—ala classical apologetics—from theism to Christianity. Here he outlines Pascal's argument that human beings are "deposed royalty"—that is, the best explanation for the paradoxical truths that humans are both great and wretched is the biblical view of man as created in God's image but fallen. This, of course, opens the door to the plausibility of the Christian revelation of Scripture with its view of God, man, Christ, and salvation. As Groothuis puts it, Pascal shows that "humans are (1) wretched because fallen, (2) great because of their unfallen origin, and (3) redeem-

able through the incarnation" (437).

Chapter 19 is actually written by Groothuis's colleague, Craig Blomberg. He argues for the accuracy of the New Testament portrait of Jesus, defending the historical reliability of the New Testament documents against various challenges. He also defends the historical plausibility of miracles, especially Jesus' resurrection. In chapters 20 and 21, Groothuis defends the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ both as a historical fact and a logical possibility. He shows how Jesus claimed to be God incarnate and lived a life consistent with that claim. He also discusses how Jesus' divine authority supports the authority of Scripture. Moreover, he provides an updated treatment of C.S. Lewis's famous "liar, lunatic, Lord" argument. Concerning the logical paradox of the incarnation, Groothuis rehearses, among other things, the well-known solution of Thomas Morris. I especially appreciated his rebuttal of those who would leave the matter of the incarnation as an irresolvable paradox (i.e., contradiction).

The resurrection of Jesus is defended in chapter 22. Groothuis rightly (in my opinion) places his defense of the resurrection within the context of a theistic worldview. He first responds to David Hume's famous arguments against miracles. Then he argues, based upon key minimal facts accepted by most scholars, that Jesus' resurrection is the best explanation for those facts. After supplying additional evidences for the resurrection in the spiritual experience of believers in history and today, Groothuis responds to naturalistic explanations for the key facts.

Part Three addresses objections to Christian theism. Chapter 23 responds to religious pluralism. The most significant contribution of this chapter is in its discussion of the differences between the world's religions and the inadequacy of various thinkers to account for these differences on pluralist terms. Groothuis also gives a welcome defense of particularism against Christian inclusivism.

Chapter 24 is a brief but poignant critique of Islam.

Groothuis responds to Muslim challenges to the integrity of the biblical text and the deity and crucifixion of Jesus. He also shows the inadequacy of their view of the human condition. In chapter 25, Groothuis tackles the problem of evil. I was particularly gratified to see that he defends a compatibilist view of freedom and thus does not rely heavily on free will as the primary answer to the problem of evil. His solution is the greater good defense—God permits evil in order to bring about greater goods than could be had if he had not allowed evil to exist.

The book includes two appendices. The first defends the traditional doctrine of hell against common objections. The second is a paper by Richard Hess who addresses apologetics issues related to the Old Testament, not least of which is the so-called Canaanite “genocide.”

Christian Apologetics is a truly masterful work. It covers almost all of the major apologetics issues that an apologetics instructor could want and does so in a readable way. My complaints are only two. First, after going to significant lengths to explain the “hypothesis testing model” and define the criteria for assessing worldviews more precisely than any other text does, Groothuis never explicitly applies those criteria to Christianity or any other worldview. The rest of the book proceeds along the standard lines of classical apologetics. Second, there are some topics that would have been welcome in a book that claims to provide a “comprehensive” case for Christianity. For example, chapters on the coherence of the divine attributes and a fuller treatment of the coherence of the trinity. Of course, the book would have to be even longer to accommodate these suggestions. However, perhaps abbreviated versions of chapters 6 and 7, and a discussion of fewer theistic arguments could have allowed these other topics.

These criticisms are trivial, though, when compared to the overall product. I highly recommend this book for use as a primary textbook in apologetics courses.

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Did Adam And Eve Really Exist?

by C. John Collins

Crossway Books, 2011. 192pp.

Attacks on the teachings of Scripture have come and gone since the outset of the Christian era, and by this point in history we are never surprised to see its critics come against it once again. But – even though we should know better on this score also – somehow we are sometimes surprised to see, 1) old attacks presented as something new or, 2) old attacks coming not from the unbelieving world but from those within the professing church. Such is the case with the current buzz over the question of the historicity of Adam and Eve, fostered perhaps most prominently by Biologos, Francis Collins, Pete Enns, as well as others.

Yet by this point in history we have also learned not to fret. Inevitably such controversies result not in a weakened faith but in a strengthened faith brought about again by an increased and closer understanding of Scripture. We may be sure that God causes even the wrath of men to praise him.

Such is the significance of C. John Collins’ *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care*. Collins (professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary and evidently no relation to the Francis Collins, whose work he criticizes) approaches the question with obvious concern for truth and a fair and balanced evaluation of the attending arguments, and he shows himself to be well acquainted with all sides of the discussion, both biblical and scientific. And in the end he proves himself a reliable guide and has provided a helpful and very accessible introduction to the debate.

The Bible Story

Collins helpfully uncovers illegitimate deductions from statements that are otherwise true. For instance, what-

ever symbolism is involved in Genesis 3 and the story of Adam's sin – and there is surely plenty! – it would be an ungrounded presupposition indeed that demands that where symbolism is employed the account cannot therefore convey real history. Similarly, the claim that “The Bible is not intended to teach science but ‘timeless theological truths’” is an acceptable characterization of Scripture. The Bible is not meant to be a textbook of science. But by no reason of logic can this be made to mean that various historical and/or “scientific” claims by the biblical authors are therefore unreliable. The Bible story is presented as real history in the real world, and (unlike other religions) its teachings presume the truthfulness of its historical claims. Indeed, Scripture’s “timeless theological truths” are historically grounded, and their usefulness and reliability depend upon the truthfulness of those historical claims.

In few places is this more evident than in the case of Adam. The question of his historical existence shapes the very storyline of Scripture. Adam is presented in Genesis as the head of the human race, our father into the consequences of whose sin we have all fallen, awaiting a New Adam who, unlike the first Adam, obeyed God faithfully and as a true representative of us all offered himself in sacrifice for our sin. The Bible story is a story of sin and redemption – the sin of Adam and the redemption by Christ – and in the Biblical story the latter rests on the former. Beyond serious question, this is the teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12-21 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22, 45), a doctrine it would seem he learned, simply, from a careful reading of the Genesis narrative. No one, understanding the Bible story, can deny that a denial of the historical Adam carries serious gospel consequences. The question is fundamental to the Bible story and, therefore, to Christianity itself.

Biblical Affirmations

The Genesis account of Adam (chapters 1-5) is plainly intended as historical, a history taken up in the larger historical narrative of Genesis 1-11 and its portrayal of the continued moral decline of humanity born in Adam's image (Gen. 5:3), the answer to which is given first

expression in God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Luke adds his affirmation of Adam in naming him as the primal ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:38), and our Lord himself expresses this conviction in Matthew 19:4-5 (cf. Gen. 2:24) and John 8:44 (cf. Gen. 3). And of course the apostle Paul several times over affirms the same, often resting his theological argument on it (Acts 17:26; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).

Collins combs the Scriptures in careful detail (both Old and New Testaments) to demonstrate the shared conviction among the Biblical writers concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve, who were very clearly understood by them as historical figures, even if historical figures with theological significance. Certainly it would be impossible to understand Acts 17:26 in any other sense, where Paul affirms that God made all the nations “from one man.” These passages and many others Collins adduces to establish his argument firmly.

What makes this point such a serious one is that it necessarily entails questions of the very nature and character of Scripture. Simply put, the basic question at issue is, Does the Bible teach that Adam really existed? If so, then if we will call ourselves Christian we are bound to believe it. We welcome challenges, and we are happy to re-evaluate our interpretations. Christians have often erred in their understanding of Scripture, just as scientists have often erred in their interpretations of “natural” phenomena, and our love of truth necessarily leaves us willingly open to challenges both from within the professing church and without. But having established a given claim of Scripture, we are bound to believe it. At the end of the day we do not measure Scripture by the “findings” of a given “scientist” whose most recent studies have led him to make certain pronouncements. As Christians we just cannot think or work in that direction. Given the doctrine of Scripture – “What Scripture says, God says” – we acknowledge its priority in measuring all other truth claims. We measure every “new thought” against what God has said, and once we are assured of a given Biblical claim we are equally assured of its truthfulness and that every opposing thought is necessarily mistaken (1 Tim.

6:20-21). What Scripture claims is true, and all contrary claims are false. This is but an entailment of the doctrine of inspiration taught us by our Lord and his appointed apostles. And on this issue in particular we are forced – if we are indeed in pursuit of truth – to acknowledge that the biblical writers and our Lord Jesus himself were united in their understanding and teaching of an historical Adam and Eve. And we remain confidently committed to the proposition that while the teaching of others err in many ways, this and every claim of Scripture will always prove to be fully reliable.

Human Uniqueness

Instinctively we are aware that God is our creator, that there is a right and a wrong to which we are obligated, and so on. Intuitively we understand ourselves to be creatures that are both dependent and obligated. That is to say, we are both religious and moral beings. And with all this there is the recognition that things are not the way they ought to be. We share a sense of loss, a recognition of a certain fallenness both in ourselves and in the world around us. We recognize both “natural” and moral evil – that the created order is out of sorts and that humanity itself, with all its injustice, falls far short of its created ideal.

Scripture easily accounts for this common human experience in its teaching of the imago Dei, that God created Adam and Eve, and through them all humanity, in his own image. It is because we bear God’s image that we share this awareness of our creator, a conscience, a sense of justice and injustice, and so on.

Collins insists that apart from the Genesis account of Adam there is no way to account for this shared human experience. Certainly “science” cannot provide an alternative answer. Apart from the truthfulness of an historical Adam created in God’s image, the Bible story not only falls apart at its outset, but humanity itself is stripped of its uniqueness.

We might press further. If this is the case – if humankind is not united in father Adam and therefore does not bear

the image of God – then what, exactly, is man? Just what is it that makes us superior to the animals? And for that matter, apart from a human race united in an historical Adam, what comes of the brotherhood of man? It would seem that without Adam racism is suddenly rendered defensible. In its teaching of Adam and humanity created in God’s image Scripture has a robust answer to racism of all varieties. But with this ground pulled out from beneath us, the question is again up for grabs.

Questions of Science

Collins interacts with questions regarding DNA in his final chapter, and his leading arguments here fall primarily along three lines. First, he argues that such scientific approaches that are used to affirm multiple human origins (polygenism) cannot account for all the relevant data, particularly the commonality of human experience and sense of loss, fallenness, and so on. Clearly, failing to account for all the relevant data no theory can claim a hearing. Second, the “findings” of this branch of scientific investigation are too uncertain to be admitted. Collins cites here the learning that continues to re-shape our understanding of what was previously called “junk DNA,” now found to be useful after all! And third, population-size studies stemming from the human genome project whose claims did not take into account the growing body of evidence of various mechanisms by which human genetic diversity can be increased at a faster rate than the models had predicted. Throughout he argues that there is yet to be offered a better explanation for human origins and the common human experience than what is given us in Scripture.

Evaluation

Collins demonstrates a firm grasp of his subject and in particular of the early chapters of Genesis. His evaluations of various arguments and approaches reflect mature considerations at each step. The book is brief (about 160 pages of text) yet relatively comprehensive. I would like to have seen a fuller development of some of the gospel/Christological implications and of the scientific dimensions of the question, but these are by no means absent. And it might have been good to explore at least a

bit the implications of this question in regard to the doctrine of inspiration. Still, this work is of great value, and I cannot think of a better resource for an introductory study of the various questions involved.

The question Collins has taken up is one of no small significance. Despite assurances to the contrary, the denial of the historical Adam and Eve leaves us without a

reliable word from God, without a single, united human race, without the imago Dei, without a Bible story, without a gospel, and without a reliable, trustworthy word from God. Collins has not lost sight of any of this, and his work is, then, a valuable service to us all.

Fred G. Zaspel

Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church of Franconia, PA

Courageous

Reviewed by Matthew Lee Anderson

The real story of *Courageous*, the third movie from the good folks at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, isn't the story that's portrayed in *Courageous*. Rather, it's that this is the third movie by Sherwood Baptist Church. Their first offering, *Facing the Giants*, says enough in the title about their plucky approach to disrupting the Hollywood establishment. Turns out that if you make it family friendly, they will come.

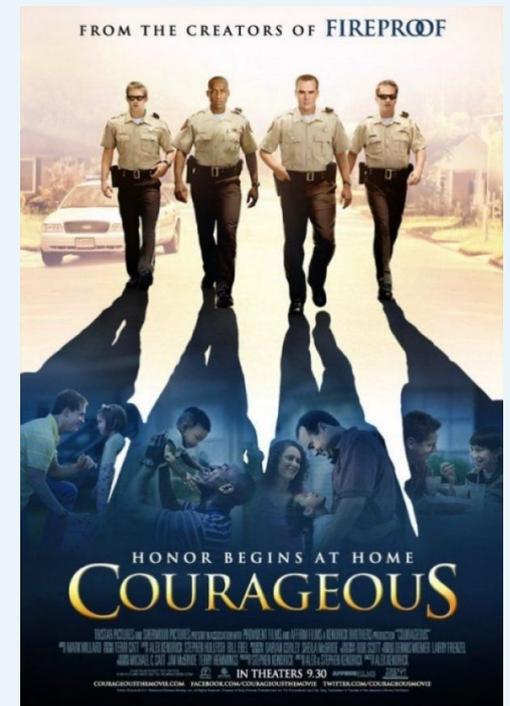
It's hard to be critical of such earnestness, and if ever a film was in earnest, this is it. It is full of the good-hearted sincerity and frank speech that makes evangelicalism (at it's best) quirky and humorously belligerent. There's no "use words if necessary" mentality about the Gospel here: the film overflows with so many Gospel proclamations and "come-to-Jesus" moments that at points they felt hilariously awkward.

The film follows the stories of four fathers who take vows of intentional fatherhood after one of them loses a child. Yet by the end of the film, the

plot feels secondary: it's more a sermon packaged as a character study that ends with an actual sermon.

Oddly, it kind of works. But only kind of. Chesterton sometimes treated his plots as simply opportunities for other characters to make Chestertonian speeches, but *Courageous* (alas) has no Chesterton. Many of the lines are simply clichés, and the lack of subtlety makes the sermonizing worse. Perhaps not surprisingly, the writing gets best when they drop the guise and simply give the sermon at the end. But that isn't quite good filmmaking.

The absence of subtlety gives the film a slightly overbaked feeling. Or perhaps a really overbaked feeling, depending on how you like your dough. Consider the central grieving scene: it's a delicate thing, grieving, to show on film but they pull it off surprisingly well. At least for a while. At the precise moment I was impressed with how well they showed the parents heartache, they kept it going another five minutes. Yet that extra five minutes gave it a



saccharine schmaltziness that undid the previous work.

The film is by no means bad. It has some scenes that are excellently acted and one that was downright hilarious. However, it simply has no sense of limits, no awareness of when the Gospel proclamations pass from genuine to browbeating and where the acting morphs from stirring into schlock. For an evening at the theater or with the DVD, you could certainly do worse (and many Hollywood productions do, in fact, do worse). But the upstart church could also do better, and with the success of this and their other ventures, there's hope that they yet will.

Is **God** Unfair?

by **Matthew Barrett**

It's not fair!" "How can God condemn millions to hell who have never heard the gospel?" Many Christians and non-Christians share this objection. For non-Christians, such an objection is all the more reason not to believe in Christianity. For many Christians, such an objection leads them down the road of inclusivism. But is God really unfair? Is he wrong to condemn those who never heard the gospel? While it may be unpopular to say this, I believe the biblical answer is quite simple: No, God is not unfair but absolutely just. Several reasons justify such an answer.

First, when we shake our fists in the air at God, protesting that it is unfair of him to condemn those who have never heard of Christ, we neglect to recognize what Scripture says, namely, that every single person, regardless of whether or not they have heard the gospel, is a wretched sinner deserving God's eternal wrath and condemnation (Rom



3:11-18). As Paul explains in Romans 1, every man is unrighteous, suppressing the truth (1:18ff). Although God's invisible attributes are perceived in creation (1:20), thereby leaving man without excuse, nevertheless, man's heart is dark and futile, and he exchanges the glory of God for idols (1:21-23).

Second, for God to send his gospel to anyone at all is sheer grace and mercy. As shocking as this might sound, God does not have to save anyone. We are sinners deserving only wrath and judgment for our transgression of his holy law (Rom 6:23a). Therefore, if we truly want "fairness," we should be sentenced to eternal punish-

ment. God has every right to send us to hell for our sin. The fact that he chooses to send his gospel to some is pure grace.

Third, our discomfort with God condemning sinners to hell who have never heard the gospel may reveal our discomfort with the biblical doctrine of predestination. Before the foundation of the world, God chose or elected certain sinners to salvation, not on the basis of foreseeing anything in them (e.g., faith or good works) but purely because of his mercy and grace (Eph 1:3-14;

Rom 9:9-12). And just as God is free to elect whom he will and pass over whom he will, so also is he free to send his gospel to whom he will and withhold it from whom he will (John 8:47; 12:40). As William Edgar states, while God knows his sheep and makes "arrangements for them to hear and respond," he also "has determined to pass others by and leave them

in the place we all deserve to be." "The fact that some do not hear the gospel is one of the providential means of his passing them by."

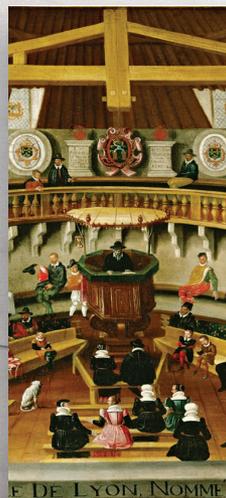
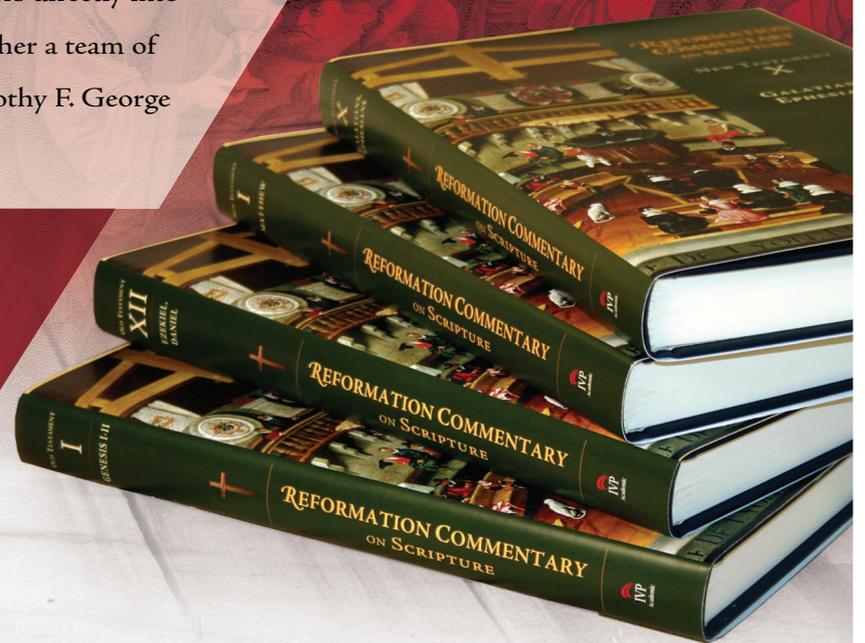
Is God unfair? Ironically, Paul addressed this very question. "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom 9:14-16, 18).

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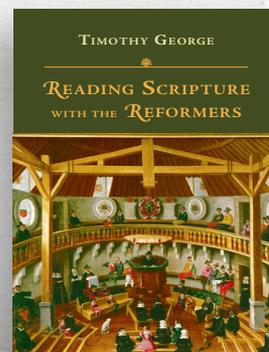
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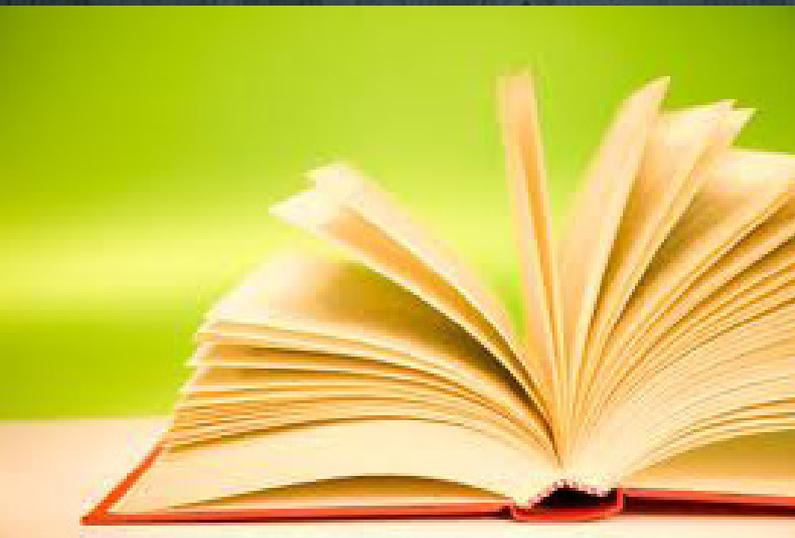
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