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Preaching the New Testament One-Another Commands

by Jeff Hawkey[1]

The NT contains dozens of one-another commands addressed to local assemblies of Christian believers. The expository preacher endeavoring to preach the whole counsel of God will inevitably encounter these *one anothers*.[2] Many preachers have preached on at least one of the one-another passages in the NT, but not many have endeavored to preach a series on all of the one-another commands.[3] Perhaps they never viewed the one-another commands as a topical collection. Perhaps they never considered the importance and interrelatedness of the one-another commands. Or perhaps they never reflected on the potential benefit that preaching such a series might have for their congregations.

The central goal of this article is to help pastors and church leaders perceive the importance and high value of preaching and teaching the NT one-another commands as a topical collection. In order to identify this collection, a formal definition of what a *one another* is will be presented and the surface forms of the *one anothers* in the Greek text will be enumerated. This will lead to the discovery of the full catalog of one-another commands.

The Need to Preach the One-Another Commands

"I watch church on TV." This statement, along with its more recent corollary, "I watch church online," represents a growing trend of unbiblical thinking that physical church attendance is optional.[4] But online church is a grossly deficient form. Hansen and Leeman observe, "When church is only online, we can't feel, experience, and witness those truths becoming enfleshed in the family of God, which both fortifies our faith and creates cords of love between brothers and sisters. Virtual church is an oxymoron."[5]

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[1] Jeff Hawkey is senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church in East Flat Rock, NC. This article summarizes some of the findings of his doctoral dissertation. See Jeffrey Allen Hawkey, "Expository Preaching from the New Testament One-Another Commands in a Local Church Context: Exegetical and Homiletical Strategies" (DMin diss., Bob Jones University, 2020).

[2] Throughout this article *one anothers* is italicized to indicate the special meaning intended herein. The *one anothers* are commands expressed in a one-another form and directed to a community of NT believers.

[3] On May 26, 2024, a simple search of sermonaudio.com for sermons with the phrase "one another" in the title resulted in 5,967 hits. Among all of these sermons, it appears that only a small number of preachers have attempted to preach a full series on the *one anothers*. The author counted only ten sermon series with twenty or more sermons out of the thirty-eight possible.

[4] Lillian Kwon, "Why Go to Church When You Can Watch Online," *Christian Post,* June 7, 2012, http://www.christianpost.com/news/why-go-to-church-when-you-can-watch-online-76269. A recent trend among multi-campus churches involves adding an "internet campus" (note the oxymoron) with its own dedicated pastor.

[5] Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 51. Hansen and Leeman lament the trend: "It's no surprise that virtual, or internet, church is growing in popularity. It's convenient and—honestly—it allows you to avoid messy relationships" (52).

And then came COVID-19. The Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 led to unprecedented government-mandated shutdowns. Churches in the United States were unable to physically assemble together for several weeks or even months. This precipitated a seismic shift in church-attendance patterns. Statistics from the 2022 American Religious Benchmark Survey indicate an overall ten percent drop in church participation as a result of the pandemic.[6] Post-COVID-19 statistics from Pew Research reveal that twenty-five percent of Christians surveyed continue to watch church online with approximately a third of these admitting that they are watching without any measure of active participation in a local church.[7] All of these data indicate the devaluation of church attendance and involvement.

Besides revealing a weak commitment to in-person church attendance, the pandemic also exposed hidden fissures in church unity. To mask or not to mask, to socially distance or not, to comply with government mandates or not—these are just a few of the many stress points that divided congregations and thus hindered the practice of the *one anothers*. James White laments the repercussions: "The basis of church unity has shifted from relationships to ideology, and the basis of that ideology has shifted from doctrine to all things politicized."[8] Randy Alcorn warns, "The increase in Christians bickering over non-essentials doesn't seem to be a passing phase. And it injures our witness, inviting eye rolls and mockery from unbelievers and prompting believers to wonder whether church hurts more than it helps."[9] A topical series on the *one anothers* is just what the post-pandemic church needs to restore unity and to prevent future division.

Passive church attendance is nearly as deficient as non-attendance. Going to church to merely "warm a pew" and leaving immediately after the final "amen" gives no real opportunity for mutual edification and fellowship in Christian community. The advent of modern megachurches has not helped. John MacArthur observes, "As churches seek to become bigger, flashier, and more technologically savvy, they usually tend to become more cold and impersonal. Contemporary churches sometimes even seem to encourage the 'me first' agenda of self-love rather than the 'one another'

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[6] "Before the pandemic, roughly half of Americans were occasionally or infrequently attending services. Now, that number has dropped to about four in 10." Lindsey Witt-Swanson, Jennifer Benz, and Daniel A. Cox, "Faith after the Pandemic: How COVID-19 Changed American Religion," Survey Center on American Life, January 5, 2023, https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/faith-after-the-pandemic-how-covid-19-changed-american-religion.

[7] Pew Research Center, "Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, but Going in Person Remains More Popular," June 2, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/06/02/online-religious-services-appeal-to-many-americans-but-going-in-person-remains-more-popular.

[8] James White, "How the Pandemic Has Changed the Church," *Outreach Magazine,* July 9, 2021, https://outreachmagazine.com/features/leadership/68023-how-the-pandemic-has-changed-the-church.html. White adds, "This is arguably the most demonic dynamic flowing from COVID, and it must be simultaneously denounced and opposed with the true nature of unity upheld. The foundation for Christian unity has always been orthodoxy (right thinking about matters of doctrine) and orthopraxy (right practice in light of that thinking), and the greatest evidence to the authenticity and integrity of both has been relational unity. For all three to be distorted or supplanted is nothing short of heresy."

[9] Randy Alcorn, "Healing a Pandemic of Disunity: The Love of Christians Is the Gospel's Greatest Defense," Eternal Perspective Ministries, Nov. 15, 2021, https://www.epm.org/resources/2021/Nov/15/healing-pandemic-disunity.

commands of Scripture."[10] This "me first" attitude is contrary to Scripture (Phil 2:3) and antithetical to the "others first" attitude inherent in the one-another commands.

Jesus deliberately chose the word *church* to describe the Christian community he established. In response to Peter's great confession of faith, Jesus declares, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).[11] The word *church* is from the Greek ἐκκλησία. The basic meaning of this word is "an assembly."[12] A church, by definition, is "a local body of believers who *meet together* to worship God and serve one another."[13] Biblical Christianity involves both physical church attendance and active church participation.[14]

The biblical admonition is to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together; instead, we are to assemble that we may exhort one another (Heb 10:25).[15] Passively "doing church" via TV, the internet, or by warming a pew does not fulfill this biblical admonition. More to the point of this article, passive church participation does not result in the proper exercise of the NT *one anothers*. The *one anothers* must be "incarnated" (lived out) within the community of believers. They require active interpersonal contact with other believers—ideally face-to-face.

The overall vitality of a local body of believers suffers when its members neglect the exercise of the *one anothers*. By the Lord's design, each member of the body of Christ has a role to play in the edification of the body as a whole (Eph 4:16). Without the full exercise of the *one anothers* on the part of every member, the edification of the body as a whole is hindered.[16] To state this observation more positively, the exercise of the *one anothers* is a vital aspect of church involvement. Indeed, the local

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[10] John F. MacArthur Jr., "Bearing One Another's Burdens," Ligonier Ministries, accessed Oct. 13, 2017, http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/bearing-one-anothers-burdens/. Originally published in *Tabletalk Magazine* (Jan. 2010).

[11] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

[12] BDAG, s.v. "ἐκκλησία." The word is a common Septuagint rendering for קָהָל (*qahal*), the Hebrew OT word often referring to the assembly of the Hebrew people (e.g., Deut 18:16; Ezra 10:1). For a comprehensive list of the Septuagint ἐκκλησία passages, see Appendix 1 in Earl D. Radmacher, *What the Church Is All About* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 385.

[13] Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), x (emphasis added). John F. MacArthur Jr. frames the problem on the back cover under the heading "Assembly Required": "In our individualistic society, church membership, faithful church attendance, and active service in the body of Christ are often considered optional, even among professing Christians. Some, in fact, view the organized church as a hindrance to spiritual growth and freedom."

[14] Physical church attendance may not be feasible for some. Even in such cases, however, a connection to a local church ministry is crucial to a shut-in's spiritual well-being and to the body life of the church as a whole. Moreover, shut-ins are among the best prayer warriors in the author's church.

[15] Commenting on this verse, Donald Whitney writes, "It's undeniable that 'meeting together' means to worship God in the physical presence of other believers. Not only do the words themselves allow for no other interpretation, but when this letter was written to the Hebrews there was no other way they could be construed. So we cannot persuade ourselves that we are 'meeting together' with other Christians by watching them worship on television. There are good reasons for the broadcast and tape recording of church worship, but none includes the idea of substituting media ministry for church attendance by those who are able." Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 92.

[16] The Apostle Paul makes this clear: "the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16).

church is the primary venue for the practice of the *one anothers*.[17] When the members of the church body are fulfilling their obligation to live out the *one anothers*, the church body as a whole is edified and the church's ministry becomes more vibrant.

Furthermore, the exercise of the *one anothers* is important to the Holy Spirit. He moved the NT writers to include dozens of positive and several negative one-another imperatives. Individual Christians need to know and practice all of these imperatives in order to be fully obedient to the Word of God. This implies that preachers need to proclaim the full catalog of NT one-another imperatives to their congregations.

The practice of the *one anothers* is to be normative in the NT church. Consider, for example, the command to "love one another." The Lord Himself instituted this injunction.[18] Paul, Peter, and John later repeated the Lord's "love one another" command multiple times.[19] In addition, nearly all of the one-another commands are located in the epistolary literature of the NT.[20] It is clear that all Christian churches then and now are to practice all of the *one anothers.*

In order for local churches to be unified, strong, and effective and in order for individual church members to edify one another properly, Christian churches need to draw more attention to the *one anothers,* and church members need to make a more diligent effort to put them into practice. A comprehensive series of messages on the *one anothers* directly addresses these needs.

The Identification of the One-Another Commands

The logical starting point in the study of the *one anothers* is the articulation of a formal definition. A clear definition will serve to delineate between what is and what is not a one-another command. Here is a proposed formal definition that has the requisite precision: *the* one anothers *are NT commands expressed in a one-another form and directed to a community of NT believers.* This definition is comprised of three components: paraenesis, form, and audience. True *one anothers* will meet all three criteria.

To satisfy the paraenesis criterion, the one-another statement must be a command at some level. A wide spectrum of intensity is possible from terse imperatives to polite exhortations.[21] The most obvious verbal expression of a command is the present or aorist imperative. But commands may also be expressed using other verbal forms such as hortatory and prohibitive subjunctives, imperatival

[17] The overwhelming majority of the NT one-another commands are in the NT epistles written to first-century churches. A few in the Gospels are addressed to Jesus' disciples.

[18] John 13:34; 15:12, 17.

[19] Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5.

[20] The only one-another command not repeated in the NT epistles is "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

[21] James Boyer explains, "Commands include a broad spectrum of concepts—injunctions, orders, admonitions, exhortations—ranging from authoritarian dictates (a centurion ordering his soldier to go or come, Matt 8:9), to the act of teaching (Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matt 5:2, 12ff)." James L. Boyer, "A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study," *Grace Theological Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 36. Most works on the *one anothers* make use of this broadened sense. As an alternative to the word "command," the definition could incorporate the term "exhortation" or "admonition" in a similarly broadened sense. Wallace's "volitional clause" is arguably an even better choice. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 713ff.

participles, participial phrases subordinate to an imperative verb,[22] volitional optatives (1 Thess 3:12), and indicatives identified contextually as commands (e.g., John 15:12, 17).[23]

The second criterion in the definition is that of *form*. In order to qualify as a *one another*, a command must have a direct object meaning "one another" or "one to another."[24] For example, the command to "let brotherly love continue" (Heb 13:1) does not meet this criterion, whereas the often-repeated command to "love one another" does meet this criterion. Jesus' command to "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35) is not a *one another* because the direct object is "enemies." Jesus' command to "love one another" (John 13:34; 15:12, 17), on the other hand, does satisfy the form criterion of the definition.

The third criterion of the definition pertains to *audience*. The intended practitioners of a command under consideration must be a community of NT believers.[25] The command not to grumble against one another (Jas 5:9) is a *one another* because it is directed toward a community of Christian believers. On the other hand, when Jesus issued the command to stop murmuring in John 6:43, he addressed it to a group of unbelieving Jews, and its application was situational. This command is not directed to a community of NT believers. Consequently, it is excluded from consideration as a *one another*.

The *one anothers* are NT commands expressed in a one-another form and directed to a community of NT believers. This formal definition draws a clear boundary for a comprehensive study of the one-another commands. With a functional definition now in place, we now turn our attention to the discovery of the *one anothers* of the NT.

The Discovery of Potential One-Another Commands

In order to discover all the potential *one anothers* that satisfy the aforementioned definitional criteria, a rigorous search methodology is needed. It is not sufficient to search in a particular English translation for the phrase "one another." Nor is it adequate to search the Greek NT for the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων in conjunction with an imperative verb. A more exhaustive approach with the aid of Bible-study software is necessary.[26]

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[22] McKay strongly affirms the validity of this category: "In most NT contexts in which participles are associated with imperatives there can be little doubt that they represent paratactic imperatives." K. L. McKay, "Aspect in Imperatival Constructions in New Testament Greek," *Novum Testamentum* 27, no. 3 (July 1985): 225.

[23] Moule, under the chapter heading "Commands, Prohibitions, Wishes," includes the following possibilities: the imperative, ἵνα or μή with the subjunctive, the subjunctive in the first person, the optative, the word ὄφελον, the infinitive in the imperatival sense, participles used imperatively, and the future indicative. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 135–37.

[24] The corresponding surface forms in NT Greek are ἀλλήλων, ἑαυτοῦ, and εἷς τὸν ἕνα. See the discussion below under "Surface Forms of the One-Another Commands."

[25] Nearly all the one-another commands in the NT are, in fact, directed toward believers. The two clear exceptions are John 6:43, where Jesus addresses unbelieving Jews, and Acts 19:38, where the town clerk in Ephesus addresses Demetrius and the craftsmen.

[26] The author used BibleWorks 9 software produced by Bibleworks LLC. The primary Greek text is the critical text UBS4/NA27 (hereafter referred to as NA27). The Majority Text is Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text Greek New Testament 2011 (hereafter referred to as BYZ). The Textus Receptus is the F. H. A. Scrivener 1894-Theodore Beza 1598 Greek New Testament (hereafter referred to as SCR).

An essential first step involves searching multiple English versions for phrases including the words "one" and "another" with two or fewer intervening words.[27] The search versions should include at least one translated from the critical Greek text and one translated from the Textus Receptus.[28] The goal at this stage is the discovery of all of the potential surface forms in the Greek corresponding to the English idea of "one another."

Surface Forms of the One-Another Commands

The aforementioned searches produce a list of ninety-three verses containing one-another constructs in the English NT.[29] An examination of these verses in the Greek reveals three surface forms of the *one anothers*: the ἀλλήλων form, the ἑαυτοῦ form, and the εἷς τὸν ἕνα form.[30] The following analysis leads to the conclusion that the three forms are functionally synonymous. Thus, no real difference in meaning or emphasis can be inferred by a writer's choice of one form over another.

The Ἀλλήλων *Form*

Greek grammars classify ἀλλήλων as a reciprocal pronoun, an exclusive category containing this word alone. The word is always plural in number and indicates an interaction among members of a common community.[31] The lexical field of the word includes "each other," "one another," and "mutually."[32] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that ἀλλήλων is the dominant form of the one-another commands: eighty-four percent of the *one anothers* are in this form.[33]

The reciprocal pronoun occurs an even one hundred times in ninety-four verses of the NT.[34] The verses are well distributed: only the comparatively short books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Philemon, 2 Peter,

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[27] The BibleWorks phrase search criteria are "one *2 another" and "one *2 other." Trial searches involving a greater number of intervening words yields no meaningful results.

[28] It turns out not to matter which of these Greek texts is used since the list of *one anothers* is identical at the conclusion of the process. The versions chosen by the author are the New American Standard Bible (1995 update) for the critical text and the KJV (1769 Blayney edition) for the Textus Receptus. The author chose these versions because of their formal equivalence to their respective Greek texts.

[29] These ninety-three verses include indicatives that do not meet the "command" criterion. The final list of one-another commands will exclude these indicative occurrences.

[30] A potential fourth form, τοῦ ἑνὸς τοῦ ἑτέρου, occurs in 1 Corinthians 4:6, which the author classifies as a marginal case. Turner (MHT 3:44) suggests ἄλλος πρὸς ἄλλον as an alternative to ἀλλήλων and cites Acts 2:12 as an example. In this case the verb is indicative, thus excluding it from consideration as a *one another*.

[31] Lowe and Lowe put it quite well: "The term conveys a relationship between two or more people committed to one another through a common faith in Jesus Christ." Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, "Allēlōn: Reciprocal Commands and Christian Development," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (Sep. 2010): 285.

[32] BDAG, s.v. "ἀλλήλων." Thayer's Lexicon adds the term "reciprocally." Romans 1:12 is a clear example of the *mutual* sense. Mutuality should not, however, be assumed in every case. This is the exegetical fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer. Chapter 4 will more fully address this concern. Lowe and Lowe (285) extrapolate well beyond the lexical categories when they declare, "The word *allēlōn* expresses concepts like mutuality, reciprocity, equality, sharing, and exchange."

[33] Fifty-one of the sixty-one *one anothers* have this form. See details in Table 1 below.

[34] NA27 and SCR each contain one hundred, but they share only ninety-nine in common. The NA27 list includes Luke 20:14 (excluded in SCR), and the SCR list includes Acts 2:7 (excluded in NA27). These differences are inconsequential since neither of these occurrences involves a command.

3 John, and Jude do not use the word.[35] Only fifty-one of these one hundred occurrences involve commands. Many of the other occurrences are in narrative material (particularly the Gospel narratives) and are associated with indicative verbs.

The occurrences of ἀλλήλων that do qualify as *one anothers* occur in paraenetic contexts.[36] Seven are found in the Gospels. The remaining forty-four are in epistolary literature.[37] This is not surprising since these epistles are addressed to communities of believers (or pastors of those communities), and they frequently provide instruction about how members of those communities are to conduct themselves.

The ἑαυτοῦ *Form*

The ἑαυτοῦ form is the next most prevalent one-another form after the ἀλλήλων form. As the third-person reflexive pronoun, it is the only reflexive pronoun to occur in the plural as is necessary to convey a one-another sense.[38] The *Shorter Lexicon* identifies three senses of the word: reflexive, reciprocal, and possessive.[39] The second sense alone is of interest since it is the only sense capable of conveying the one-another idea.

There are 158 occurrences of ἑαυτοῦ in the masculine and feminine plural.[40] Every NT book except Galatians, Titus, Philemon, and 3 John contains one or more occurrences. Twenty-six occurrences of ἑαυτοῦ involve the reciprocal sense. Many of these can be excluded since they occur in narratives and are associated with indicative verbs—often involving a speech act within a group of people. This leaves just nine one-another commands with the ἑαυτοῦ form.[41]

An important question arises at this point: Is there a subtle distinction in meaning between the ἀλλήλων form and the ἑαυτοῦ form? There are at least three compelling reasons to conclude that the two forms convey the same meaning. First, they often occur adjacent to each another for the sake of variety. In Ephesians 4:32 the Apostle Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to "be kind to one another" (ἀλλήλων) and to "forgive one another" (ἑαυτοῦ). In Colossians 3:13 he exhorts his readers to

[35] Jude is the only NT writer that does not use ἀλλήλων.

[36] Wallace asserts, "One frequently finds this pronoun in paraenetic contexts, basing the exhortation on the organic connection that believers have with the risen Christ" (351).

[37] The historical Book of Acts, the Epistle to Philemon, and the prophetic book of Revelation do not contain any one-another commands meeting the formal definition.

[38] The first- and second-person reflexive pronouns (ἑαυτοῦ and σεαυτοῦ) occur only in the singular.

[39] F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed., *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), s.v. "ἑαυτοῦ."

[40] The tabulations in this paragraph are based on the NA27 text. Ten of these ἑαυτοῦ occurrences do not appear in SCR. There are also seventeen occurrences in SCR that do not appear in NA27. Although four of these SCR-only occurrences use ἑαυτοῦ in a reciprocal sense, none of them qualify as commands. So once again, differences between Greek texts have no bearing on the final list of *one anothers*.

[41] See details in Table 1 below. Two of the nine are in Colossians 3:16, where ἑαυτοῦ is distributed across two verbs ("teach" and "admonish") in a parallel construction.

"forebear one another" (ἀλλήλων) and to "forgive one another" (ἑαυτοῦ).[42] It is clear in both of these examples that the writer is using the two forms interchangeably.

The second compelling reason to conclude that the two forms mean the same thing is found in the works of respected translators. The KJV and ESV translators make no deliberate distinction in their renderings of the two terms. The NASB translators attempt to preserve the stylistic variations of the two preceding examples by rendering ἀλλήλων as "one another" and ἑαυτοῦ as "each other." These renderings arguably have no functional distinction in meaning.

The third compelling reason that ἀλλήλων and ἑαυτοῦ mean the same thing is that grammarians who have carefully considered this question have come to this conclusion. Robertson declares that the reciprocal use of the reflexive pronoun "does not really differ in idea from ἀλλήλων."[43] Nigel Turner concurs, asserting that "ἑαυτοῦ serves for ἀλλήλων" when used in the reciprocal sense.[44]

The Εἷς τὸν Ἕνα *Form*

The third and final surface form of the *one anothers* is εἷς τὸν ἕνα, employing the cardinal "one" as both subject and object of the verb. The phrase literally means "one the one" (i.e., "one the other"). This form stands out as an oddity, occurring only once in the NT. Consequently, several works on the *one anothers* fail to include this form in their lists. The apparent reason for its rarity is that the phrase in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 is an Aramaism.[45]

Is there a nuanced distinction in meaning between the εἷς τὸν ἕνα form and the other forms? Again, the answer is no, and the same three compelling reasons apply. First, the ἀλλήλων and the εἷς τὸν ἕνα forms occur alongside each other in stylistic variation. The Greek text of 1 Thessalonians 5:11 contains two *one anothers*, the first using the ἀλλήλων form and the second using the εἷς τὸν ἕνα form.[46] Gordon Fee points to the change in direct object and observes, "This is almost certainly an instance of 'elegant variation,' where there is no difference in meaning at all."[47] Second, the translators convey no

[42] Turner cites these two examples as evidence that the two forms occur side by side for variety (MHT 3:43). BDF agrees that the variation in form is simply for variety and adds Luke 23:12 as an example based on the SCR and BYZ texts (§287). BDAG likewise considers the reciprocal sense of ἑαυτοῦ to be a direct substitute for ἀλλήλων (s.v. "ἑαυτοῦ," sense 2). A few other verses contain both forms but use ἑαυτοῦ in a reflexive (vs. reciprocal) sense (Luke 9:50; 12:1; John 19:24; Rom 1:27; 12:16; Phil 2:3).

[43] Archibald Thomas Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 690. He observes, "This is in harmony with the ancient Greek idiom. The papyri show this same blending of ἑαυτῶν with ἀλλήλων. Sometimes it occurs side by side with ἀλλήλων as if by way of variety, as in ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς (Col. 3:13)."

[44] MHT 3:43.

[45] MHT 3:187. See also BDF §247.4. Why the apostle Paul uses this form here is a matter of speculation. Stylistic variation could be his only reason.

[46] The Greek text reads, Διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε εἷς τὸν ἕνα. The syntactical parallelism in combination with a variation in direct object strongly suggests equivalence.

[47] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 199n58.

distinction in meaning in their renderings.[48] Third, Greek grammarians view εἷς τὸν ἕνα as equivalent to ἀλλήλων. Moule, for example, asserts that εἷς τὸν ἕνα expresses the same reciprocal sense as ἀλλήλων.[49]

Polarities of the One-Another Commands

Throughout the Scriptures, God expresses his will for his people in the form of commands. Some of his commands are negative and prohibitory (the "thou shalt not's") and some of his commands are positive and prescriptive (the "thou shalts"). This distinction can be observed in both sections of the Decalogue. The first four commands, pertaining to Israel's vertical relationship with God, prohibit polytheism and idolatry and prescribe the keeping of the Sabbath. The remaining six commands, pertaining to horizontal relationships with others, prohibit murder and stealing and prescribe the honoring of one's parents.

Since the *one anothers* are by definition a category of biblical commands, it is natural to expect this positive and negative distinction with respect to them as well. Indeed, this is the case. A significant majority of the *one anothers* are positive/prescriptive, but eight are negative/prohibitory. The commands addressed to believers in one-another form define the norms of behavior within the believing community to which they are addressed. The positive commands encourage proper behaviors that contribute to the well-being and edification of a body of believers. The negative commands restrain improper behaviors that are harmful to the life and health of the body.[50]

The neglect of either category is tragic. Believers individually and churches corporately have no more freedom to pick and choose which of the *one anothers* to teach and practice than Israel had to pick and chose which of the commands of the Decalogue to obey. Sadly, however, the negative category of the *one anothers* is often neglected.[51] This is not proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Second Timothy 3:16 declares that Scripture is profitable for reproof and correction. Shall we neglect so valuable a resource? As George Cowan insightfully declares, "The prohibitions of

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[48] The NASB, ESV, and NIV translators render both forms as "one another." The KJV translators make a slight distinction in one direction ("comfort yourselves together, and edify one another"), and the NKJV translation committee makes a slight distinction in the opposite direction ("comfort each other and edify one another").

[49] Moule, 120. BDF (§247.4), MHT (3:187), and BDAG (s.v. "εἷς" sense 5a) all equate the two forms.

[50] Alsup reinforces this view: "The positive one-another passages enhance the quality of fellowship, while the negative passages frustrate the quality and sometimes will work to destroy the relationships among Christians so that they will no longer associate, participate, or share together." Herbert E. Alsup Jr., *Koinonia: A Perspective from the "One-Another" Passages* (MA thesis, David Lipscomb University, 1990), 36.

[51] None of Getz's books address a negative *one another*. In the introduction to the second edition of his seminal *Building Up One Another*, under the heading of "new insights," Getz admits to having previously "missed" the negative one-another statements, and yet he still does not address them. See Gene Getz, *Building Up One Another*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1997), 9. Jones and Brown consider only positive *one anothers*. Thomas Jones and Steve Brown, *One Another: Transformational Relationships in the Body of Christ* (Spring Hill, TN: Discipleship Publications International, 2008). The same is true in Wayne Jacobsen and Clay Jacobsen, *Authentic Relationships: Discover the Lost Art of "One Anothering"* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

grace are an essential part of Christian life truth. . . . Such a body of truth is not to be relegated to an insignificant corner of practical Christian thinking and living."[52]

Occurrences of the One-Another Commands

Locating occurrences of the three surface forms of the *one anothers* in the Greek text and then evaluating these against the formal definition developed above produce a definitive list of sixty-one *one anothers* (see Table 1 below).[53] There are a few interesting facts to note about this list. First, not a single entry in the list represents an original discovery. Rather, the list for the most part validates the valiant efforts of all those who have previously researched this topic.[54] Second, seven of the *one anothers* are located in the Gospels, and all seven of these are uttered from the lips of the Lord of the Church. Works that more narrowly focus on the epistolary literature of the NT overlook this vitally important material.[55] Third, the list of *one anothers* derives from a majority of the NT writers including Mark, John, Paul, the writer of Hebrews, James, and Peter. The only NT writers not contributing to the list are Matthew, Luke, and Jude.

In terms of the list's composition, fifty-one entries have the ἀλλήλων form, nine have the ἑαυτοῦ form, and only one has the εἷς τὸν ἕνα form. Grammatically speaking, thirty of the *one anothers* involve imperative verbs, fourteen involve hortatory or prohibitive subjunctives, eleven reside in subordinate participial clauses, two are commands by way of context, one involves an infinitive with ὀφείλω, and one involves an optative. In addition, the *one anothers* in Romans 12:10 and 1 Peter 4:9 involve elliptical verbs. This analysis makes it clear that searching for verses containing "one another" in combination with imperative verbs is wholly inadequate. The language of the NT is simply too rich for such a rudimentary approach.

The Organization of the One-Another Commands

A cursory scan of the data leads to the obvious conclusion that some of the one-another commands are repeated two or more times. A sensible first step in organizing the data, therefore, is to group these repeated occurrences together. After combining repeated commands in accordance with the foregoing considerations, the list of sixty-one one-another occurrences is reduced to thirty-eight unique one-

[52] George M. Cowan, "The Prohibitions of Grace," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 103 (1946): 223, 225.

[53] This excludes seven marginal cases discussed in the author's dissertation (see note 1 above). The term *definitive* is not used casually. Barring future changes to the Greek text of the NT, the author stakes this claim on the rigor of the methodology employed coupled with the exhaustive search capability of Bible software.

[54] It is true that some entries in the list are more often overlooked (e.g., Rom 14:19; 1 Cor 7:5; 1 Thess 5:13, 15). If these share any commonality, it is that the KJV renderings of these verses do not contain "one another" as a simple construct.

[55] In the original edition of *Building Up One Another* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1976), Gene Getz begins well by identifying ἀλλήλων as the "unique word" that describes the "mutual and reciprocal process" enabling the body of Christ "to function effectively and to grow spiritually" (4). He adds, "In fact, *excluding the gospels*, the word is used 58 times in the New Testament" (emphasis added). Getz then proceeds to focus narrowly on twelve *one anothers*, all from Pauline epistles. Five years pass before Getz writes *Loving One Another*, a volume giving due consideration to the "love one another" commands of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels.

another commands (see Table 2 below). The largest set is "love one another" (fourteen occurrences). There are four occurrences of "greet one another" and two occurrences each of "comfort/encourage," "edify," "exhort," "forbear," "forgive," "be at peace with," and "serve" "one another."

The catalog of one-another commands can be organized into groups by means of semantic relatedness: the measure of how close two words are in meaning.[56] In biblical study, the seminal work in the area of semantic relatedness is the *Greek-English Lexicon* by Louw and Nida.[57] This lexicon distinguishes itself from other Bible lexicons by grouping lexical items that are related in meaning into what Louw and Nida call semantic domains and subdomains.[58] Semantic domains are categories of broadly related meanings, and subdomains constitute smaller subcategories within each semantic domain.[59] The Louw and Nida system has at least two distinct advantages relevant to the *one anothers*: different parts of speech may be classified together, and polarities are also classified together since they share common lexical features.[60]

Arranging the *one anothers* by semantic domain reveals some notable groupings. Seven one-another commands map to L&N semantic domain 25, "Attitudes and Emotions." Nine map to semantic domain 33, "Communication." Six others map to domain 88, "Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behavior." Ten one-another commands are alone ("singletons") in their semantic domains: "consume one another," "consider one another," "submit to one another," "forgive one another," "wash one another's feet," "judge one another," "defraud one another," "edify one another," "wait for one another," and "honor one another." The remaining *one anothers* map to domains containing just two each. Higher-order groupings of small groups and singletons are possible within the Louw and Nida taxonomy since domains sharing a degree of commonality are listed in close proximity.[61]

Suggested Categories

A three-step process is proposed for organizing the one-another commands into categories: (1) create first-order groupings based solely on the L&N semantic domains; (2) use higher-order groupings within the L&N taxonomy to merge domains with few members into broader domains;

[56] Reda Siblini and Leila Kosseim, "Using a Weighted Semantic Network for Lexical Semantic Relatedness," in *Proceedings of Recent Advances in Natural Language Processing* (Shouman, Bulgaria: Incoma, 2014), 610.

[57] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988). Louw and Nida use the principle of semantic relatedness in creating their semantic domains.

[58] Louw and Nida identify this as a chief motivation for their lexicon: "The most important reason for a new approach to a Greek New Testament lexicon is the necessity of bringing together those meanings which are most closely related in semantic space, that is to say, those meanings which are often regarded as partial synonyms because the ranges of their meanings tend to overlap." Eugene A. Nida and Johannes P. Louw, *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1992), ix. References herein to Nida and Louw pertain to this work, whereas L&N pertains to their lexicon.

[59] Louw and Nida offer this helpful analogy: "A dictionary based on semantic domains is in many ways like a classification of flora or fauna based on families, genera, and species. One may say that the domains constitute families of meanings, the subdomains are the genera, and the individual entries are the species." L&N, 1:8.

[60] Ibid., 1:x.

[61] See the discussion on grouping of domains in Nida and Louw, 84. See also the domain classes listed in L&N, 1:vi.

and (3) use various ad hoc methods to determine the best categories for singletons. Step 1 groups the *one anothers* into sixteen semantic domains, three of which have three or more members. Steps 2 and 3 group the rest of the *one anothers* into larger groups. Five categories of *one anothers* emerge from this process: *attitudinal, ethical, cognitive, communicational, and social.* Table 2 below lists the *one anothers* by category.

Attitudinal *one anothers* include attitudes and emotions that influence one's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Seven of the thirty-eight unique one-another commands in the NT fall into this category, most notably the group of fourteen occurrences of "love one another." The other one-another commands in this category are "have devoted affection," "be compassionate" (KJV "tenderhearted"), "care for," "forbear," "forgive," and "consume not" (i.e., do no harm or have a mean-spirited attitude).[62]

Ethical *one anothers* deal with moral principles that govern conduct within a community of believers.[63] In general, these one-another commands involve doing good to others and seeking the good of others. This category contains seven unique *one anothers*: "be humble," "edify," "pursue good," "be kind," "be at peace," "envy not," and "provoke not."[64]

Cognitive *one anothers* involve thoughts, opinions, and thought processes. This is the smallest of the categories, with only five *one anothers*: "consider," "esteem," "honor," "judge not," and "be likeminded."[65] It is logical to group these five together since all of these involve evaluative thought processes.

Communicational *one anothers* involve speech and other forms of communication. This is the largest category, with eleven unique one-another commands: "greet"; "speak to"; "teach"; "admonish"; "comfort/encourage";[66] "exhort"; "confess to"; "pray for"; and three negative commands: "lie";

[62] L&N places all of these except "consume one another" in domain 25, "Attitudes and Emotions." The prohibition against consuming one another is contextually contrasted with the attitude of love. Louw and Nida admit that this domain is "very closely related to a number of domains including Think, Psychological Faculties, Sensory Events and States, Behavior and Related States, and Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behaviors." L&N, 1:288.

[63] The ethics of one-another relationships fits within the broader category of biblical ethics, sometimes called Christian ethics or kingdom ethics. For an extensive consideration of Christian ethics, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life,* A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008). For a more concise treatment, see Arthur F. Holmes, *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions,* Contours of Christian Philosophy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994).

[64] L&N groups most of these within domain 88, Moral and Ethical Qualities and Related Behavior. Added to these is the command to "edify," which is an aspect of pursuing the good of others. One could argue that "be humble" is attitudinal. But in the context of 1 Peter 5:5 it governs the ethics of interpersonal behavior.

[65] L&N groups esteeming and being likeminded in subdomain 31.1, "have an opinion, hold a view." To "judge" and to "honor" have strong semantic relatedness to "esteem" and to each other.

[66] L&N does not treat "comfort/encourage" and "exhort" as separate senses of παρακαλέω. Instead, it classifies all four one-another occurrences of the word under domain 25, "attitudes and emotions," subdomain 25.150, "to cause someone to be encouraged or consoled." The problem with this classification is that it focuses on the sense of encouragement experienced by the recipient rather than the action of the encourager/exhorter, which typically involves a speech act (as is the case in the relevant contexts). Consequently, the L&N domain assignment is overridden by the author in the case of παρακαλέω.

"grumble"; and "slander." The Bible has much to say about verbal communication, including much instruction on how believers are to communicate with one another and about one another.[67]

Social *one anothers* include social behaviors and norms pertaining to relationships within the Christian community.[68] This category contains eight unique *one anothers*, making it the second largest category. The commands in this category include "accept," "wait for," "be hospitable," "bear burdens," "serve," "wash . . . feet," "submit," and "defraud not." The social *one anothers* span six L&N semantic domains, making it the most disparate of the five categories.[69]

Recommended Sequence for Preaching

Grouping the one-another commands into these five categories is a significant step toward sequencing them for preaching. Before embarking on a sermon series, however, the preacher must first consider how best to begin his series. An introductory message for the series establishes the proper biblical framework for interpreting and applying the *one anothers*. Before preaching a message on the first one-another command, the preacher needs to expound the key one-another *indicative,* namely, that believers are "members one of another" (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25).[70] By tracing the use of the body metaphor throughout the NT epistles, several foundational principles emerge: universally speaking, there is but one body (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:4); the church is Christ's body (1:23); Christ is the head of his body (4:15); and believers are the members of the body (Rom 12:5).

After this introductory message, there are several reasons to address the "love one another" command first. The most compelling reason is that Jesus elevated the command to love others above all other commands except the command to love God (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31). A second compelling reason to begin with this command is its prevalence: of the sixty-one one-another commands in the NT, fourteen are occurrences of "love one another." A third compelling reason is the priority it is given in 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." Fourth, the command to love provides a suitable foundation for all the other *one*

[67] The use and misuse of speech are dominant themes in both OT and NT. For example, "My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly" (Job 33:3); "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Ps 34:13); "The tongue of the just is as choice silver" (Prov 10:20a); "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (18:21); "The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things" (Jas 3:5); "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile" (1 Pet 3:10).

[68] The category label is "social" in place of L&N's much broader term "relational," which might conceivably include all the *one anothers*. "Social" is one of the categories in Lowe and Lowe (287). Their category includes four of the members in the list above. Their list also includes "forbear" and "care for" (in the "attitudinal" category) and "honor" (in the "cognitive" category).

[69] The grouping together of these domains is nonetheless reasonable. Several adjacent L&N semantic domains have to do with social behavior: "A number of interpersonal relations are grouped together in the domains of Association; Help, Care For; Guide, Discipline, Follow [etc.]." Nida and Louw, 84.

[70] Joe Nieboer recognized this fact. Joe Nieboer, *One Another: A Treatise on Happy Christian Relationships* (North East, PA: Our Daily Walk, 1953), 10. Chapter 2 of his book is titled "Members One of Another." It uses Romans 12:5 as its central passage. Hoag identifies this as the "key verse" for a study of the *one anothers*. Wayne Hoag, *The One Another Project* (Maitland: Xulon, 2012), 13.

anothers since love is the greatest Christian virtue (1 Cor 13:13) and the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).[71] Fifth, love is central to NT ecclesiology (Gal 5:13–14; Eph 4:16; Phil 1:9; etc.).

The command for believers to love one another belongs to the attitudinal one-another category. It is sensible, therefore, to next preach through all the commands in this category before proceeding to the commands in the other categories. One paradigm for ordering the remaining categories is to sequence them on the general basis of causality. Since attitudes and ethics shape thought processes and thought processes influence interpersonal communications and social interaction, it is appropriate to preach through the one-another categories in this order: (1) attitudinal; (2) ethical; (3) cognitive; (4) communicational; (5) social. The preacher may consider using contextual relatedness to influence the order within a category.[72]

The Value of Preaching the One-Another Commands

A preacher can engender pathos in the pulpit by means of his own heart preparation. After all, a sermon without a heartbeat is dead on arrival. Rowell suggests that a preacher ask himself, "Do I believe this message will make a difference?"[73] Genuine pathos in the pulpit is contingent upon an enthusiastically affirmative answer to this question. Let there be no doubt in the preacher's mind: preaching the *one anothers* most assuredly will make a difference in individual relationships within a church and in the overall body life of a church. The following wealth of evidence supports this claim.

Henry Admiraal taught a course on "reciprocal Christian relationships" covering eight one-another commands. Interest in the topic itself caused increased participation in his church's fellowship groups even *before* the first lesson.[74] By the time the series ended, tangible impact on congregational life could be observed in four distinct areas: (1) a majority of the fellowship groups voluntarily engaged in "serving one another" projects; (2) the congregation responded to "pray for one another" through a dramatic increase in prayer chain activity and the public sharing of prayer requests and praises; (3) the congregation implemented "encourage one another" through the use of encouragement cards; (4) seventy-five families applied the "be hospitable to one another" command by participating in dessert exchanges.[75]

Don Pahl used pretest and posttest surveys to assess the effects of a thirteen-week preaching series on the *one anothers*. Quantitatively, Pahl's survey results indicated a statistically significant "increase

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[71] Hoag, 15. John Owen declares, "Love is the fountain of all duties toward God and man, the substance of all rules that concerneth the saints, the bond of communion, the fulfilling of the law, the advancement of the honour of the Lord Jesus, and the glory of the gospel." *Works of John Owen,* ed. William H. Goold (1850–53; reprint, London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 13:62. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, with 1 John 4:8 in view ("He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love"), declares, "I do not hesitate, therefore, to say that the ultimate test of our profession of the Christian faith is, I believe, this whole question of our loving one another." *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 420.

[72] For example, "teach" and "admonish," both in the "communicational" category, occur together in Colossians 3:16.

[73] Edward K. Rowell, *Preaching with Spiritual Passion*, The Pastor's Soul Series (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 88.

[74] Henry Admiraal, "The Preparation and Use of a Course on Reciprocal Christian Relationships in the Local Church" (DMin project, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1986), 27.

[75] Ibid., 37–39.

in the awareness and experience of the 'one-another' actions."[76] Qualitatively, testimonials from study participants attested to a greater awareness of others' needs and of participants' own deficiencies in practicing the *one anothers*.[77]

Pastor George McDearmon preached a series of sixty-seven sermons on the *one anothers*.[78] "I have come to assess the series as the most important series I have ever preached," he exclaimed, "and, were I starting over in the pastoral ministry, [I] would have preached it much earlier."[79] By his own assessment, his congregation became "persuaded of the high and critical importance of the application of the one-another commands, exhortations and prohibitions."[80]

Pastor Dan Brooks preached a series of forty-one sermons on the *one anothers*.[81] In his view, the series matured his people significantly as they perceived the interrelatedness of the one-another commands to the overarching command to love one another. This awareness led to "deeper relational quality of the Christian life." He also personally grew and matured along with his congregation: "God challenged so many of my preconceived ideas about love, service, and ministry," he testified. What was Pastor Brooks's advice to a pastor thinking about preaching a series on the *one anothers*? "Do it!" he exclaimed. "This was a powerful study, both personally and corporately."[82]

Pastor Daniel Jarstfer preached a series of thirty-four sermons on the *one anothers*.[83] He did it to address the "many false ideas on how members of Christ's Body should treat one another."[84] Entrenched ideas and behaviors are sometimes difficult to dislodge. Despite this human reality, Pastor Jarstfer reported that some "took the Word to heart and grew."[85] This is a testimony to the supernatural power of the Word of God to transform lives. Pastor Jarstfer encourages other pastors to preach the *one anothers* because they are "germane to us all" and they lead to the development of better body life in the church.[86]

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[76] Don L. Pahl, "The Theology and Practice of Community in the Local Church: Building the Church's 'Socio-Spiritual Capital' by Practicing the 'One-Anothers' of the New Testament" (DMin project, Denver Seminary, 2005), 168.

[77] Ibid., 163–65.

[78] "One Another Duties," recorded May 13, 2012, through March 23, 2014, accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currpage=1&keyword=One+Another+Duties&keywordDesc=One+Another+Duties&SeriesOnly=true&SourceID=blbcsa&AudioOnly=false.

[79] George McDearmon, e-mail message to the author, May 28, 2020.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Brooks preached these sermons at Heritage Bible Church in Greer, South Carolina. "One Another," recorded May 9, 2011, through August 26, 2012, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currpage=1&keyword=One+Another+%2D+2011&keywordDesc=One+Another+%2D+2011&SeriesOnly=true&SourceID=hbcchurch&AudioOnly=false&sortby=date.

[82] Dan Brooks, e-mail message to the author, May 12, 2020.

[83] Jarstfer preached these sermons at Christ Our Hope Presbyterian Church in Charlestown, Rhode Island. Daniel Jarstfer, "One Another," recorded January 26, 2014, through October 26, 2014, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currpage=1&keyword=Daniel%5FJarstfer&SpeakerOnly=true&subsetcat=series&subsetitem=One+Another&AudioOnly=false&sortby=oldest.

[84] Daniel Jarstfer, e-mail message to author, May 14, 2020.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Daniel Jarstfer, telephone conversation with the author, May 15, 2020.

Dr. Rick Arrowood also preached a series of thirty-four sermons on the *one anothers*.[87] He characterized the results as "phenomenal." "This was one of those series that I still hear conversation about from time to time. It was profitable to me as I developed them, and [to] our people as they put many of the principles into their daily lives."[88] He recounted a particularly moving example of the impact of this series upon his congregation. After preaching on "forgive one another," a man came forward and asked to speak with him. This man had a daughter who had broken family rules and left home to marry a man without the parents' blessings. The family had not spoken with her for eighteen years! The "forgive one another" sermon triggered a months-long process of healing that culminated in an emotional reconciliation in the pastor's office. Pastor Arrowood described it as one of the most stirring days in his forty-one years of ministry. Upon his retirement, many in his church identified his "One Another Principle" series as his most memorable and helpful sermon series.[89]

The author preached a series of thirty-nine messages on "practicing the one anothers."[90] Doing so has had a profound impact on body life within the church. The congregation regularly thinks in one-another categories and seek to live out the *one anothers* in their daily lives. This has led to an observable increase in mutual care within the church family.

Conclusion

The church must put the one-another commands into practice. The place to begin is with the command to "love one another." Loving one another is the heartbeat and hub of Christian ministry, and the remaining thirty-seven *one anothers* radiate the effects of love throughout the body of Christ. As the members of Christ's body love one another and live out the rest of the one-another commands, the body grows and edifies itself in love (Eph 4:16).

The one-another commands are an integral part of the whole counsel of God. The consistent practice of these commands is vital to the church. Therefore, they must be preached. Preaching them has the potential to transform Christian relationships and to revitalize entire church ministries. Preaching them together as a series serves to amplify the impact.

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[87] Arrowood preached these sermons at Crosspointe Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. "The One Another Principle," recorded December 28, 2016, through November 12, 2017, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currpage=1&keyword=The+One+Another+Principle&keywordDesc=The+One+Another+Principle&SeriesOnly=true&SourceID=crosspointe&sortby=date.

[88] Rick Arrowood, e-mail message to the author, June 3, 2020.

[89] Rick Arrowood, telephone conversation with the author, June 15, 2020.

[90] Audio recordings of the series may be accessed at https://www.grace-baptist-church.org/sermon_archive?sa_action=mode_series&sa_filter=Practicing--SPC--the--SPC--One--SPC--Anothers.

Table 1. Occurrences of the One-Another Commands

Following is a list of all the one-another passages that satisfy the formal definition proposed above. References are in canonical order. Where possible, a single word expresses the paraenetic idea of the command.[91]

#	Passage	Command	Polarity	Form
1.	Mark 9:50	Peace	Positive	ἀλλήλων
2.	John 13:14	Wash	Positive	ἀλλήλων
3.	John 13:34a	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
4.	John 13:34b	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
5.	John 13:35	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
6.	John 15:12	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
7.	John 15:17	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
8.	Rom 12:10a	Devoted[92]	Positive	ἀλλήλων
9.	Rom 12:10b	Honor	Positive	ἀλλήλων
10.	Rom 12:16	Likeminded	Positive	ἀλλήλων
11.	Rom 13:8	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
12.	Rom 14:13	Judge	Negative	ἀλλήλων
13.	Rom 14:19	Edify	Positive	ἀλλήλων
14.	Rom 15:7	Accept	Positive	ἀλλήλων
15.	Rom 16:16	Greet	Positive	ἀλλήλων
16.	1 Cor 7:5	Deprive	Negative	ἀλλήλων
17.	1 Cor 11:33	Wait	Positive	ἀλλήλων
18.	1 Cor 12:25	Care	Positive	ἀλλήλων
19.	1 Cor 16:20	Greet	Positive	ἀλλήλων
20.	2 Cor 13:12	Greet	Positive	ἀλλήλων
21.	Gal 5:13	Serve	Positive	ἀλλήλων
22.	Gal 5:15b	Be consumed	Negative	ἀλλήλων
23.	Gal 5:26a	Provoke	Negative	ἀλλήλων
24.	Gal 5:26b	Envy	Negative	ἀλλήλων
25.	Gal 6:2	Bear (burdens)	Positive	ἀλλήλων

[91] "Peace," for example, represents both "have peace" (Mark 9:50 KJV) and "be at peace" (1 Thess 5:13). The English word representing the command may come from the KJV, the NASB, or the ESV, or it may be the author's own rendering.

[92] This is the NASB rendering. The KJV reads, "Be kindly affectioned one to another." The Greek term is φιλόστοργοι. Louw and Nida explain its meaning: "Pertaining to love or affection for those closely related to one, particularly members of one's immediate family or in-group – 'very loving, warmly devoted to, very affectionate.'" L&N, § 25.41.

#	Passage	Command	Polarity	Form
26.	Eph 4:2	Forbear	Positive	ἀλλήλων
27.	Eph 4:32a	Kind	Positive	ἀλλήλων
28.	Eph 4:32b	Compassionate	Positive	ἀλλήλων
29.	Eph 4:32c	Forgive	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
30.	Eph 5:19	Speak	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
31.	Eph 5:21	Submit	Positive	ἀλλήλων
32.	Phil 2:3	Esteem	Positive	ἀλλήλων
33.	Col 3:9	Lie	Negative	ἀλλήλων
34.	Col 3:13a	Forbear	Positive	ἀλλήλων
35.	Col 3:13b	Forgive	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
36.	Col 3:16a	Teach	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
37.	Col 3:16b	Admonish	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
38.	1 Thess 3:12	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
39.	1 Thess 4:18	Comfort[93]	Positive	ἀλλήλων
40.	1 Thess 5:11a	Comfort[94]	Positive	ἀλλήλων
41.	1 Thess 5:11b	Edify	Positive	εἷς τὸν ἕνα
42.	1 Thess 5:13	Peace	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
43.	1 Thess 5:15	Pursue good	Positive	ἀλλήλων
44.	Heb 3:13	Exhort[95]	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
45.	Heb 10:24	Consider[96]	Positive	ἀλλήλων
46.	Heb 10:25	Exhort	Positive	ἀλλήλων
47.	Jas 4:11	Slander	Negative	ἀλλήλων
48.	Jas 5:9	Grumble	Negative	ἀλλήλων
49.	Jas 5:16a	Confess	Positive	ἀλλήλων

[93] The KJV rendering is "comfort," whereas the ESV rendering is "encourage." The distinction is difficult to maintain: "In the rare instances in which the verb and noun mean 'to comfort' or 'comfort' in ordinary Greek usage, the consolation is mostly at the level of exhortation or encouragement to those who sorrow." *TDNT,* s.v. "παρακαλέω."

[94] The KJV and NKJV rendering is "comfort." The NASB, ESV, NET, RSV, NRSV, and NIV rendering is "encourage." Wanamaker argues in favor of "exhort," but none of the aforementioned English versions concur. Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 189.

[95] The KJV and ESV rendering is "exhort," whereas the NASB rendering is "encourage." "Hebrews more than once summons readers to help one another by mutual exhortation (3:13; 10:25)." *TDNT,* s.v. "παρακαλέω," para. F. 2., "exhortation."

[96] The paraenetic idea expressed in the verse is difficult to reduce to a single word. In the KJV the verse reads, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." The main verb is the hortatory subjunctive κατανοῶμεν "consider" with ἀλλήλους as its direct object. "The Exhortation . . . centers on the responsibility of Christians to exhibit practical concern for one another." William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13,* WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 289.

#	Passage	Command	Polarity	Form
50.	Jas 5:16b	Pray	Positive	ἀλλήλων
51.	1 Pet 1:22	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
52.	1 Pet 4:8	Love	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
53.	1 Pet 4:9	Hospitable	Positive	ἀλλήλων
54.	1 Pet 4:10	Serve	Positive	ἑαυτοῦ
55.	1 Pet 5:5	Humble	Positive	ἀλλήλων
56.	1 Pet 5:14	Greet	Positive	ἀλλήλων
57.	1 John 3:11	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
58.	1 John 3:23	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
59.	1 John 4:7	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
60.	1 John 4:11	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων
61.	2 John 5	Love	Positive	ἀλλήλων

Table 2. Suggested Sermons on the One-Another Commands of the NT

Below is a listing of the one-another commands grouped into categories. The order in which they are listed is a suggested order for preaching. No grouping scheme is perfect. In the scheme below, the attitudinal and ethical categories, though driven by L&N semantic-domain groupings, are not entirely distinct. Nevertheless, the overall progression of the proposed order is influenced on the basis of causality.

Sermon #	Sermon Title	Sermon Text(s)
Introductory Message		
1.	Members One of Another	Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25
Attitudinal One-Another Commands		
2.	Love	John 13:34 2x, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 3:12; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11; 2 John 5
3.	Have devoted affection toward	Rom 12:10
4.	Be compassionate	Eph 4:32
5.	Care for	1 Cor 12:25
6.	Forbear	Eph 4:2; Col 3:13
7.	Forgive	Eph 4:32; Col 3:13
8.	Be not consumed	Gal 5:15
Ethical One-Another Commands		
9.	Be humble	1 Pet 5:5
10.	Edify	Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11
11.	Pursue good	1 Thess 5:15
12.	Be kind	Eph 4:32
13.	Be at peace	Mark 9:50; 1 Thess 5:13
14.	Provoke not	Gal 5:26a
15.	Envy not	Gal 5:26b
Cognitive One-Another Commands		
16.	Consider	Heb 10:24
17.	Esteem	Phil 2:3
18.	Honor	Rom 12:10
19.	Judge not	Rom 14:13
20.	Be likeminded	Rom 12:16
Communicational One-Another Commands		
21.	Greet	Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14

Sermon #	Sermon Title	Sermon Text(s)
22.	Speak to	Eph 5:19
23.	Teach and admonish	Col 3:16
24.	Comfort/encourage	1 Thess 4:18; 5:11
25.	Exhort	Heb 3:13; 10:25
26.	Lie not	Col 3:9
27.	Grumble not	Jas 5:9
28.	Slander not	Jas 4:11
29.	Confess to	Jas 5:16
30.	Pray for	Jas 5:16
Social One-Another Commands		
31.	Accept	Rom 15:7
32.	Wait for	1 Cor 11:33
33.	Be hospitable	1 Pet 4:9
34.	Bear burdens	Gal 6:2
35.	Serve	Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 4:10
36.	Wash . . . feet	John 13:14
37.	Submit to	Eph 5:21
38.	Defraud not	1 Cor 7:5
Concluding Message		
39.	Review	

Urgency in the Mundane: Present Living in Light of the *Parousia* Texts in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

by Cory M. Marsh[1]

No one questions that first-century Mediterranean church culture was different from modern Western culture. Differences aside, there are more similarities between the two than often assumed. One commonality is the mundane routines of average daily life, involving individual behavior, societal relationships, business, and vocation—along with the ethics involved within each sphere. Two Pauline letters speak directly into these areas and offer an unexpected cosmic incentive for how believers ought to conduct themselves in everyday life. Among the earliest canonical writings, 1 and 2 Thessalonians initiate a strategy not uncommon in the rest of the NT by appealing to the coming of Christ as a motivator for spiritual renewal and vitality in otherwise ordinary living.

This article argues that a major theme of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is one of eschatological hope for believers to form spiritually, both individually and communally, during the present age before the *parousia*. Additionally, it will suggest that the prominence of end-times teaching in these two letters to a brand new "baby church" demonstrates that eschatology is a fundamental biblical doctrine that should be taught with urgency to Christians, not reserved as a final doctrine as customary in systematic theology. Speaking words of both exhortation and encouragement to the Thessalonians in light of Christ's imminent *parousia*, Paul teaches a perennial lesson for Christians everywhere: hope in the future produces holiness in the present.

End Times and the Limits of Systematic Theology

Systematic theologies traditionally cover ten topics of Christian doctrine in a logical order. Almost without exception, the last one is eschatology, which makes sense as it is a study on "last things" or "end times." This customary structure in textbooks can leave a skewed impression regarding the *importance* attached to each doctrine, however unintended. Placing eschatology as the last of all other Christian doctrines can inadvertently give the perception that eschatology is unrelated to personal sanctification or the Christian life. It becomes something merely to tack on at the end of one's systematic beliefs.

The biblical witness offers a different order. According to Oren Martin, "Eschatology—the study of last things—enters not at the end of theology but at the beginning. . . . Hence the entire Bible is

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eschatological since it focuses upon and culminates in the arrival of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, who ushers in the Kingdom of God and fulfills what God intended for humanity and the world."[2] This foundational eschatology, which Paul likewise expressed to the Thessalonians, has had a far-reaching influence in motivating followers of Christ in their daily lives throughout church history.

The second-century bishop Irenaeus understood Paul's *parousia* texts to the Thessalonians to be a promise restricted for those who are living a Spirit-filled life in the present, much like Enoch and Elijah, who were whisked away into paradise. In his recent study on the eschatology of the church fathers, Michael Svigel explains that for Irenaeus "the promise of being caught up in the likeness of Enoch and Elijah is limited to those who are 'perfect and spiritual,' while those who are imperfect and carnal will be left along with the unbelievers to endure the purifying trials of the tribulation."[3] Questions over his partial-pretribulation rapture theory aside, the point is that Irenaeus (and others) during the patristic period stressed the importance of ethical living in light of the *parousia*.[4] A later and striking example comes from the sixteenth-century Swiss brethren Anabaptists. This group endured harsh persecution for their stances on believer's baptism, pacifism, and their eschatological outlook. They were entirely premillennial, looking forward to Christ's *parousia* to endure their present circumstances. William Estep recounts, "Their eschatology saved them from utter despair in facing the indescribable suffering which they everywhere experienced from the authorities. Even as Christ suffered, they too, as His disciples were not to consider themselves immune from a similar fate. As Christ was vindicated in the resurrection, they believed that they too would eventually triumph with Him."[5]

Examples such as these demonstrate that the church, throughout its history, has looked to eschatology not as a final doctrine to consider in systematic theology but as a doctrine that provides the impetus and motivation for daily Christian life. As such, Christ's imminent *parousia* is not a doctrine as abstract or ambiguous as often presented. Quite the opposite, such eschatology should be taught with urgency in every local church.

Prominence of the Parousia

The *parousia* is a big deal for Paul. More than any other biblical writer, Paul applies the term *parousia* to Jesus' return seven times, six of which are in his letters to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; cf. 1 Cor 15:23).[6] Moreover, apart from two instances

[2] Oren Martin, "How Do the Old and New Testaments Progress, Integrate, and Climax in Christ?" in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 53.

[3] Michael J. Svigel, *The Fathers on the Future: A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2024), 233.

4 See ibid., 241–74, for Svigel's critique of Irenaeus's partial-rapture theory as well as other stances on the church's assumption to heaven at the *parousia*, along with a thorough defense of Svigel's pretribulational rapture position.

[5] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 264.

[6] The prominence of the Pauline term is one of two major oversights in Mark Keown, "An Imminent Parousia and Christian Mission: Did the New Testament Writers Really Expect Jesus's Imminent Return?" in *Christian Origins and the*

in 2 Thessalonians, each reference concludes its accompanying pericope by infusing eschatological themes with daily sanctification. For example, the first reference to the word closes out the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians after commending these new believers for their endurance in persecution and imitation of Christian churches in Judea (v. 14). Paul then says, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming [*parousia*]? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thess 2:19–20).

In fact, apart from the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, each of that letter's chapters ends with a reference to Christ's return with the word *parousia*.[7] In chapter 2, Paul says that the Thessalonian saints would be his crown of rejoicing before the Lord Jesus Christ at his *parousia* (2:19). Chapter 3 ends by praying that their hearts be established blameless in holiness before the Father at the *parousia* of the Lord with all his saints (3:13). Chapter 4 ends by comforting the Thessalonians with the knowledge that if alive at Christ's *parousia* they would be caught up together with the departed saints to meet him in the air and so forever be with the Lord (4:15). Finally, the epistle ends in chapter 5 with the petition for the saints that their whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the *parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ (5:23). And though chapter 1 of 1 Thessalonians does not use the word *parousia*, the concept is there nevertheless, ending with waiting for the return of God's Son from heaven to "deliver us from the wrath to come" (1:10), an event the rest of the letter terms *parousia*.

In his dual correspondence with the church at Thessalonica, Paul averages the term *parousia* between two and three times every thousand words. Compared to his longer letters to Corinth or Rome, which average over 6,000 words collectively, a word appearing here and there every thousand or so words may not seem that important. But Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are among the shortest writings of the NT, the first letter containing just 1,481 Greek words and the second clocking at a mere 823 words. Combined, the total is just 2,304 words of Greek text in these two epistles, which makes every appearance of *parousia* worthy of pause. Coupled with the fact that 1 and 2 Thessalonians are arguably the earliest writings of Paul, if not of the entire NT,[8] the concept of the "coming presence"

Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement, TENTSS 12, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 242–63. Keown argues against Paul and other NT writers believing in an imminent *parousia* since their mission to bring the gospel to the whole world was never completed in their lifetimes. However, not only does Keown not engage any one of Paul's explicit *parousia* texts, but he also overlooks the distinction between an imminent appearing of Christ to *receive the church* and his return to *establish the kingdom on earth* (as assumed in this paper). Only the former does the NT picture as imminent. Further, at times Keown conflates the apostles' *desire* to evangelize the whole world with a *non-belief* in the reality of the *parousia* since, for example, Paul presumably never made it to Spain despite his desire (Rom 15:24, 28), and he continued to endure and expect hardships in his ongoing mission. As this paper argues, however, the desire to continue to work even amidst afflictions (promised by Christ in John 15–16) was indeed *motivated* by the knowledge of an imminent *parousia*.

[7] See Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Synopsis of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Grace, n.d.), 76.

[8] The scholarly debate over which is Paul's first canonical letter is generally between Galatians and 1 and/or 2 Thessalonians, with the scales tipped slightly in favor of Galatians (cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, Christianity in the Making 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 497–518). A recent (and largely novel) approach is offered by Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 190–253, which attempts to sketch a *vitae* of Paul's ministry along with dates for his writings, not with the companion help of Acts but solely by Paul's letters. This results in an earlier dating than previously proposed for Paul's travels to Macedonia, which included Thessalonica, in ca. 40–42, during which the apostle would have written both 1 and 2 Thessalonians as possibly

or "imminent appearing" of Christ—*parousia*—is undoubtedly a prominent theme in these back-to-back letters.[9]

Ethical Eschatology

Each occurrence of the word *parousia* in 1 and 2 Thessalonians is in every sense eschatological. The contextual usage is never divorced from the return of Jesus Christ, which Paul orients as a still-future event that the Thessalonian church was to expect without warning. Thus, a tone of urgency is detected in the two letters. However, the term's usage may have distinct eschatological moments in view while referencing Christ's return. For instance, Paul writes, "For this we declare to you by a word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess 4:15), an event not specifically preceded by signs, predicated only on their waiting for Christ's revelation from heaven (cf. 1:10). Using the same word, elsewhere he states, "The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming [*parousia*]" (2 Thess 2:8), implying this is a different event preceded by the revealing of Antichrist.

Distinctions in the usage of *parousia* aside, Paul connects the sudden appearing of Christ with a type of present-living expected of the Thessalonian Christians. This includes "increasing in love for one another" (1 Thess 3:12), "abstaining from sexual immorality" (4:3), and "doing good to one another and to everyone" (5:15). Rather than living with an apathetic attitude passively waiting for the *parousia*, the Thessalonian believers were to avoid "idleness" (ἀτάκτως) at all costs (2 Thess 3:7, 11–12).[10] "If anyone is not willing to work," Paul charged, "let him not eat" (3:10). Void of any suggestions to hunker down or to isolate from the world or from one another in light of the sudden appearing of Christ, throughout both letters Paul presupposes the *parousia* as the ultimate motivator for active Christian living.

For Paul, eschatology is not esoteric; it is ethical. "What is more," Andreas Köstenberger notes, "as in other Pauline letters (e.g., Ephesians), these two themes sustain an integral relationship to one another in that eschatology is presented as a motivation for ethical living."[11] The topics that emerge from both Thessalonian epistles include the intersections of identity, ethnicity, faith, and family obligations, along with various ethics concerning charity, sex, multi-ethnic communities, hospitality,

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the first NT letters. A less contemporary argument defending the chronological priority of 2 Thessalonians is Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

[9] For the English glosses, see Walter Bauer, et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek,* ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroder (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1591; Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 647–56. From here on these works are abbreviated BDAG, MGS, and *NIDNTTE*, respectively.

[10] Among the glosses for the adverb ἀτάκτως in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3 are "free loading, sponging" (BDAG, 148), and "disorderly fashion" and "neglectfully" (MGS, 328).

[11] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 584.

and business and trade dealings.[12] These ideas suggest that the eschatology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians "may be about ethics and morality as much as, maybe even *more than*, about the future."[13] Rather than instructing the Thessalonians to set dates, sell all they had, form a commune, or even fortify their community from outsiders, the apostle offers modest counsel to " live quiet lives," minding their own affairs and maintaining an attractive witness before non-believers as productive members of society (1 Thess 4:11–12; 2 Thess 3:12–13). This means that the eschatology so prominent in these two letters functions as a tutor, not so much for helping predict the future but for reminding the believers at Thessalonica how they should behave in their present space *because* of the future. Quite simply, Thessalonian eschatology is ethical. As Rafael Rodriguez puts it:

> For Paul, eschatology transforms his readers' identity . . . and results in a new ethic. As for the Thessalonians' identity, they are "children of light" and "children of the day," as opposed to their adversaries, who are, implicitly "of the night," and "of the darkness" (1 Thess 5:5). As for their ethics, their behavior is alert and sober, as befits the day, rather than languid and inebriated (5:6–8).[14]

Considering the prominence of encouragement, ethics, and exhortation in 1 and 2 Thessalonians does force the interpreter to engage the scholarly dialogue on categorizing these two epistles. Are they pastoral or doctrinal? Is their purpose for encouragement, exhortation, or didactic in conveying Christian morals? Moreover, how does end-times prophecy intersect with these areas?

Consoling or Exhorting?

That the main literary genre of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is epistolary is not questioned. These works bear all the standard marks of ancient letter writing, with only slight variations (such as apparent co-authors; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 2:1).[15] Though scholars Steve Walton, Duane Watson, and Ben Witherington have offered valuable insights by way of rhetorical criticism (are these letters deliberative, judicial, or epideictic?),[16] the fact is that there are no recorded speeches in either 1 or 2 Thessalonians. Socio-historical insights from rhetorical conventions must therefore be drawn within the bounds of literary analysis, which also comes with caveats.

While all agree that Paul's canonized correspondence with the Thessalonian church takes the form of epistolary genre, what scholars debate is the *type* of epistolary literature, if any one type at all. The

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[12] Rafael Rodriguez, *The First Christian Letters: Reading 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Eugene: Cascade, 2024), 14. See also Köstenberger and Goswell, *Biblical Theology*, 586–88.

[13] Rodriguez, *The First Christian Letters*, 90n9.

[14] Ibid., 85.

[15] E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 32–46, 122–55.

[16] Steve Walton, "What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul? Rhetorical Criticism and 1 Thessalonians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 229–50; Duane F. Watson, "Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles," in *Paul and Rhetoric*, ed. J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 25–47; Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 30.

broad categories scholars generally offer for the two letters are *paraclectic* ("consoling") and *paraenetic* ("ethical exhortation"). Are they one or the other? Or are they both? Nijay Gupta surveys scholars such as Karl Donfried, Abraham Smith, and Donald Hagner as advocates for 1 and 2 Thessalonians being *paracletic*.[17] Beverly Gaventa provides a good example as she argues, "In common with the crafters of love letters, Paul does not write to convey data, but to express his *affection* and communicate his *concern*."[18] Those siding with the Thessalonian epistles being more *paraenetic*—offering moral exhortation—include Abraham Malherbe, David Aune, and Luke Timothy Johnson. In his analysis, Malherbe goes so far as to suggest connections between Paul's ethical injunctions and the pagan moral philosophers of his day.[19]

As with rhetorical criticism, a bit of caution should be exercised when assigning modern labels to ancient literature. This is because a case can be made for either category—paracletic *or* paraenetic—as Paul seamlessly interweaves words of both consolation and moral exhortation while addressing the Thessalonian situation in light of eschatology. The apostle is *paracletic* when he consoles these new believers "not to grieve as others do who have no hope" when instructing them on the *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, as they will be "caught up, raptured" (ἁρπαγησόμεθα) by the Lord with other believers and will always be together with Christ. He is pastoral and comforts them with, "God has not destined us for wrath" (5:9); therefore, these young believers were to "encourage one another and build one another up, just as [they were] doing" (v. 11). And yet, Paul is also *paraenetic* in his clear exhortations that involve the ethics of working and trade: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess 3:10), and "not to defraud [one's] brother in this matter [of sexual purity]" (1 Thess 4:6). Paul exhorted the Thessalonians "to mind one's own affairs" and to "labor with their own hands," just as he "instructed/charged" (παρηγγείλαμεν) them (4:11). For these reasons, it is best to adopt Gupta's counsel, which refuses to choose an either/or option, instead preferring a both/and approach: "For my part," contends Gupta, "I am skeptical about the usefulness of assigning 1 Thessalonians [and presumably 2 Thessalonians] to a specific epistolary letter-type. If I had to choose, I might prefer a 'mixed' type because I think the reader ought not to be forced to decide between 'consoling' and 'paraenetic.'"[20]

By way of the eschatology conveyed in Paul's prophetic statements concerning the *parousia*, the entire contents of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians are consoling, didactic, *and* ethical. Even with a didactic text as foreboding as the passage on the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:1–12), Paul's teaching intricately connects both *paraenesis* and *pastoralia,* as moral exhortation goes hand in glove with consolation and encouragement.[21] In the end, no compelling reason remains for the interpreter to choose any one specific literary category over another for 1 and 2 Thessalonians in order to understand their ethics in

[17] Nijay K. Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, ZCINT 13 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 30.

[18] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 40, quoted in ibid., 30n34 (emphasis added).

[19] Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians,* AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 81–86.

[20] Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 30.

[21] Phillip G. Zeigler, "How It Ends: Brief Remarks on Reading 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12," *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 1 (2022): 47.

light of Christ's *parousia*. Paul's teaching on the abrupt appearing of Christ was meant to instruct, console, and exhort. These elements contribute to the sanctification of the Thessalonian believers as Paul calls them to live out holy lives in light of the *parousia* (1 Thess 4:3). Such ethics are not an exception but a demand for God's people.[22]

Early History of 1 and 2 Thessalonians

The earliest known manuscript of Pauline letters that includes fragments of both Thessalonian epistles is $\mathfrak{P}^{30}$ (Oxyrhynchus 1598), which dates to the early third century.[23] Contemporary debates over the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians aside, from a very early period the apostolic authority of both epistles was accepted as genuine. Such is evident in the writings themselves; otherwise there is no force in Paul's words: "If anyone does not *obey* what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess 3:14, emphasis added). As Benjamin Laird observes, "The apostles certainly had their personal limitations and shortcomings, yet the authority of their teaching was widely recognized throughout the Christian world."[24] The apostolic authority of 1 and 2 Thessalonians was recognized during the primitive eras of church history and remained virtually uncontested for nineteen centuries.

Mentioned earlier was the scholarly consensus of the early dating of 1 Thessalonians (with some debate concerning 2 Thessalonians). In a recent monograph arguing for the early composition of the NT, Jonathan Bernier dates the Thessalonian letters no later than AD 52, a mere two decades following the crucifixion of Christ.[25] Doing so situates Paul's writing to the Thessalonian church just after his visit to the city in Acts 17, during his eighteen-month sojourn in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and before composing any other of his canonical literature. The only possible exception of an earlier Pauline writing is Galatians, which may have been written about the same time if not a year or two before 1 and 2 Thessalonians.[26]

Thessalonica was an important city, a capital of one of four major districts in Macedonia.[27] It was named after Alexander the Great's stepsister who was married to his general Cassander, several hundred

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[22] Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 101 (emphasis original).

[23] Benjamin P. Laird, *The Pauline Corpus in Early Christianity: Its Formation, Publication, and Circulation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2022), 42. Laird states that the manuscript likely originally included a collection of Pauline letters (319); cf. Phillip Wesley Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Papyri 1–72,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 112–14.

[24] Benjamin P. Laird, *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023), 180. Laird also offers a strong linguistic defense of Paul's co-authors, Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 2:1), sharing in Paul's apostolic authority, by the use of the considerable amount of first-person verbs and pronouns throughout the letters (40).

[25] Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence of Early Composition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 146–49.

[26] Cf. ibid., 163.

[27] The historical and archeological data in this section was informed by the following recourses: F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1982), xix–xxvii; Richard S. Ascough, "Thessalonica," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1300; David Lang, *The Accordance Dictionary of Place Names* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Oaktree Software, n.d.), 532; and J. W. Simpson Jr.,

years before these letters were written. Thessalonica was declared to be a "free city" by Emperor Augustus in the first century BC, as multiple cities were in the Roman Empire (such as Tarsus, Paul's birthplace). This meant that the city did not require a standing army to control any resistance to Rome. It retained the rights to be governed according to its own ancestral laws and appoint its own officials, such as a local senate administered by a "proconsul" acting as governor for a short period.

Two archeological discoveries confirm the history of Paul's travels in Thessalonica in Acts 17 and help to pinpoint the date of writing of the letters, which this paper argues is very early. The first pertains to a unique phrase found only twice in the NT (both in Acts 17). In 17:6, Luke records that a Jewish mob dragged a man before the πολιτάρχης "city authorities" for opening his home to Paul and Silas while the two were ministering in Thessalonica. This rare word used twice in the same passage appears nowhere else in the Bible, including the LXX. Apart from Acts, the word appears only in a few ancient Greek inscriptions. As a result of the word's rarity, many critical scholars dismissed Luke as a historian, casting doubt on whether Paul was ever actually in Thessalonica as reported in Acts. However, in the late nineteenth century, the word πολιτάρχης was discovered inscribed on an arch stone in, of all places, Thessalonica, framing the west entrance of the city. This discovery supported the historical accounts of Luke and places Paul in Thessalonica exactly as Acts says.

The second discovery enabled scholars to pinpoint with virtual certainty the early date of composition of both Thessalonian epistles. Acts 18 reports that Paul spent a year and a half ministering in the city of Corinth, which overlapped with the tenure of the proconsul named Gallio (vv. 11–17). Proconsuls were sometimes military officials, but more often civilians, who served as acting governors over a city for one year. In the early twentieth century, archeologists found an inscription at the site of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi (central Greece) that contains a greeting from the Roman emperor Claudius (also mentioned in Acts) to the local citizens. It refers to the proconsul *Gallio* by name. This discovery helped determine the dates of these events of Paul in Thessalonica, including the two letters he wrote to the church there. Not only does the finding corroborate Luke's report that Gallio was proconsul in Thessalonica, but the inscription also contained the year of Emperor Claudius's reign, which in the current dating-system is AD 51. An inference is that Gallio served as a proconsul in Thessalonica from approximately the summer of 51 to the summer of 52, resulting in the same date-range for the composition of the Thessalonian epistles, predating the Gospels and virtually the entire NT corpus.[28]

The Foundational Importance of Eschatology

Not only is the early dating of 1 and 2 Thessalonians relevant as it indicates that this church lacked the NT writings, but so is the absence of any explicit Jewish background in the letters. There are no OT quotations in either 1 or 2 Thessalonians. This suggests that the first readers were largely Gentile

"Thessalonians, Letters to the," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 662–66.

[28] Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible* Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:230, argues for an even earlier date of no later than the spring of 50.

and without any other biblical literature.[29] As such, the original recipients of Paul's earliest letters were presumably new Gentile converts to the Christian faith and undeveloped in their theology. In modern lingo, the recipients of the Thessalonian letters were a "baby church," full of "baby Christians." Remarkably, the first divinely written revelation they received largely addressed not soteriology but eschatology.

Indeed, twenty-six percent of 1 Thessalonians concerns the future (23 out of 89 verses), while forty percent of 2 Thessalonians is also prophetic (19 out of 47 verses). Combined, both letters are one-third eschatologically related (42 out of 136 verses total). Because of the overwhelmingly prophetic content, Richard Mayhue refers to 1 and 2 Thessalonians as the "the eschatological epistles" and offers a dozen reasons that prophetic literature is important for the Christian.[30] Future events such as the imminent "catching up" and subsequent Day of the Lord fill major portions in the first epistle (4:13–5:11). The return of Christ in judgment as well as the rise and fall of the future "man of lawlessness" take up almost two-thirds of the second epistle (1:5–2:12).

That prophetic-eschatology is so prominent in these two letters to a newly established church argues that end-times teaching is a *basic, fundamental doctrine*. Taking as cues the early dating of 1 and 2 Thessalonians along with their substantive content, eschatology should be taught first, not last. Eschatology is not to be the focus of merely academic discourse or reduced to theological camps arguing for their preferred millennial positions. And, when taught, it should certainly not be for the mere satisfaction of intellectual curiosity or result in spiritual lethargy. The eschatology of the Thessalonian epistles was intended to affect and motivate present living.

The Relevance of the Parousia

According to Pauline thought, eschatology matters not only for knowing the future but also for living the Christian life in the present. In his first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, Paul directly connects the "catching up" of the church (4:17) not to a pessimistic attitude about the future but to personal sanctification in the present. In 4:16 he says that Christ will descend with a "shout" (NASB, NKJV) or "cry of command" (ESV). Apart from an obscure reference in Proverbs 30:27 (LXX), the noun form κέλευσμα is a hapax legomenon, restricting what nuances can be pulled from it biblically. Its semantic usage elsewhere ranges from a summons to carry out a battle engagement to encouraging words given to animals.[31]

Drawing from Psalm 47:5 (46:6 LXX), Gordon Fee believes Paul is applying the enthronement language of this "Psalm of Ascent" to describe the coming from heaven of Jesus Christ, who is now pictured as "descending" in a way similar to the "descent" of Yahweh at Sinai. "Whether Paul would have understood any of this language to be taken literally is in itself moot," contends Fee, "since his

[29] It is likely that OT allusions in the Thessalonian letters exist that may assume some previous Jewish knowledge (e.g., holiness, the temple, the Day of the Lord). See Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "1–2 Thessalonians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,* ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 871–89.

[30] Richard Mayhue, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1999), 15, 141–42.

[31] BDAG, 538; MGS, 1111; *NIDNTTE*, 655.

only reason for including it at all is to give expression to the heavenly summons that is intended figuratively to 'awaken the dead.'"[32] But should readers understand Paul's language as solely figurative? It seems the apostle was more didactic here concerning what the Thessalonians should expect surrounding the appearing of Christ. F. F. Bruce suggests a more literal reading by highlighting the noun's military sense: "Here it is the Lord himself who shouts the quickening word, which commands a ready and obedient response (cf. John 5:25)."[33] In verse 17, Paul explicitly uses the future passive plural form of ἁρπάζω which translates "caught up together" (NASB, ESV, NKJV). The Latin Vulgate uses the first-person plural future passive verb *rapiemur* (lemma, *rapio*), which in English transliterates as "rapture." A sense of urgency permeates the text as there are no signs preceding Jesus' call of command or shout here. It is imminent, at any time.

Though some scholars push back against the idea of what they slight as a "secret rapture of the church" in 1 Thessalonians 4, their reasoning for doing so is often less than convincing.[34] For example, Fee believes that for Paul to have intended an imminent rapture at the *parousia* in verse 17 would demand previous instruction about it to the young church, which is lacking in the text.[35] Yet is this assumption necessary? Does the miracle of inspiration require biblical revelation to be disclosed previously in order for it to end up on papyrus or parchment? What in the inspiration or inscripturation process precludes Paul from disclosing something for the first time to this church while writing with divine authority? In any case, Paul does seem to suggest that he instructed them previously concerning this event. In 2 Thessalonians Paul writes to the same church about events surrounding the same *parousia,* such as the revealing of the future man of lawlessness and Day of the Lord (2:1–12). He then asks, "Do you not remember that when *I was still with you I told you these things*?" (v. 5).[36] As very little time elapsed between the composition of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, no scholar believes that Paul visited the same church in the short time between the two letters. His sole visit would be what is recorded in Acts 17, and the two letters written without an intervening visit.[37] It is perfectly reasonable, therefore, to understand Paul's reminder in 2 Thessalonians as including *all* of his relevant eschatological teaching as oral instruction during his only visit to these young believers. If that is the case, they did indeed receive some previous instruction on what Fee and others term "the secret rapture of the church" or *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.[38] Still, this is not a doctrine that Paul hoped would

[32] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 97.

[33] Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 100.

[34] The moniker "secret" is Fee's terminology. It is worth noting that only antagonists of the idea of an imminent (or pretribulational) rapture refer to it as a "secret rapture." As far as I am aware, there are no scholars who defend an imminent rapture with "secret" language. Rather, it appears to be a phrase of derision employed solely by opponents of the rapture idea.

[35] Fee, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, 98.

[36] The plural accusative ταῦτα need not be restricted to the immediate "things" in 2 Thessalonians but can account for Paul's eschatological teaching in 1 Thessalonians as well.

[37] Moreover, as Acts 17:2 points out, Paul was in Thessalonica for merely "three Sabbath days." Depending on the day that he and Silas arrived, this would mean they remained in Thessalonica for no more than two or three weeks.

[38] This is implied in Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxxvii, as well as in John F. Walvoord and Mark Hitchcock, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, TJWPC (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 67.

keep heads in the clouds. It is one of encouragement that Christians will meet the Lord in the clouds. But until then, believers are to remain in this world and live in such a way that brings honor to Christ, who is coming to receive them to himself (cf. John 14:1–3).

While the sound of this event may be startling as a battle cry, it also pictures encouragement, hope, and healing. If one were to grant Fee's connection of Psalm 47 to the *parousia,* shouts of joy and acclamation envelop that psalm (vv. 6, 9). For believers in Christ the *parousia* is not a doctrine of terror; it is one of adulation. At the *parousia*, all suffering experienced by believers in this age of the church will cease. The assumption of the church into heaven is the antidote to all affliction and oppression that Christians all over the world experience on a daily basis.[39] Such is a radical motivator for living faithfully until that day. Ultimately, the Thessalonians were not to look for *something* to happen but rather for *someone* to come. The appearing of Christ in that moment is what Paul describes elsewhere as "our blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). This is why the apostle can say to the young Thessalonian church to "encourage one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:18), when referring to the same event.

The *parousia* of Christ is a doctrine that inspires active discipleship and daily sanctification in all areas of life. The Thessalonians were to live lives "controlling their own body in holiness and honor" (1 Thess 4:4). They were to show "love to one another" (v. 9). They were to maintain ethics in their businesses, "to aspire to live quiet lives and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands," just as Paul had instructed them (v. 11). All of these directions were given in light of the promise of "being caught up [ἁρπάζω] together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (v. 17). The practical relevance of the any-moment appearing of Christ is not lost on scholars. "As far as 1 Thessalonians is concerned," notes Gupta, "the emphasis is on [present] life shaped in light of the hope of the *parosuia*."[40] The lesson that emerges from the *parousia* texts in 1 Thessalonians is relevant: *hope in the future produces holiness in the present.*

Second Thessalonians is similar. Reflecting on the future expectations of 2 Thessalonians, Phillip Ziegler relays "how this focal eschatological concern presses with power upon—and so interferes with—the present."[41] Likely written only a few months later, this second epistle has much the same tenor*: knowledge of the future motivates living in the present.* While in his previous letter Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to live a sanctified life before the imminent appearing of Christ, his second letter to the same church focused on the future Day of the Lord and the coming man of lawlessness as additional motivators for daily living while awaiting the *parousia*. In his commentary Calvin argued, "Unquestionably the love of God cannot reign in us unless brotherly love is also exercised. *Waiting for Christ*, on the other hand, teaches us to exercise contempt for the world, mortification of the flesh, and endurance of the cross."[42] Though the church is promised escape from this future period of wrath (cf. 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9), the knowledge of such impending doom, nevertheless, should humble believers

[39] I expand on this further in Cory M. Marsh, "The Rapture: Cosmic Segregation or Antidote for Oppression? A Critical Response to the 'Racial Ideology of Rapture,'" *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 60–79.

[40] Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 90 (italics added).

[41] Zeigler, "How It Ends: Brief Remarks on Reading 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12," 44.

[42] John Calvin, *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* in *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. XXI, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 351 (emphasis original).

in their daily lives and spur them on to holiness and more love for the brethren while there is still time to do so.

As in his previous letter, the apostle connects a knowledge of the future with a life in the present that reflects hope even in the mundane ethics of work and paying bills, "not being lazy busybodies" (2 Thess 3:11), "nor growing weary in doing good" (3:13).[43] In light of the *parousia*, cited twice in 2 Thessalonians in reference to Christ (2:1, 8), these early Christians were not to be idle, passively waiting to be raptured. Instead, Paul commanded them to work for their daily sustenance (3:10) and "to do their work quietly and to earn their own living" (v. 12). They were even to apply church discipline on those who were so preoccupied with flying in the sky that they refused to earn their keep within the community—all while anticipating the *parousia* (vv. 13–14).

The Practicality of the Parousia

As argued thus far, the *parousia* texts in 1 and 2 Thessalonians were not intended merely to instruct about the future. They were also intended as practical implications for the present. Bruce argued that "it is the ethical implications that are chiefly stressed" in Paul's doctrine of the *parousia*.[44] He is not alone; dispensational scholars also defend the practicality and relevance of the *parousia,* contrary to popular caricatures of their supposed pessimism, obsessions over prophecy charts, and fixation over being "left behind."[45] John Walvoord and Mark Hitchcock, for example, contend that the many problems Christians face in this life, such as disease, pain, and sorrow, will be made right at the *parousia*. "We can face the trials and challenges of life because God has given us this blessed hope of the Lord's return," they say. "May we take it to heart, *live in its reality*, and be refreshed by its truth."[46]

This focus on present living in light of the *parousia* is shared by other dispensational scholars. One is Richard Mayhue who synthesizes both letters' theological importance and identifies nine major themes—only one of which focuses on future events.[47] The other eight include pastoral emphases, spiritual emphases, and missional emphases addressing topics such as evangelism, church planting, sanctification, encouraging the saints, and church discipline. "Paul's reason for writing," argues Mayhue, "flowed from his shepherd's heart which was concerned about the flock from which he had been separated. . . . Paul writes to bolster a church which is growing in the midst of painful trials."[48]

Similarly, Robert Thomas gave three reasons that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, all of which focus on practical matters such as defending his apostolic credentials and addressing the spiritual condition of the church there. When summarizing the main idea of the very passages addressing the "catching

[43] Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 233, says, "The problem is not that these troublemakers are doing *nothing* but rather they refuse to work and intentionally behave in a counterproductive way" (emphasis original).

[44] Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxxviii.

[45] For example, Mike Wilson, *Leaving Left Behind: How Positivity Will Help Christians Flourish* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021); Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Basic, 2004).

[46] Walvoord and Hitchcock, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 82 (emphasis added).

[47] Mayhue*, 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 26, 29.

[48] Mayhue*, 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 25, 28.

up" at the *parousia* and subsequent Day of the Lord (4:1–5:24), Thomas states that it was "to suggest specific ways in which the already strong Christian behavior of the Thessalonians could be improved as they lived a life of holiness."[49] These are unexpected comments from those who are often maligned for their eschatology being supposedly irrelevant to daily Christian living.

Paul does not offer any specific dates for the *parousia*. His teaching on the unexpectedness of the event was not intended to be reduced to prophecy charts. Nor was it to provoke a floorless pool of date-setting speculation. Rather, "he turns their attention away from timetable theories towards faithfulness and upright behavior *today*. The *timing* doesn't matter, if, in waiting for the master, you are *always* at work in your duties."[50] Paul's eschatology is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the wise manager in Luke 12 whose protagonist is "blessed" for his faithful service upon his master's sudden return (v. 43).[51] As the story ends, the lesson becomes clear: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (v. 38).

First and Second Thessalonians require much from their readers. We might not know the exact timing of the Lord's *parousia*, but that is intentional. We are not meant to know the *when*, just the *what*. In Fee's words, "the coming is totally 'unexpected' in terms of precise timing."[52] Christ's appearance will be sudden and imminent, heralded by the blast of a cosmic shofar (1 Thess 4:17; cf. 1 Cor 15:52). Without warning, Christians will be "caught up" (ἁρπαγησόμεθα) into the blissful presence of their Lord. Still, knowing this fact of divine revelation comes with responsibility. It guides the reader into faithful service here in the present while awaiting such imminent eschatology. As J. N. Darby argues, Paul's teaching of the sudden appearing of Christ "is not merely formally meant as a doctrine; it is linked with every spiritual relationship of our souls, it is displayed in all the circumstances of the Christian's life."[53] The Christian lives and works and loves steadily with the hope of Christ's *parousia*, even through the quotidian of life. Rewards await those who spend their lives fully present in the mundane. There is a compelling urgency even while waiting for future events, knowing that our labor *while* we wait is never in vain (1 Cor 15:58). As Darby saw it, this was the very reason for salvation: "We are converted in order to wait for Him. The joy of the saints in the fruits of their labors is realised in His presence. It is at the coming of Christ that holiness has its value, its measure being seen in that which is manifested."[54]

In these two epistles, holiness, discipleship, encouragement, love, and work are snatched out of the mundane routines of daily Christian life. They become the tangible expression of our knowing the future return of Jesus is about to happen, and with them, we face the standard experiences of living—from boredom to bedlam—with the cosmic surety of Christ's *parousia*. Paul's letters to the

[49] Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," 844.

[50] Nijay K. Gupta, *1–2 Thessalonians*, NCCS (Eugene: Cascade, 2016), 15 (emphasis original).

[51] Gupta also leverages Luke 12:41–48 for support of his quotation above.

[52] Fee, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, 96.

[53] J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Colossians–Revelation* (London: Cooper and Budd, 1949), 5:43.

[54] Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible,* 5:43–44.

Thessalonians remind us that what we have received from the past offers us a surer footing for facing a tumultuous present or uncertain future.[55] As it turns out, at the *parousia* what was originally thought to be routine living is revealed as not so mundane. Every bit of waiting and working, fair-trade dealings and hospitality, every act of genuine kindness and integrity amid a highly sexualized and corrupt culture will be revealed as moments of glory for the King of glory upon his return.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that 1 and 2 Thessalonians speak of eschatological hope for believers to form spiritually, both individually and communally, during the present age before the *parousia,* even during routine matters of life. Additionally, it contended that the prominence of eschatology in these two letters addressed to a "baby church" demonstrates that eschatology is a fundamental biblical doctrine that should be taught to Christians with urgency rather than left as a final doctrine, as in systematics. The eschatology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians was shown to be ethical to the core and relevant to Christian sanctification. Both letters speak words of exhortation and encouragement to the Thessalonian believers in light of the imminent *parousia.* In the end, a clear lesson emerges that shapes Christian living: views on the future affect lives in the present. To the Thessalonians in particular, Paul gave a cosmic incentive for how they were to behave in daily life. He expected that hope in the *parousia* would produce holiness while waiting for it.

[55] Rodriguez, 111.

J. Wilbur Chapman and American Evangelism

by Mark Sidwell[1]

Christians sometimes think of "worldview" in terms of how Christianity applies to cultural issues in such areas as economics or the fine arts. But a true biblical worldview must be centered on understanding what the Scripture both teaches and emphasizes. For example, however one views the Christian's cultural mandate that many Christians espouse, it is more important for a Christian to fulfil the gospel mandate stressed in the NT. Part of this gospel mandate is evangelism. This article is the third in a series on noted evangelists in American history—their work, methodology, and philosophy—a series that is intended to deepen understanding of the successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, of historic American evangelism.[2]

J. Wilbur Chapman, like many American evangelists of the past, is vaguely familiar to twenty-first century American Christians who are nonetheless unsure of precisely who he was. Even those who recognize him as falling in the same category as D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Sunday would be hard pressed to explain what distinguished Chapman from the rest. Commonly, Chapman is considered the link between the two most famous evangelists of America's citywide campaigns, Moody and Sunday. Chapman began as an associate of Moody and later became Sunday's mentor. Although "Chapman as link" has a historical elegance to it, the notion fails to measure his full impact on American evangelism.

Chapman was not simply one in a line of notable evangelists but an innovator in and promoter of evangelism. He displayed a flexibility that embodied Paul's admonition to be "all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Chapman weighed matters of theory and theology, of promotion and organization. If not precisely a theologian of evangelism, he was nonetheless an evangelist with a sense of what evangelism was, what it ought to be, and how it ought to be conducted.

Life of Chapman

John Wilbur Chapman was born on June 17, 1859, in Richmond, Indiana.[3] Chapman's mother was a Methodist, and he made his public profession of faith in a Methodist Sunday school. His father

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[2] The earlier installments are Mark Sidwell, "George Whitfield and the Rise of American Evangelism," *JBTW* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 53–75; idem, "Between Whitefield and Finney: The Evangelism of Asahel Nettleton," *JBTW* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2024): 33–47.

[3] The best biography of Chapman is Ford C. Ottman, *J. Wilbur Chapman: A Biography* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920). Ottman was a close friend of Chapman and made extensive use of Chapman's

was a Presbyterian, and the year before he went to college he united with a Presbyterian church and remained with that denomination (or other Reformed groups) for the rest of his life. Chapman did not recall the precise time of his conversion, and he said that this fact bothered him for a time. He stopped worrying, however, when he realized that "I should know I was living physically even if I did not know my birthday, and I may know that I am living spiritually even though I do not know when I 'passed from death unto life.'"[4] Although he did not commit himself to the ministry until he was in college, he later said he was called to preach as a boy when he conducted a meeting of the YMCA in Richmond. Chapman did not think the meeting went particularly well, but a business acquaintance of his father who was at the meeting told him that "somehow I have the impression that you will some day be a minister of the Gospel."[5]

Chapman spent his freshman year of college (1876–77) at Oberlin College, entering the year after the death of the school's famous president, Charles Finney.[6] For his sophomore year, Chapman transferred to Lake Forest College in Illinois, where he graduated in 1879. Chapman made two acquaintances at Lake Forest that shaped his later career. One was B. Fay Mills (1857–1916), another divinity student, who became a sensationally successful evangelist in the 1880s and 1890s. Chapman and Mills became close friends, and Mills led his classmate into evangelism.

Chapman's other notable acquaintance at Lake Forest was D. L. Moody. Chapman attended a series of meetings the evangelist held in Chicago, and Moody's directness and warmth impressed him. Moody personally counseled Chapman in an inquiry meeting.[7] When Chapman professed his lack of assurance of his salvation, Moody read John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." He asked, "Do you believe this?" Chapman replied, "Certainly." Moody asked, "Are you a Christian?" The younger man said, "Sometimes I think I am, and again I am fearful." Moody said, "Read it again," then asked again if he believed it, and Chapman again said that he was unsure. "Then he seemed to lose his patience," Chapman recalled, "and the only time I

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papers and correspondence. Although uncritical (it lacks footnotes, for example), it is thorough. Also somewhat useful is John C. Ramsay, *John Wilbur Chapman: The Man, His Methods and His Message* (Boston: Christopher, 1962). Derived from Ramsay's dissertation, the work is not well organized, and, like Ottman, has no footnotes. Ramsay is better than Ottman in describing the details of Chapman's evangelistic work. Also valuable in studying Chapman's life are the J. Wilbur Chapman Papers (hereafter referred to as JWCP) housed in the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. See also William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald, 1959), 377–88, for a helpful, if unsympathetic summary of Chapman's career. A very helpful, more recent work is Ross A. Purdy, "The Development of John Wilbur Chapman's Life and Thought (1859–1918)" (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2016). He focuses particularly on Chapman's thought and theology as well as his methodology, noting the strong influence of dispensationalist premillennialism on Chapman's views.

[4] J. Wilbur Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* (New York: Revell, 1894), 77–78.

[5] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap* (New York: American Tract Society, 1918), 16.

[6] It is uncertain how much influence Finney had on Chapman. In one of his early books he devoted a chapter to Finney as "The Prince of Modern Evangelists" and devoted another chapter to Finney's evangelistic theory. J. Wilbur Chapman, *Revivals and Missions* (New York: Lentilhon, 1900), 39–58, 69–79. He referred to Finney less often in later works and discussed his theory not at all. For further discussion of Chapman's views of Finney, see Purdy, 135–36, 173.

[7] See Ottman, 29–30. McLoughlin mistakenly says, "Moody personally converted him from a nominal to born-again Christian," *Modern Revivalism,* 377. In reality, Chapman's experience was more in the form of assurance of salvation. He certainly did not date the meeting with Moody as his conversion.

can remember Mr. Moody being sharp with me was when he turned upon me and said, 'Whom are you doubting?'" After Chapman thought this over, Moody said, "Read it again." He did and Moody asked, "Do you believe this?" Chapman replied, "Yes, indeed I do." Moody asked, "Are you a Christian?" He answered, "Yes, Mr. Moody, I am." Chapman concluded, "From that day to this I have never questioned my acceptance with God."[8] Later Chapman worked in some of Moody's campaigns, preached at his Northfield Bible Conference, and served as vice president of Moody's Bible institute in Chicago.

After finishing his baccalaureate work, Chapman went to Lane Seminary in Cincinnati (1879–82). Shortly after graduation from Lane, Chapman married and took his first pastorate. The charge was a dual one, serving two small churches located in Liberty, Indiana, and College Corners, Ohio. Chapman served these towns only a year, thanks to B. Fay Mills, who was filling the pulpit of the Dutch Reformed Church of Greenwich, New York. When Chapman visited Mills, the latter arranged for Chapman to supply a vacant pulpit in the nearby Dutch Reformed Church in Schuylerville. The congregation, duly impressed, called the young Hoosier as its pastor in 1883.

Chapman thereafter took the pastorates of progressively larger, more prestigious churches. In 1885 Chapman moved to the First Reformed Church of Albany, which grew by 500 members under his direction. In 1890 he became pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, serving twice, 1890 to 1893 and 1895 to 1899. Finally, in 1899 he took his last pastorate, Fourth Presbyterian Church, New York City, where he served until 1903. All these churches were congregations of higher social status. Bethany, for example, was the church of the Wanamakers, a leading family in dry-goods merchandising and Republican politics.[9]

Although Chapman's greatest fame came in the field of evangelism, he always considered his experience as a pastor a key component of his evangelistic career. His pastoral work gave him a deeper understanding of the work of the ministers and churches he cooperated with in his campaigns. In particular his experience at Bethany Presbyterian exposed him to the possibilities of innovation and flexibility in Christian work. As William Glass has noted, Bethany was a prime example of the "institutional church," the attempt of churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to meet the challenges of the cities with varied forms of outreach.[10] Before, during, and after Chapman's pastorate, Bethany had modeled inventive means of extending its ministries. Begun before the Civil War as a Sunday school, as it grew the church offered poverty relief, arranged social activities, dispensed medical treatment, and provided vocational training. During his time at Bethany, Chapman

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[8] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1912), 14–17.

[9] His salary grew commensurately. His beginning salary at Bethany, $4,000 per year, grew to $5,000 by 1895. At Fourth Presbyterian he began at $6,000 and was making $8,000 by 1902. See "Resolution of the Congregation of Bethany Presbyterian Church," January 8, 1890, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; "Resolution of the Congregation of Bethany Presbyterian Church," December 2, 1895, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; "Resolution of the Congregation of the Fourth Presbyterian Church," March 13, 1899, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3; and J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, October 14, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[10] William R. Glass, "Liberal Means to Conservative Ends: Bethany Presbyterian Church, John Wanamaker, and the Institutional Church Movement," *American Presbyterians* 68 (1990): 181–92.

successfully changed the Sunday evening service into an evangelistic service followed by an after-meeting, an innovation that saw numerous conversions.

After 1903 Chapman's ministry was devoted almost entirely to evangelism, but he pursued other ministries as well. With his song leader Charles Alexander, Chapman promoted the Pocket Testament League, the goal of which was to encourage Christians to carry pocket New Testaments to read, of course, but also, with the help of markings and annotations, to use in witnessing to others. In 1895 he also became the founding director of the Winona Lake Bible Conference in Indiana. The conference was more than a series of meetings held in the summer. The founder of the Winona organization, Presbyterian Sol Dickey, envisioned establishing several institutions to promote Christian renewal, including schools and a Chautauqua (a popular course of adult education, concerts, and lectures by noted speakers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). The Bible conference was one component of that vision. Winona became a rallying point for conservative Christians, foreshadowing the parachurch ministries that would later characterize American evangelicalism. Chapman built a summer home at Winona Lake and used the conference as a means of promoting evangelism.[11] He remained director until 1908.

Evangelistic Career

J. Wilbur Chapman's entrance into full-time evangelism was gradual, growing out of his own interest and the influence of several mentors. He recalled that his first inclination toward evangelism occurred at Lake Forest College, but it was several years before he actually entered the field.[12] His career as an evangelist divides into several periods, with different approaches characterizing each.[13]

Evangelistic Influences

D. L. Moody had a profound influence on Chapman, who wrote a flattering but sincere biography of his mentor.[14] Chapman assisted Moody in campaigns at the Chicago World's Fair, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York. Moody's World's Fair campaign (1893) was particularly interesting in that it prefigured Chapman's "simultaneous" method of evangelism (discussed below). Beyond Moody's evangelistic example, Chapman also drew from him the Keswick idea of spiritual power. The focus of Keswick holiness ideas (named for the English conference where its adherents met) took different shapes depending on it varied proponents. To Moody and those around him, Keswick meant,

[11] See Mark Sidwell, "The History of the Winona Lake Bible Conference" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1988).

[12] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* vii.

[13] There are two dissertations on Chapman's evangelistic career, in addition to the one on which Ramsay's biography is based: Scott Sterling Hobbs, "The Contribution of J. Wilbur Chapman to American Evangelism" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), and James Paul Cogdill, "A Major Stream of American Mass Evangelism: The Ministries of R. A. Torrey, J. W. Chapman, and W. E. Biederwolf" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

[14] J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Life and Work of Dwight L. Moody* (Boston: J. A. Haskell, 1900).

as George Marsden notes, "power for service": the endowing of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of God.[15]

Among those of Moody's circle who influenced Chapman toward Keswick teaching was British Baptist minister and staunch advocate of holiness teaching, F. B. Meyer. Chapman heard Meyer at the Northfield Bible Conference and was deeply affected when Meyer asked, "If you are not willing to give up everything for Christ, are you willing to be made willing?"[16] The question changed Chapman's ministry. Chapman dedicated his book *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* to Meyer, "because two years ago, in a single sentence, he opened up a new life to me when he led me to know more about the Spirit of God."[17]

The idea of a Keswick-like experience runs through Chapman's ministry, not only as a basis for Christian living but also as a key preparation for evangelism. In his evangelistic campaigns Chapman designated certain meetings as "Quiet Hour" services focused on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He taught that the basis for Christian service was found in such matters as "presentation of the whole being to Christ as our master and king," "an abandonment of every known sin," "acceptance by faith of the Holy Ghost as God's gracious provision for holiness of life and for power in his service," and "a continuous dying unto self that Christ may be all in all."[18] In a sentence fully consonant with Moody and Meyer, Chapman wrote, "To know him [the Holy Spirit] aright has always meant POWER."[19]

Another great influence was B. Fay Mills. Nearly forgotten today, Mills was briefly America's leading evangelist, as well as a cautionary tale to evangelicals. He began conducting evangelistic work while still a pastor and from 1886 served some ten years as a full-time evangelist. Mills pioneered some methods that became standard for most evangelists, such as using cards to record responses (on which he reputedly recorded a total of 500,000 conversions) and to direct inquirers to churches from the sponsoring committee of the campaign. He also experimented with the decentralized method that Chapman later refined, what Mills called the "District-Combination Plan." This scheme, Nelson observes, arose from "the notion that he [Mills] could best conquer a city by first dividing it."[20] Instead of a central mass meeting, Mills held meetings in different locations in an urban area. Perhaps his most

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[15] George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78–80.

[16] Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 18.

[17] Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* dedication. He later recounts the experience from Meyer's teaching, 86–87.

[18] J. Wilbur Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1903), 48–49.

[19] Chapman, *Received Ye the Holy Ghost?* 34. Bryan Gilling questions whether Chapman's Keswick "full surrender" theology squared with his Reformed heritage, notably the doctrine of total depravity and the idea of a Christian granting "permission" to God in surrender. Bryan D. Gilling. "Revivalism as Renewal: J. Wilbur Chapman in New Zealand, 1912–1913," *American Presbyterians* 70 (1992): 87–88.

[20] Daniel W. Nelson, "B. Fay Mills: Revivalist, Social Reformer and Advocate of Free Religion" (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1964), 85. For a more detailed discussion of Mills's relationship with Chapman, see Purdy 38–40, 201–3.

famous campaign was held in Columbus, Ohio (1895).[21] The Columbus campaign, however, also foreshadowed a drastic shift in his theology. Mills first embraced the social gospel, then moved to Unitarianism, only to leave the confines of that system (such as they were) to embrace "free religion," becoming a sort of "evangelist for liberalism" in Los Angeles and Chicago. There he preached government ownership of utilities and support for the labor movement, proclaiming Christ "as the Savior of the social organization rather than of individuals." He took as his motto "What is the loving thing to do?"[22]

While serving as a pastor in Albany, Chapman invited Mills—still in his orthodox period—to hold a series of evangelistic meetings in his church. After Mills had finished his commitment, Chapman wanted to continue the meetings, and the congregation prevailed upon him to serve as the evangelist himself. Mills then invited him to assist his campaigns in Cincinnati in 1892 and Minneapolis in 1893. When Mills departed from orthodoxy shortly afterward, Chapman maintained ties as best he could and even visited Mills when Chapman was on the west coast. When, shortly before his death, Mills publicly professed a return to orthodoxy, Chapman was among those who welcomed him.

Early Evangelistic Career

Chapman's experience with Mills in the 1892 Cincinnati crusade convinced him to pursue evangelistic work. Over the protests of his congregation, he resigned his pulpit and launched into his new work.[23] Surprisingly little is known of Chapman's first attempt at full-time evangelism (1893–95). During this period Chapman hired Billy Sunday as an assistant, luring him from an irregularly paying position with the YMCA. Chapman held campaigns in Saginaw, Michigan; Burlington, Vermont; Saratoga, New York; Ottawa, Illinois; Bloomington, Indiana; Boston (at the close of 1895), and Brooklyn.[24] One of his meetings was a one-week evangelistic "Camp Meeting" in Winona Lake in 1895 to help launch the Bible conference.[25] Ramsay observes that in this period Chapman used the method of "single mass meeting," the standard approach of Moody-era evangelists, not the

[21] See Henry Stauffer, ed., *The Great Awakening in Columbus, Ohio, under the Labors of Rev. B. Fay Mills* (Columbus: W. L. Lemon, 1895).

[22] On Mills, see Daniel Nelson's dissertation on Mills, and McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 329–46.

[23] Chapman initially persuaded his church in Philadelphia to allow him six months out of the year to conduct evangelistic work, the church approving "a plan allowing the Pastor [Chapman] a full half of each year for [evangelistic] work in or out of the city and outside of The Bethany Church." "Resolution of the Board of Elders of Bethany Presbyterian Church," October 18, 1892, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 3. Then, before this plan had time to take effect, Chapman abruptly decided to go into evangelism full-time.

[24] Ottman, 88–89. The guide to Chapman's papers from the Billy Graham Center lists some fourteen cities for this period but identifies the date for all as "c. 1893–1895 (?)," reflecting how uncertain Chapman's itinerary is for this period. In addition to the cities mentioned by Ottman, the Graham Center lists four cities in Chapman's home state (Indianapolis, Evansville, Terre Haute, Fort Wayne), Paris and Peoria in Illinois, and Montreal. Collection: Collection 077 Papers of J. Wilbur Chapman | Archives of Wheaton College (accessed July 23, 2024). Another campaign possibly from this period is the work in Jacksonville, Illinois, that Chapman describes in his book *Revivals and Missions,* 86–106.

[25] Billy Sunday actually spoke at the opening service before Chapman arrived. See "Great Camp Meeting," *Warsaw* (Ind.) *Daily Times,* August 21, 1895, 3; "The Union Meeting," *Warsaw Daily Times,* August 26, 1895, 3.

"simultaneous" method he later developed from Mills's practice.[26] In 1895 Bethany Church successfully urged Chapman to return to its pulpit, a decision that induced Billy Sunday to enter evangelism, which he did with Chapman's assistance.[27]

Evangelism and the Presbyterian Church

In 1901 Presbyterian layman and millionaire John Converse, president of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, urged the General Assembly to create a special committee to promote evangelism within the Presbyterian Church, and he lent both his wealth and energy to this effort. The Assembly approved of the idea and chose Chapman as the corresponding secretary of the twelve-man committee. Converse served as chairman. The denomination wanted Chapman's services full time, but Fourth Presbyterian of New York balked at losing their pastor. Chapman therefore tried to juggle his responsibilities to the committee and his church as well as his duties at the Winona Lake Bible Conference. Unable to maintain this load, Chapman finally persuaded his church to release him in 1903.

John Converse was the driving force behind the evangelism committee. The concept was for the denomination to organize and finance meetings in places where financial resources were limited, such as rural, thinly populated areas and impoverished areas. The plan originally called for no offerings to be taken, with Converse supplying the money through the treasury of the committee. However, offerings from the local supporters dropped off almost entirely, so offerings during the meetings were revived, and the Committee supplemented them.[28] Chapman later memorialized Converse for having given liberally to evangelistic efforts: "He never said 'no' to any appeal which I presented to him."[29] Converse also provided financially for Chapman himself, so he labored in full-time evangelism under less financial pressures than most evangelists.[30]

Chapman's duties for the committee included organizing campaigns across the country and, after he left Fourth Presbyterian, preaching himself when possible. For the first year and a half, his work focused on organizing and overseeing committee-sponsored meetings through a staff of over fifty

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[26] Ramsay, 108.

[27] An indication of the deep influence that Moody had upon Chapman is reflected in the fact that Chapman says that when he went back to the pastorate after this first experience in evangelism, Moody "seemed disturbed." Moody hoped he would stay in evangelism. Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 17.

[28] See Ottman, 121–22, for a description of the committee's organization. Chapman described the original plan: "Mr. John H. Converse suggests that the money necessary for such evangelistic services be secured by contributions from those willing to aid in the work, and not from church collections. It is also suggested, that, if possible, no collections be taken in the tents." Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 224.

[29] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 99.

[30] While still pastor of Fourth Presbyterian (1901–03), Chapman received $2,000 a year from the Presbyterian Church for his services to the committee, funds underwritten by Converse. John Converse to J. Wilbur Chapman, October 23, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4. With the start of his full-time work for the committee, Chapman's salary increased to $6,000 annually, again with Converse's support. Beyond that, John Converse established a trust for Chapman, assuring the evangelist of at least $4,000 a year above the committee's salary. The millionaire also guaranteed a large sum to Chapman in case he became incapacitated. Although Converse died in 1910, he made provision in his will to continue Chapman's trust. "Deed of Trust of John H. Converse to the Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman," February 1, 1905, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

evangelists and the leadership of local pastors.[31] Then after leaving the pastorate, Chapman began conducting campaigns from 1904 to 1908 in Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Dallas, Cincinnati, and several smaller cities.

Winona Lake and Evangelism

Chapman also helped the Winona Lake organization promote evangelism. Because the Winona leadership envisioned their organization as the vanguard of a movement to spread Christian influence across America, they threw themselves wholeheartedly behind Chapman's efforts.[32] Chapman made Winona Lake a center for evangelism. Winona participated directly through its "Camp Meetings," campaigns held just before or just after the conference that featured various evangelists. Chapman also scheduled evangelistic conferences in connection with the Bible conference. These evangelistic conferences provided support and instruction for evangelists with a focus on methodology, philosophy, and exhortation. At first Chapman led the conferences personally and later organized them under the auspices of the Interdenominational Association of Evangelists, a professional organization for evangelists he was instrumental in founding at Winona Lake (discussed below).

The Chapman-Alexander Campaigns

J. Wilbur Chapman's greatest fame as an evangelist came after his decision in 1908 to join forces with evangelistic song leader Charles ("Charlie") Alexander (1867–1920). Alexander had already spent several years in evangelism, most notably as music director for R. A. Torrey. Chapman and Alexander united in what was officially called "The Chapman-Alexander Simultaneous Mission."[33] Chapman told Converse that the meetings would follow the pattern of the simultaneous meetings he was currently conducting except "that Mr. Alexander and myself are to have a larger central district."[34]

The Chapman-Alexander work began in Philadelphia with a large campaign (March–April 1908) followed by several others in the United States and Canada, notably their famous Boston campaign (1909). But from the start both were eager to conduct evangelism abroad. Their first, and in many ways greatest, international effort was in Australia during the first half of 1909. Ottman, Chapman's

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[31] See Ottman, 122–24.

[32] Thomas Kane, a member of the Winona board, noted the movement to promote evangelism in America and said that "since the organization of the General Assembly's Evangelistic Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. John H. Converse, of Philadelphia, and Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman . . . as Secretary, both our staunch friends, Winona has become the center, or, rather, the right arm of the entire movement." Thomas Kane, "The Present and Future of Winona," in *1903 Program of Winona Assembly* (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1903), 9. Converse expressly allowed room in the terms of his trust to Chapman for "the summer work at Winona." John Converse to J. Wilbur Chapman, October 17, 1902, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[33] "Memorandum of Agreement between Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles M. Alexander," dated January 30, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

[34] J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 24, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4. In describing the new partnership to Converse, Chapman told his benefactor, "It has always been understood that Mr. Alexander was rather the heavier and better part of the combination [with Torrey]." J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 21, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 4.

biographer and a participant in these campaigns, said that in the more than three months of the Australia meetings Chapman "preached three hundred times, an average of three times each day" and that the entire team held a thousand meetings altogether.[35] Some 15,000 attended his concluding meeting in Melbourne.[36] Between 1911 and 1914 Chapman and Alexander followed this effort with campaigns in England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland as well as a second one in Australia and the rest of Australasia (1912–13). While Billy Sunday was the most famous American evangelist in the 1910s, Chapman took the opportunity to explore international opportunities. The First World War, however, cut short Chapman's work abroad and aborted his plans for further international work. The rest of his career was spent in the United States.

Evangelistic Theory

Two characteristics of Chapman make him stand out among evangelists of the period: his education and his published writings. Unlike the pastoral ministry, the office of evangelist has not often been associated with either educational attainment or skill in research or writing. The most famous evangelists, Moody, Sunday, and Sam Jones, were not highly educated. Chapman, however, along with Torrey and Biederwolf, not only attended graduate school and seminary but also wrote books on evangelism and the ministry that explained their philosophy and methodology.[37] Chapman's writings are not profound, but his style is clear and his thinking systematic.[38]

Philosophy

Chapman believed that the evangelist held a definite office in the NT era, that evangelism was not simply an extension of the work of the minister.[39] Yet he by no means separated the evangelist from the overall life of the church; he certainly did not conceive of evangelism as the province of evangelists only. Chapman argued that "the real soul winner is the pastor, his first assistant is the church-member and the evangelist is the specialist who comes to perform a needed service at a critical time."[40] The work must be cooperative and manifest none of the rivalry that sometimes emerged between the evangelist and local ministers. He declared that "no evangelistic campaign is worth while if it disturbs

[35] Ottman, 155. In the sections on the foreign campaign, Ottman's narrative often lapses into a travelogue, perhaps because of his personal participation.

[36] Ibid., 171.

[37] It is this characteristic of these three men that motivated James Cogdill to consider them jointly in his dissertation. Cogdill, "A Major Stream of American Mass Evangelism," 3. The original observation appears to go back to William McLoughlin's description of them as "college graduates with formal seminary training and sufficient theological knowledge to entitle them to the doctor of divinity degrees they were awarded." *Modern Revivalism,* 365.

[38] One irritating quality of Chapman's writing was inserting into his narrative lengthy quotations from other writers (all duly credited). One of the worst examples is Chapman's *Revivals and Missions,* in which only a little under half of the book is Chapman's own writing.

[39] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 181.

[40] Ibid., 185.

too much the regular life of the Church" and "that evangelistic work, if it is to be permanently effective, should be simply an added emphasis given to the regular work of the Church."[41]

Chapman insisted on a close relationship between pastors and evangelists. He argued that pastors should be evangelistic, not simply on the personal level, but in their pulpit ministries and the organization of their churches. He once suggested that a pastor hold a month of evangelistic services in his church, doing the preaching himself.[42] Practicing what he preached, Chapman began his ministry at Bethany Presbyterian Church with such a month-long evangelistic campaign. Likewise, Chapman thought evangelists should have experience as pastors so "that they may be in sympathy with pastors whom they help."[43] Chapman himself was even referred to as "The Pastor Evangelist."[44]

Another key characteristic was Chapman's willingness to consider innovation. "The evangelistic Church," he wrote, "is one that is willing to use any method until one is found that can turn the attention of lost men to Christ."[45] He said that "we must be wedded to no particular method if we would be successful in our work. There are some men who seem to be constitutionally opposed to anything that savors of variety or change."[46] For instance, he was willing to hold services on fairgrounds where there would be not only ample room but also where the "novelty" might attract people "who never would think of darkening the doors of a church."[47]

Chapman saw urban mass evangelism as but one component of overall Christian evangelism—and not necessarily the primary component. While believing that mass union meetings and professional evangelists still played an important role, Chapman thought a greater emphasis should be laid on pastoral evangelism and personal evangelism.[48] His books on evangelism and outreach included chapters on how the church might bend all of its ministries to focus on reaching the lost. For example, having himself made a profession of faith in a Sunday school class, Chapman laid great stress on making the Sunday school an evangelistic outreach.[49]

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[41] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 178, 179.

[42] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 121. He did write that "the extra [evangelistic] service is almost a confession of failure of the regular means of grace" (130–31), but he seems to be emphasizing here the need for a constant evangelistic theme to be woven into the church ministry.

[43] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 187. Elsewhere he quoted with approval an unnamed evangelist who said, "The ordained evangelist should be one who has formerly been a pastor." Ibid., 184.

[44] Ramsay notes this description from Frank Beardsley, *Heralds of Salvation* (Philadelphia: American Tract Society, 1939), 168–77. See Ramsay, 157.

[45] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 138–39.

[46] Ibid., 36. See also Chapman, *Fishing for Men,* 36.

[47] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 222. He suggested using tents for evangelistic services for similar reasons. Ibid., 219–26.

[48] Ibid., 23–24.

[49] See, for example, his chapters "Evangelistic Sunday School" (Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 202–13) and "A Revival in the Sunday School" (Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 121–32). As a child, Chapman attended a Presbyterian Sunday school in the morning and a Methodist one in the afternoon. It was his Methodist teacher who encouraged him to take a public stand for Christ. Chapman said of this incident, "I do not know that that was the time of my conversion, but I do know that it was the day when one of the most profound impressions of my life was made upon me." Chapman, *The Personal Touch in Service,* 12, 14.

Even in connection with his own campaigns, Chapman emphasized the importance of other means of evangelism. Of his meeting in Swansea, Wales (1911), he reported that "literally hundreds of people were won to Christ by personal invitation, some of them never came to the meetings at all."[50] In short, evangelism was not just what evangelists did. "One may be evangelistic just by the way he enters the pulpit, by the way he announces his hymns, by the spirit of his prayer, by the yearning influence of his sermon. In other words, he may be evangelistic because of what he is."[51]

Nevertheless, Chapman unquestionably viewed the evangelistic crusade as an important component of evangelism. In addition to pastoral or personal evangelism, "the special evangelistic service is a necessity."[52] An evangelistic church, he advised, "is not of necessity a Church which holds extra services although these are as a rule advisable, for it is by the extraordinary service that the attention of some is called to Christ who would not otherwise think of him in their busy lives."[53]

While the evangelist ought not to usurp the place of the pastor, he was nonetheless important to the function of the church. The evangelist "ought to sustain the same relation to the Church at large as a specialist in the medical profession."[54] For instance, he called for evangelists to help with home missions on "the western frontier" and in "smaller cities and towns" where they could help overburdened pastors.[55] He saw the evangelist helping even in "larger and more successful churches" where they could build on the pastor's work and bring to fruition work the pastor had been doing.[56]

Although Chapman clearly had a philosophy of evangelism, he never offered what one could call a theology of evangelism. Believing the evangelistic call to be an obvious mandate for the Christian, he rarely delved into the biblical rationale for the work. Although he was himself undeniably a conservative in theology[57] and often stressed the deity of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible as the foundation of Christian belief and of evangelistic work, he did not become a theologian of revival like Jonathan Edwards. In his earlier years he equated revival and evangelism,[58] but rather than exposit biblical teaching on evangelism, he focused more on exhortation and matters of practical organization.

Chapman's "Social Gospel"

Because he ministered in the Progressive era of political reform and at a time when the church wrestled with the newly minted "social gospel," Chapman commented on the social purpose of the

[50] Quoted in Ottman, 222.

[51] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 69–70.

[52] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 203.

[53] Ibid., 99.

[54] Ibid., 206.

[55] Ibid., 189.

[56] Ibid., 190.

[57] Cogdill gives a good overview of the heart of Chapman's theology, 176–96, especially as his theology related to evangelism, but Cogdill has to piece this together from Chapman's writings and sermons. Chapman did not write or preach systematically on theology, even the theology of evangelism.

[58] This is most evident in his book *Revivals and Missions* (1900), although even here the exposition is more by lengthy quotations from other writers, notably Charles Finney. See also Cogdill, 199–202.

church, sometimes at length. Ottman accurately summarizes Chapman's view as being "that social wrong is only the symbol of spiritual wrong and that spiritual remedies will alone heal what is ultimately a spiritual malady."[59] Chapman did not disdain social reform, but he nuanced his pronouncements. For example, he wrote, "There is what men call 'A Social Gospel,' and it is well to keep it in mind, for there is great danger in neglecting the social side of the Christian life, in being so well satisfied that we ourselves are saved that we shall forget all about the needs of others. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of personal salvation, but we may easily under-emphasize our responsibility to others less fortunate than ourselves."[60]

Chapman commented on "how impossible it is to be a true Christian, and then be indifferent to existing conditions in the social and business world which make for the oppression of the poor." He said that "no believer in the 'social gospel'" could be stronger than he was "in his determination to overthrow, if possible, the influences which cause us much of sorrow in the world." Yet "at the same time no one could insist more strenuously than I upon the individualistic message of Jesus when He said to one whose moral life was above reproach, 'Ye must be born again.'"[61] Chapman's emphasis was not on correcting unjust social structures, as advocates of the social gospel argued, but on reform that allowed individuals to live righteously within society. As for the evangelists themselves, he said directly, "Evangelists should be primarily soul winners and not reformers."[62]

Critics of evangelism are less antagonistic to Chapman than to others such as Sam Jones or Billy Sunday. Usually, criticism falls on Chapman when he is lumped with the others. McLoughlin charges Chapman with being one of the major evangelists who "transformed" American urban evangelism "from the pious soul-winning of D. L. Moody to the barn-storming 100 per cent Americanism of Billy Sunday," an assertion that frankly does not stand scrutiny.[63] Eric Crouse notes that during Chapman's Canadian campaigns some working-class critics tied the evangelist to what they viewed as hostile capitalist interests.[64] Chapman was certainly comfortable with capitalists, as shown by his own close friendship with John Converse, but there is no evidence that he ever served as a tool of repressive social forces.[65]

In fact, Chapman displayed a concern for extending evangelism to the poor. A common shortcoming of urban evangelism, despite its focus on the city in general, was that it found greatest

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[59] Ottman, 314. It is not clear from the context whether these words are actually Chapman's or are Ottman's representation of his view, but it is an accurate summation.

[60] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 49.

[61] Ibid., 50–51.

[62] Article "Evangelism," n.d. (internal evidence indicates a date during World War I), JWCP, Box 5, Folder 26.

[63] McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 364.

[64] Eric Crouse, "Great Expectations: J. Wilbur Chapman, Presbyterians, and Other Protestants in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78 (2000): 165. See also the expanded discussion in Crouse's *Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884–1914,* Volume 35 in McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion, Series 2 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), particularly Chapter 5 on Chapman, "Transition," 116–32.

[65] Purdy, 17, argues that Chapman's pro-business views were moderated by his advocacy of social reform and by his premillennialism, which reduced his interest in economic issues.

success in reaching middle-class audiences. Rarely did it reach the working class and even more rarely did it reach the urban poor. Chapman felt this weakness keenly. He believed true evangelism must reflect the words of Christ to John the Baptist that "the poor have the gospel preached unto them" (Matt 11:5). He wrote to John Converse in 1908, "I would like also to have before me as an ambition, a ministry to the unchurched and the poor."[66]

Chapman pursued this goal in part by promoting the work of urban rescue missions to evangelize the poorest and most destitute. He became a close friend of Samuel H. Hadley, director of the Water Street Rescue Mission in New York, one of the pioneer rescue missions. Chapman promoted Hadley's work and even wrote a biography of him.[67] Chapman established special conferences at the Winona Lake Bible Conference to bring rescue-mission workers together and expose other Christians to their work. He entrusted these meetings to Hadley and also attracted other noted rescue-mission workers, such as Mel Trotter of Grand Rapids.

Chapman attempted to incorporate outreach to the lower classes into his own work. Among his associates in his evangelistic campaigns were William and Virginia Asher, Christian workers noted for their success in reaching alcoholics, prostitutes, and others of the urban underclass. Chapman also brought Charles Stelzle into his campaigns to reach workers. Reared, as the title of his autobiography states, in the slum-ridden Bowery of New York,[68] Stelzle took a keen interest in ministering to the poor and working classes. He served as Superintendent of the Presbyterian Church's Department of Church and Labor from 1903 to 1913 and left the denomination when it sought to curtail this work. In his efforts to reach laborers, Stelzle spoke at factories and served as a delegate to meetings of the American Federation of Labor.

During Chapman's Boston campaign, churches raised money to buy food and other goods for the poor and then recruited volunteers to package and deliver them.[69] Also in Boston, Chapman, Alexander, and their team, in connection with the Salvation Army, held services at Scollay Square among the down-and-outers.[70] One method that Chapman adopted to reach poorer areas was to march publicly into the seamier districts of cities as a testimony and then conduct meetings and personal evangelism. In a typical, if unusually large march, he led 15,000 people through Seattle's red-light district.[71] Chapman did not see large numbers of converts from the lower classes, but it was not for lack of trying.

In particular, the idea of reaching men (as opposed to women) with the gospel also characterized Chapman's work. Margaret Bendroth, analyzing Chapman's Boston campaign of 1909, notes Chapman's success in drawing middle-class businessmen to the church, an allegedly difficult group

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[66] J. Wilbur Chapman to John Converse, January 27, 1908, JWCP, Box 1, Folder 1.

[67] J. Wilbur Chapman, *S. H. Hadley of Water Street* (New York: Revell, 1906).

[68] Charles Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926).

[69] Arcturus Z. Conrad, ed., *Boston's Awakening* (Boston: The King's Business, 1909), 119–20.

[70] Ibid., 137–43. Salvation Army leader Evangeline Booth was among the associates with the Chapman team during the Boston campaign.

[71] Dale E. Soden, "Anatomy of a Presbyterian Urban Revival: J. W. Chapman in the Pacific Northwest," *American Presbyterians* 64 (1986), 53–54.

for evangelical Christianity to reach.[72] Analyzing the reports and sermons of the campaign, she says that Chapman presented a masculine ideal and tailored his messages to draw men.[73] Yet her observations demonstrate only that Chapman sometimes expressed himself in "gendered" terms, not that gender issues dominated his thinking or drove his message. A close look at Chapman's ministry does reveal an emphasis on reaching men. One should take the title of his book *Fishing for Men* literally—its purpose was to show how to reach men with the gospel, to attract them to Christ. The last half of the book consists of sermons by different preachers (William Biederwolf, L. W. Munhall, etc.) reputed to be effective in reaching men. In his campaigns he often held (as many evangelists did) meetings for men only as well as special meetings aimed at businessmen.

Yet Chapman does not seem to have adapted his message as much as some evangelists. While others pushed a "muscular Christianity" that allegedly appealed more to men, Chapman focused on simply reaching and confronting men with the same message urged upon women and children. Even his sermons to men seemed not so much crafted to "male interests" but rather straightforward evangelistic messages typical of those he delivered to mixed audiences.[74] A reporter reviewing the Boston campaign noted, "Men fill the [Tremont] Temple at the noon meetings; in the evening women predominate. But always there are more men than women who sign the decision cards."[75] Reaching men was a part of reaching people in general.

Methods

Chapman's openness to innovation led him to experiment. His goal was not novelty, except insofar as novelty might capture people's interest and thereby promote evangelism. Refusing to be bound by tradition, or even his own previous practices, Chapman remained flexible and open to suggestions.

Simultaneous Campaign

A method closely associated with Chapman was his simultaneous campaign. Borrowing from B. Fay Mills's district-combination plan, he decentralized the evangelistic campaign. Previously, the usual approach had been a single mass meeting, as used effectively by D. L. Moody.[76] Such a campaign

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[72] Margaret Bendroth, "Men, Masculinity, and Urban Revivalism: J. Wilbur Chapman's Boston Crusade, 1909," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 75 (1997): 235–36. See also her *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches, 1885–1950,* Religion in America Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter 7, "Civic Revivalism: J. Wilbur Chapman's Crusade, 1909," 128–40. For further analysis of Chapman's campaigns from a social and gender-related perspective, see Thekla Ellen Joiner, *Sin in the City: Chicago and Revivalism, 1880–1920* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), Chapter 3, "'Convert Chicago through Its Women!' The 1910 Chapman-Alexander Simultaneous Campaign," 109–67.

[73] Bendroth, 240.

[74] See, e.g., "A Solemn Talk to Men," January 23, 1916, JWCP, Box 5, Folder 19, and "A Message to Men," November 7, 1915, JWCP, Box 5, Folder 20.

[75] Conrad, 82.

[76] Moody himself experimented with a form of the decentralized campaign, notably the effort in Chicago in 1893 in connection with the World's Fair. Chapman was one of Moody's associates in this effort. See McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism,* 378.

established one central location for meetings, and all efforts were bent to promoting those meetings. Mills had tried holding meetings in several places within an urban center to see whether he could more effectively blanket the area. Chapman modified this concept further, restoring some of the focus of the single mass meeting. The main evangelist still had a central location that was a major focus of the campaign, but other evangelists held smaller meetings in other venues. Sometimes these smaller meetings had a special focus, such as meetings for young people, children, or factory workers. At other times the meetings were simply focused on geographic areas. He held the first of his simultaneous campaigns in Pittsburgh in 1904, and results were encouraging enough to warrant further exploration of the idea.[77]

The largest and most famous of his campaigns, the Boston campaign of 1909, was the acme of the simultaneous method. Evangelical forces in the city mobilized to deliver the largest evangelistic wallop possible. Some 160 churches cooperated and held meetings six nights a week for three weeks in different areas of the city. Organizers divided the city into twenty-seven sections, each led by an evangelist or pastor aided by a team of lay workers. The lead and associate evangelists held 990 services over the course of the campaign. The central district focused on Tremont Temple, where Chapman and Alexander labored. The effort climaxed with four days of meetings (no other meetings being held at this time) in Mechanics Hall, the largest auditorium in Boston, where over 10,000 people crowded in for each of the final sessions.[78]

The simultaneous method had its advantages. Crouse notes that the novelty of the simultaneous method caught the attention of newspapers in Canada,[79] as it likely did elsewhere. The sheer size of the effort fostered a high degree of organization, efficiency, and wholehearted local involvement. Chapman wrote early in his career, "The Holy Ghost is not to be bound by rules, as we have already said; but it certainly cannot be displeasing to Him to have a well-defined plan and nearly as possible a perfect organization."[80] Dale Soden suggests that with the simultaneous method Chapman owed a debt to "the overall culture of the Progressive period," saying, "Clearly the values of specialization and efficiency dominated the thinking of people in every field from business to city government."[81] Almost as a by-product, the approach provided a training ground for other evangelists. Among the Chapman associates who went on to notable careers in evangelism were William Biederwolf and Irish evangelist W. P. Nicholson.

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[77] Hobbs provides a good summary overview of the 1904 Pittsburgh campaign, 123–29.

[78] The best source on the Boston campaign is Conrad's, *Boston's Awakening.*

[79] Crouse, 159.

[80] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 83.

[81] Soden, 51. The pragmatism Chapman displayed in his evangelistic methodology is not unusual for Presbyterians, even conservatives, in this era. Consistent with the emphases of the Progressive era, Presbyterians in general stressed a concern for efficiency in all phases of church work. For a general discussion of this trend, see John Wiers, "Pragmatic Evangelical Presbyterians: Theological Moderates in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1870–1920" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1995).

Yet because of the time, labor, and money expended, the simultaneous method raised unrealistic expectations for results.[82] Ottman says of the simultaneous approach, "In some respects these meetings, though most carefully arranged, were disappointing, but in other respects the success was phenomenal. . . . In all campaigns Dr. Chapman was the central sun around which the other evangelists as satellites revolved. The ill success of the lesser lights was charged against the general movement."[83] When Chapman used the method overseas, foreign critics echoed those in America who charged that the results of the subordinate meetings did not seem commensurate with the effort. Ottman claims that "in his later years" Chapman concluded that the simultaneous method was "not the best method."[84] In the last few years of his ministry Chapman reverted to the single mass meeting approach.

Evangelistic Music

An emphasis on music came naturally to J. Wilbur Chapman. He was musically inclined, having played the violin until finances forced him to sell the instrument while in college. He later edited hymnbooks[85] and wrote songs himself, most famously "Our Great Saviour" ("Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners") and "One Day."[86] While pastor at First Reformed in Albany, Chapman won over a staid congregation through the use of gospel music. A member of the Albany church said that at the beginning of Chapman's pastorate the "congregation had an atmosphere only less alien to the fervour of evangelism than the North Pole."[87] D. L. Moody advised him to raise this spiritual temperature through spirited singing. Moody sent Chapman hymn sheets, but an elder who found the pastor putting these into the pew racks told him he could not do this. When he told this to Moody, the older man replied, "Dear Chapman:—You do not know how to get along with church officers. Slip those hymns in when they do not know it and sing them." Chapman said that he "was much more afraid of disturbing Mr. Moody than any church officer," and did as Moody advised. The church sang "Ring the Bells of Heaven" the next service, and that won over even the elders.[88]

Chapman thought so much of the role of music that he devoted a chapter to "The Evangelist in Song" in one of his books.[89] In that chapter he foreshadowed the partnership he later enjoyed with Alexander. Of musical evangelists he said, "They are not and they ought not to be the business agent of the evangelist; they are not to serve in the capacity of a private secretary, they are not to be his

[82] The Boston campaign cost around $20,000, which Conrad says comes down to about sixteen cents per person in the 120,000 members of evangelical churches that supported the effort, but this was still a substantial amount. Conrad, 43.

[83] Ottman, 125–26.

[84] Ibid., 207. He adds, "But what is the best method? Perhaps pastoral evangelism which he afterward—in fact, always—so ardently advocated."

[85] See the listing in Ramsay, 147–48.

[86] A sermon by Chapman on Psalm 45:8 also inspired Henry Barraclough to write "Out of the Ivory Palaces."

[87] Ottman, 55.

[88] Chapman, *The Minister's Handicap,* 103–5.

[89] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 192–202.

servant, for the position of the evangelist in song is side by side with the evangelist who preaches the Gospel."[90]

Understanding Chapman's attitude toward the song leader goes far to explain his smooth and successful relationship with Charles Alexander and how Alexander became a key player in his campaigns.[91] Alexander, like most of the major evangelistic song leaders of the period, served as the master of ceremonies for the meetings, warming up the audience and drawing them into the spirit of the service. A reporter attending the Boston campaign said that "after a half hour of song and prayer under the leading of Mr. Alexander, the audience was in good humor, enthusiastic, ready for the message of the sermon, feeling more like a company of old friends than like a crowd of chance neighbors."[92]

Mechanics

The work of evangelism required not only theory but also nitty-gritty details. A basic example is Chapman's use of decision cards. Popularized by Mills, the decision card served evangelists as a source for statistics and were key in follow-up work by directing respondents to one of the supporting churches. Chapman used at least two forms of the decision card. The first was for those who showed interest in the message but were uncertain of their own spiritual status:

> I have an Honest Desire Henceforth to Live a Christian Life.
> I am willing to follow any light God may give me.
> I ask the People of God to Pray for me.[93]

The other was for those who definitely wanted to commit themselves to Christ: "Turning from all past sins, and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I do hereby decide, God helping me, to henceforth lead a Christian life. This I do, freely, fully and forever."[94]

Chapman viewed the decision card not as an end but as a step in the process of conversion. The local chairman of the Boston campaign said, "It is well understood that a card is not a convert, but an opportunity" to be followed up by "the pastor and Christian worker."[95] Chapman himself said in a letter he sent to pastors preparing for his campaigns, "I wish very much to make it plain to you that I do not count every one who may sign the inquirer's card a *convert.* They may be (for one could accept Christ in so simple a manner as this), and in many cases they are, but if they are not, they are in a

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[90] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 200.

[91] On Alexander and his career, see J. Kennedy MacLean, *Chapman and Alexander: The Story of Their Lives and Work* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1915), and Helen Cadbury Alexander, with J. Kennedy MacLean, *Charles M. Alexander: A Romance of Song and Soul-Winning,* 3rd ed. (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.).

[92] Conrad, 85. See also the full description of how Alexander used music and prepared a crowd in one service in the Boston campaign, 74–76.

[93] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 126.

[94] Ibid., 127.

[95] Conrad, 31.

position where they may be easily won."[96] He said in Boston, "I haven't a particle of ambition about the number of cards that may be signed. I never make any announcement of the number that may have been signed at the meetings that I conduct. They go right to the pastors named in them. Neither you nor I know if a person has been converted. God alone knows the heart."[97]

As his use of the decision cards indicates, Chapman laid great stress on follow-up. For him, the "call to repentance or an invitation to come to Christ . . . is only the beginning."[98] He called for "widening the scope" of evangelism beyond calling for repentance and seeing repentant sinners brought into the church; he wanted "to reproduce the Spirit of Christ in the world. It is a call to men to live in such fellowship with him that the world taking knowledge of them shall know that they have been with Jesus."[99] At times, Chapman's call for discipleship blended into his individualistic version of the social gospel: "We may make fine distinctions as to dispensational truth in which I confess I believe with all my heart, but this wicked world waits for the manifestation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in home life, in Church activities, and in the business world, and will be satisfied with nothing less. Evangelistic effort which stops short of the training and culture of the one saved is not such preaching and service could merit the divine approval."[100]

Chapman devised a four-step plan for following up decisions: immediate visit by pastor or dependable helper, urging of those who made some decision to offer a public commitment at a regular church service, enrolling the convert in a special class in church, and putting the convert to work in Christian service.[101]

Chapman varied the mechanics of his invitations at the close of the service. When he served as a pastor, for example, one method was to have church officers go through the congregation near the conclusion of the service. They were to seek those who seemed affected by the sermon and give them cards to sign that said they would be willing to have a visit from the minister.[102] Chapman included the traditional altar call among his methods, inviting people to come and kneel at the front or stand by the pastor as he prayed. Whatever method the preacher chose, Chapman advised, "Do not simply preach about Christ and tell how to come to him; but give your hearers an opportunity to make a profession of faith. It is true that the Holy Spirit is waiting to do his work; but it is also true that past history shows that He elects to work through God's people. We are His chosen instruments."[103]

Despite his own experience as a young inquirer with Moody, Chapman does not seem to have often used an inquiry room, asking respondents to go to another room for counseling and prayer.[104] Instead, his preferred method was an after-meeting, asking concerned persons to remain in place after

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[96] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 84.

[97] Quoted in Conrad, 92.

[98] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 60.

[99] Ibid., 57–58.

[100] Ibid., 63.

[101] Ibid., 235–36.

[102] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 101–2.

[103] Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 119.

[104] Conrad, for example, said that Chapman rarely used the inquiry room in the Boston campaign. Conrad, 30.

the rest of the crowd left. Once the audience was reduced to inquirers, the after-meeting could include fuller explanation or exhortation by the evangelist or other worker and then an opportunity for workers to deal personally with those who needed help. Chapman apparently came to believe the after-meeting was the best method, even giving instructions about how one should be conducted.[105]

Structure and Accountability

Chapman desired to find some means of bringing structure and accountability to the field of evangelism. By its nature, evangelism, particularly of the interdenominational kind, defied regulation and invited independence. W. P. Nicholson, for a time an associate of Chapman, recalled, "I came across some evangelists who, when asked what church they belonged to, would say, 'I belong to the Lord.' I always felt a wee bit suspicious about them."[106] For most religious work of that time, denominations provided structure, regulation, and accountability. Denominations controlled not only individual congregations but also missions, publishing houses, colleges, seminaries, and other outreaches. Evangelism was different. Furthermore, evangelism was one aspect of church work for which there was no professional training.

Chapman lamented this lack of accountability. "Evangelists should not be permitted to be free lances," he said. "They should be men approved by their brethren in the ministry."[107] In advising churches on how to conduct union evangelistic meetings, Chapman cautioned that the evangelist "should certainly be accredited."[108] He believed the field of evangelism would be more credible "did only the Church exercise her authority in training, in oversight, and even in discipline."[109] It puzzled Chapman that standards could be so low for evangelists. "We train our ministers and give them special oversight," he said. "They are not licensed if they are not orthodox. Their license is recalled if at any time they become heterodox either in living or teaching." He noted that YMCA secretaries and even some Sunday school superintendents received professional training. But where, he asked, are evangelists educated? Education for evangelism should be, Chapman argued, in the seminaries. "I cannot understand how it can at all be inconsistent with the highest scholarship to train men to evangelize nor why the seminary should not be a place where men's souls would be set on fire for God. It is because the church has exercised little oversight in this matter that irresponsible evangelists have gone forth into the church."[110]

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[105] See, e.g., "The After-Meeting" in Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 124–36, and "The After Meeting" in Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 99–111. In a section he quotes from an evangelical Anglican writer on parish missions, there is even a description of "a second after-meeting" in which all those in the first after-meeting are asked to leave if they do not want personal counseling. Chapman, *Revivals and Missions,* 179.

[106] Mavis Heaney, ed., *To God Be the Glory: The Personal Memoirs of Rev. William P. Nicholson* (Belfast: Ambassador, 2004), 33.

[107] Article "Evangelism," n.d., JWCP, Box 5, Folder 26.

[108] Chapman, *The Problem of the Work,* 178.

[109] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 20; see also 25–26.

[110] Ibid., 186–87.

One answer was to rely on the denominational structure. Chapman, after all, served as secretary on a committee on evangelism sponsored by the Presbyterian Church, and his campaigns after leaving Fourth Presbyterian in 1903 were launched under Presbyterian auspices, although almost always with interdenominational participation. In addition, as secretary he oversaw campaigns, meetings, and missions led by Presbyterian ministers and evangelists, held under the oversight of local presbyteries. He endorsed the vote of the Presbyterian Church in 1909 to expand its evangelistic work by promoting overseas cooperation. Ford Ottman says Chapman returned from his tour of Australia buoyed up with the idea of uniting Christian forces "for an interdenominational, world-encircling, evangelistic campaign."[111] He thought Christians could do this by harnessing Presbyterian groups worldwide, and he tried to coordinate such an effort through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, though hopes never materialized.[112]

Nevertheless, Chapman realized that denominational oversight had its limitations, especially in a field where so much work crossed denominational lines. Likely, this was the reason he took the lead in founding the Interdenominational Association of Evangelists (founded 1904, incorporated 1906) at Winona Lake. Chapman envisioned this association as a professional organization for evangelists, providing a uniform code of ethics and maintaining an orthodox doctrinal foundation for their work. The organization also helped secure meetings for its members. Although many leading evangelists joined the IAE—its membership peaked at around one thousand—it remained a voluntary organization with little machinery to enforce its guidelines or decisions.[113]

Style

Chapman recalled that once he tried to memorize "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards. Although finding its message relevant, he said, "I was soon convinced that the sermon in itself, while its truth was still great, was in its expression and vocabulary not for this generation."[114] Chapman's own style was suited to his times.

W. E. Slemmons of the First Presbyterian Church of Washington, Pennsylvania, said of Chapman after a campaign in his city, "Not one word of slang has escaped the preacher of righteousness. There has been no brow-beating of the minister. There have been no rhetorical exercises in vituperation."[115] Gilling accurately describes Chapman's preaching as not theological, like Torrey's, but more like Moody's in emotional appeal.[116]

Chapman's sermons are suffused with sentiment and abundant illustrations. His evangelistic sermons, which are by far the largest portion of his sermons that have survived, did not so much

[111] Ottman, 205.

[112] Ibid., 205–6.

[113] For more on Chapman and the IAE, see Purdy, 109–11.

[114] Quoted in Conrad, 52–53.

[115] Ottman, 285. One notes that Slemmons offers his observation after Billy Sunday had climbed to prominence, but it is not clear that Slemmons had this fact in mind.

[116] Gilling, 83.

exposit the Bible as take a biblical theme, lay out three or four ramifications of the idea, and illustrate the points richly. His sermons are filled with heart-rending accounts of young men and women gone wrong, of repentant sons returning to faithful mothers, of death-bed scenes in which children utter flowery phrases worthy of Louisa May Alcott (though not as well crafted). If Chapman was right that Jonathan Edwards's style was only for his day, then too was Chapman's. Yet clearly, in Chapman's own day, audiences responded.

Conclusion

Chapman continued to hold campaigns throughout the 1910s, usually in connection with Charles Alexander. The scope of his work diminished after 1914 when World War I ended his international efforts, but he remained a popular evangelist in the United States. Although by then Billy Sunday had surpassed him in public notice, there is no indication that he resented his former assistant's prominence. He always expressed delight in Sunday's success.[117] In 1917 the Presbyterian Church rewarded Chapman's lifetime of service by electing him moderator. Health problems began to afflict him, in part because of his refusal to slow his pace. He died unexpectedly on Christmas Day 1918 of complications from gallstone surgery. He was fifty-nine years old.

Evaluating an evangelist's success is always difficult. The primary means is usually numbers: How many people did the evangelist reach? Of course, trying to quantify spiritual decisions is by its very nature uncertain. In Chapman's case, numbers are even more problematic because Chapman did not publish his results. Although newspapers tried to provide numbers, Chapman's use of after-meetings hindered reporters from estimating the number of converts.[118]

One can also note the influence of Chapman on his successors. As already mentioned, Chapman launched Billy Sunday into his evangelistic career, and Sunday continued to revere Chapman as his mentor. Yet Sunday followed a method different from Chapman's and certainly preached in a different style. As mentioned earlier, others influenced by Chapman include William Biederwolf, who became a leading evangelist known not only for his preaching but also, like Chapman, for his writing on evangelistic theory and philosophy. One should also note Irish evangelist W. P. Nicholson, who served as an associate to Chapman. Hobbs observes, "Perhaps more than any prior evangelist Chapman took his distinctively American revival techniques and applied them to an overseas setting."[119] Hobbs likely undervalues the famed Moody-Sankey campaign in England of 1873–75 in this regard, but he has a point. Nicholson, influenced by Chapman, transplanted the American style of evangelism to Northern Ireland and in the 1920s led one of the most profound revivals in twentieth-century Europe.

Ironically, for all his willingness to experiment and innovate, Chapman left little mark on evangelistic methodology. He is best known for pioneering the simultaneous method of evangelism,

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[117] Cogdill preserves an interesting quotation from an interview with Chapman (233–34). Chapman admitted, "Sunday is a sensational evangelist; but he is the highest type of sensational evangelist." He denied that Sunday did things "merely for the sake of sensationalism" but because "he has an overmastering passion to win men to God."

[118] Gilling, 91.

[119] Hobbs, 204.

but that approach faded even in his own lifetime. Still, specialization and organization, the hallmarks of the simultaneous method, continued to play a role in evangelism. If Chapman was not responsible for originating these ideas, he at least promoted them and emphasized their necessity in his own work. In addition, Chapman always remained flexible, demonstrating a willingness to become "all things to all men" so that he "might by all means save some."

In his flexibility, Chapman challenged the church to keep an evangelistic focus. In an apt summary of his own ministry, Chapman wrote, "For every lost individual in the community every Church has a measure of responsibility from which it cannot be freed until at least every legitimate means has been tried for his salvation."[120] Chapman, for one, would not be stopped until all those means had been sought and tried.

[120] Chapman, *Present-Day Evangelism,* 206.

Adoring Shulamite as Foil to Adulterous Israel: A Canonical Theology of the Song of Songs

by Layton Talbert[1]

Lutheran commentator H. C. Leupold remarked concerning Daniel 11: "This chapter might be treated in Bible classes. We do not see how it could be used for a sermon or for sermons."[2] That appears to be a common assumption towards the Song of Songs as a whole, at least among respectable interpreters.

Song of Songs is generally politely avoided in public preaching and teaching for what would seem to be fairly obvious reasons. Surely no portion of sacred Scripture is unsuitable for public use, though certain passages may be more appropriate for some situations and audiences than for others.[3] (When was the last time your pastor preached from—let alone *through*—the Song?)[4] And yet, here it is in our Bibles. Solomon was unashamed about writing it, God's Spirit about inspiring it, and both Israel and the church about canonizing and preserving it.

Its general avoidance in the contemporary pulpit, however, does not mean that it has historically been ignored. "From the late patristic period through the Middle Ages, Christian interpreters wrote more on the Song than on any other Old Testament book."[5] Jewish teachers were no less enthusiastic about the Song's value and beauty. The first-century Jewish rabbi Akiba famously opined: "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Hagiographa are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies."[6]

The Hebrew title, Song of Songs (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים), is a superlative construction, just like "Holy of holies" (Holiest of all holy places) or "King of kings" (King over all kings). Solomon composed 1,005 songs (1 Kgs 4:32), but this one is the pinnacle, the best of them all—and, arguably, the best of all compositions that fall into that category. Surveying the many attempts to express the gist of the book's

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[1] Layton Talbert (PhD, Theology) is professor of theology at BJU Seminary and the author of several books, including *The Trustworthiness of God's Words: Why Every Word from God Matters* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2022) and *Soteriology for Beginners: What Does the Bible Say about Salvation?* (n.p.: Equip Discipleship, 2023).

[2] Cited by Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel,* BST (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 147.

[3] For a valuable recent work on Song of Songs specifically targeting singles (high-school age and above) with a biblical perspective on sexual intimacy designed to counteract the world's promiscuous perversion of the subject, see Tim and Angela Little, *Song of Songs for Singles: Lessons on Love from King Solomon* (Ankeny, IA: Faith, 2023). See also Brian Collins's review of the book in this issue of *JBTW.*

[4] The question is rhetorical and assumes your pastor is not Mark Driscoll. I will, however, counterweight the question with a recommendation: Peter W. Van Kleeck, *A Primer for the Public Preaching of the Song of Songs* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2015). After completing graduate degrees at Westminster Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary, Van Kleeck pursued a Doctor of Ministry degree from BJU Seminary. His book largely reproduces his DMin dissertation.

[5] Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,* NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 355.

[6] Quoted in Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 323.

title, Mitchell notes that "no single translation can capture the elegance and scope of the original"; he proposes "the consummate Song," underscoring its "uniqueness and perfection, and alluding to the Song's yearning for love's consummation, which is evident immediately in 1:2 and following."[7]

So why is this book in our Bibles? What is its purpose? And what is its contribution to the larger theology of the canon and storyline of Scripture?[8]

Hermeneutical Hurdles

Several features make the Song hermeneutically challenging, beginning with its poetic form. Gordis notes that "the essence of poetry" is to "employ *symbolism* to express nuances beyond the power of exact definition. This is particularly true of love poetry."[9] Consequently, woven into the already inherent complexities of Hebrew poetry is a cornucopia of oriental metaphorical imagery that includes fauna (*doves, ravens, ewes, sheep, fawns, gazelles, foxes, goats, lions, leopards*), flora (*lilies, mandrakes, brambles, cedar, cypress, apple tree, palm tree, grapevines*), food (*honey, wine, milk, wheat, dates, grapes, apples, figs, pomegranates, raisins, nuts*), spices (*oil, saffron, myrrh, spikenard, balsam, calamus, cinnamon, henna, nard, frankincense, aloes*), valuables (*gold, silver, ivory, beryl, rubies, sapphires, marble, jewels*), topography (*clefts, mountains, gardens, parks, pools, fields, orchards, vineyards, valleys*), and even specific locations (*Jerusalem, Tower of David, Damascus, Amana River, Tirzah, Mount Hermon, En Gedi, Lebanon, Carmel, Sharon, Gilead, Heshbon*). The profusion of metaphors evokes and engages all the senses: sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch. No other portion of Scripture is so sensually evocative of all the human means for engaging the physical world as God has created both it and us. Their environment being pastoral and Middle Eastern, most of the metaphors are drawn from nature and, while many of them are strange to our ears, they express the total sensory delight each spouse finds in the other. In addition, the vocabulary of the Song incorporates some fifty *hapax legomena*; four percent of the entire Song consists of obscure words used nowhere else in Scripture. Perhaps most challenging of all, the Song incorporates multiple speakers who are not always clearly identified. The Song's sexual candor (though guileless), secular content (virtually nothing overtly theological), and ambiguous plotline make it ripe for interpretive speculation.

Summaries of the Song's history of interpretation are easy enough to access.[10] The most common and longstanding hermeneutical approach among both Jewish and Christian interpreters has been an allegorical interpretation. The hallmark (and Achilles's heel) of an allegorical approach is not that it recognizes parallels in the Song to the relationship between God and his people but that it assumes or

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[7] Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs,* CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 548–49. Mitchell's magisterial 1300-page commentary is difficult to top for sheer thoroughness combined with modernity of perspective and research.

[8] Disclaimer: There is much about the interpretation and content of the Song that this article has no intention of addressing. The history of the Song's interpretation, the question of whether the male speaker is Solomon or someone else, debates over the structure, plotline, and outline of the Song—all fascinating and worthwhile pursuits—are peripheral to the specific scope and aim of this article and will be referenced only in passing if at all.

[9] Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation, and Commentary* (New York: KTAV, 1974), 37 (emphasis original).

[10] E.g., Mitchell, 451–508; Garrett, 352–66; Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 20–47; Richard S. Hess, *The Song of Songs,* BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 22–29.

asserts that the divine-human relationship is the *primary* or *real* meaning of the Song—to the diminution or negation of the human-to-human relationship.[11] Like the variety of hermeneutical approaches to the Song, the weaknesses of an allegorical hermeneutic are also addressed elsewhere and need not be rehearsed here. Though the Bible frequently employs the marriage metaphor to image the divine-human relationship (as we will see), metaphorical illustration does not warrant allegorical interpretation.

Finally, there is the issue of genre. Garrett notes the uniqueness of the Song not only within the poetic corpus but within the Hebrew Bible, as the only work devoted in its entirety to the celebration of marital love.[12] He also observes the affinities of the book to the wisdom corpus. Its use of sexual language is not, after all, unknown in other wisdom books (Prov 5:15–19; Eccl 9:9), though sometimes in a negative context (Prov 7, 9). Its ascription to Solomon is a strong indication that it belongs to the wisdom genre, and the specific designation of "songs" as a dimension and demonstration of the artistry of Solomon's wisdom should not be overlooked (1 Kgs 4:30–34). "Most important," notes Garrett, the book comports with "the function and purpose of wisdom literature," which "is meant to teach the reader how to live in the world." If other wisdom literature—like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes—extends those fields to include "politics, personal morality, economics, social behavior," then "certainly courtship, sensual love, and marriage cannot be excluded since these areas are among the most basic universals of human experience."[13] Again, even Proverbs and Ecclesiastes incorporate specific counsel along these same lines. "Sexuality and love are fundamental to the human experience; and it is altogether fitting that the Bible . . . should have something to say in this area."[14]

At the same time, one of Garrett's assumptions in assigning it to the wisdom genre is, in my view, short-sighted: "The covenant between Yahweh and Israel is not in view as it is in the books of the Law and the Prophets."[15] Though the Song expresses no explicit covenantal dimension on the surface, I will argue that it is *implicitly* and *deeply* theological and covenantal, precisely because the marital relationship (which is celebrated in the Song) is an inherently covenantal institution of divine origin with profound theological ramifications. God himself repeatedly employs a husband-wife metaphor analogically. Because God originated marriage as a covenantal relationship that he knew he would later invoke as a primary metaphor for the relationship between himself and his people, the Song's canonical

[11] The historical ubiquity of the allegorical approach explains how lines from the Song found their way into Christian hymnody and devotional literature. Unfortunately, besides suffering from the weakness of the allegorical approach, many lines either misunderstand or ignore the original speaker and the line's function in the original Song. For example, "Jesus, Rose of Sharon" is drawn from Song 2:1; but the passage is clearly a reference of the Shulamite to herself (cf. 2:2), making the sentiment incompatible as a reference to Christ. Likewise, "He's the lily of the valley" (also from Song 2:1) is a self-reference to the Shulamite, not to her beloved. The origin of the line "He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul" is a little uncertain (1:8? 5:9? 6:1?). Other lines reflect a more accurate application of the Song's language. Samuel Rutherford's lines, "O, I am my Beloved's and my Beloved's mine" (2:16; 6:3) and "He brings a poor vile sinner into His house of wine" (2:4), are consistent with the Song's speakers and imagery. For a more detailed (generally sympathetic) survey of the Song's influence on hymnody, see Mitchell, 532–43.

[12] Garrett, 366–67.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 366.

[15] Ibid.

function goes beyond merely teaching a theology of marital love, important as that is. Canonically, there is more of a theological-covenantal orientation than meets the ear.

A Dialogical Analysis of the Song

In drama, as in historical narrative, dialogue is hermeneutically central and determinative.[16] In the Song, dialogue is not just central—it is everything. After the title in 1:1, the Song is entirely dialogue with no narration. Any valid interpretation, then, must give close attention to who says what to whom.

Actors

Views on the number and nature of the actors in the Song vary. For the purposes of this article's canonical-theological proposal, however, it makes no significant difference whether Solomon is one of the two main characters in the Song or whether he is a third party composing the Song about the relationship between two others. What matters is the relationship between the two main actors in the Song.[17] In addition, from the standpoint of the theological import of the Song—grounded as it is in the theological import with which God has canonically infused the marriage relationship that the Song celebrates—it is irrelevant whether the characters are viewed as literal or imaginary, historical or parabolic, biographical or idealized. The quality of the marital relationship that it depicts is the core of the Song's theological import.

Her

The Song's female voice is referred to as a shepherdess (1:8) and identified as a "Shulamite" only in 6:13 (twice).[18] She is usually called (my) companion, darling, lover (רַעְיָתִי; 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4). Other terms of endearment include my bride (4:8, 11), my sister (5:2), or my sister-bride (אֲחֹתִי כַּלָּה; 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1), and love (אַהֲבָה; 7:6). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to her throughout this article as the Shulamite.

[16] Whether viewed as a continuous plotline or a collection of poems between lovers, the Song displays a series of dramatic interchanges between the protagonists, not unlike the Book of Job but with no intervening narration.

[17] Nonetheless, in the interest of full disclosure, in my view Walter Kaiser correctly identifies "three main characters in the book, not just two: Solomon, the Shulamite maiden whom Solomon is trying to win as another prize in his growing harem, and the boyfriend whom the maiden really wishes to marry instead of marrying King Solomon." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 145. For others who hold that Solomon is not the Beloved in the poem, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 301–2; Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville: BJU Press, 2010), 270–71; Longman, 16.

[18] Debate persists over what this term signifies. Was she an inhabitant of Shulam (unknown location), or of Shunem (2 Kgs 4:8) as a unique variant of Shunammite (2 Kgs 4:12, 25, 36; cf. Abishag the Shunammite, 1 Kgs 1:3, 15; 2:17, 21, 22)? Or is her title a feminine form of Solomon, "the Solomoness" (Solomon = *Shlomo*; Shulamite = *Shulamiyt*), or does it derive from *shalom*? For a discussion of these and other possibilities, see Mitchell, 127–36.

Him

The Song's central male character is identified as a "shepherd" (1:7). The Shulamite's favorite pet-name for him (over thirty times) is (*my*) *beloved* (דּוֹד or the possessive דּוֹדִי).[19] It is important to note that *the terms of endearment are exclusive to each of the lovers.* She never calls him anything but *beloved*, and he never uses this term with reference to her. Remembering this exegetical fact will prevent a multitude of interpretational and applicational sins.[20] Moreover, the beloved speaks always and only to the Shulamite; the Shulamite speaks both to her beloved as well as to others, but always about her beloved. I will refer to him throughout the rest of this article as the beloved.[21]

Chorus

A group or groups of plural speakers (who are clearly neither the Shulamite nor the beloved) occasionally react to or interact with statements from the Shulamite or the beloved. Their precise identity is unclear. Most are presumed to be a group of "daughters (of Jerusalem)" since the Shulamite sometimes addresses such a group.[22]

Dialogue

Translations vary somewhat in identifying and assigning dialogue, but those differences relate more to the "supporting cast" than the protagonists. Speakers are consistently identifiable by virtue of the number and gender of the Hebrew pronouns. Generally, it is particularly clear when He or She is speaking.[23]

The important dialogical question in the Song is not only *what* is said, but *who* says it. Who speaks the most? Who gets the most "press"? In a love song written by a man in a largely patriarchal society,

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[19] Interestingly, this address of endearment surfaces in another song: "Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of *my Beloved* regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill" (Isa 5:1; unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.] The song is sung to Yahweh, the owner of the vineyard (5:7). Many interpreters think the singer is Isaiah; if so, he would be speaking as a model Israelite in his holy affection for Israel's exalted God. Cf. John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 152–53; he also observes that the same word *vineyard* in Isaiah's song "has sexual overtones in Canticles."

[20] James Hamilton's reference to the woman as "the beloved" misses the Song's consistent use of this term exclusively as the woman's term of endearment for the man. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 307–8.

[21] As indicated earlier, whether or not Solomon is the beloved in the Song and, as such, the main male actor (Him) is irrelevant for the purpose of this article's proposal. For the sake of thoroughness, nonetheless, it is worth noting that Solomon is mentioned by name a few times (1:1; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12). Within the Song itself, the referent of "Solomon" or "the king" is debated. Some clearly refer to King Solomon comparatively (8:11–12). Others could be culturally conditioned references to the beloved as her "Solomon" or her "king," so to speak (3:7, 9, 11). Some evidence suggests that brides and grooms in Near Eastern marriage culture referred to each other as "king/prince" and "queen/princess." Bell, 270; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 92.

[22] **Bold** indicates instances of this group's dialogue; the other references indicate the group being addressed or referred to (1:**4**, 5, **11**; 2:2, 7; 3:5, 10, 11; 5:8, **9**, 16; 6:**1**, 9; 8:4; 8:**8–9**). Based on the statement in 1:6, 8:8–9 is often attributed to the Shulamite's brothers.

[23] Bell, 271.

who would you expect to be the dominant speaker? Likewise, in a song widely regarded (even without an allegorical hermeneutic, as we will see below) to be in some way reflective of God's love for his people, who would you expect to hear the most?

To begin with, who gets the first word? She does (1:2). Who gets the last word? She does (8:14; again, the term *beloved* always refers to him, and he never uses it of her). That alone is suggestive, but the bigger question is, who speaks the most throughout the Song? She does. And the ratio is not insignificant. The Shulamite sings to and about her beloved twice as often,[24] and virtually twice as much content as he speaks about her.[25] Moreover, he always sings to (and about) her; she sings sometimes to him and sometimes to others, but always about him—his qualities, her desire for him, and what he means to her.

Table 1. Song of Songs: Dialogue Distribution

Speaker	Hebrew
Total Words	1,246[26]
Chorus	148 (12%)
Him	379 (30%)
Her	719 (58%)

Why is that? This is no tongue-in-cheek commentary on the loquacious proclivities of the feminine personality, hardly giving her beloved a chance to get a word in edgewise. In any literary creation, dialogue does not happen by accident. More than anyone or anything else, the Song rivets our attention on the Shulamite bride and her devotion and passion for her beloved. That is both purposeful and meaningful.

This is not a novel observation. Others have noted the rhetorical dominance of the female voice in the Song.[27] Köstenberger and Goswell write, "The Song of Songs is largely a woman's song, for the

[24] Garrett's outline of the Song assigns seventeen "speaks" to the woman, and only eight "speaks" to the man. Garrett, 381, 383.

[25] Again, Hamilton's depiction of the Song is askew because of this. Referencing Song 7:10 ("I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me"), he writes, "The use of this term 'desire' in Genesis 3:16" indicated that "Yahweh cursed the woman with 'desire' for her husband, which meant that she would inappropriately seek to take the initiative in the relationship. The Song sings the righting of reversed desire. The one who desires is the man, and it is he who takes proper initiative in the relationship." Hamilton, 308. Whatever one makes of Genesis 3:16 (including the tantalizing detail that its Hebrew word for "desire" occurs elsewhere only in Genesis 4:7 and Song 7:10), the dialogical realities of the Song do not emphasize the man's initiative in this relationship. In fact, Gledhill enumerates thirteen passages that express "the woman's initiatives" versus only six passages that express "the man's initiatives." Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs,* BST (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 251–52.

[26] Including 1:1, the total is 1,250 words; but the opening verse is introductory and not part of the Song. The Shulamite's word count includes two passages in which she is quoting the beloved (2:10–15; 5:2); in one of them, she recounts what he says to her in her dream. In both cases, they are his words only secondarily; she is the one saying them, and that, too, is significant.

[27] "Where the Torah and Prophets' texts portrayed the male, whether human or divine, as the dominant and proactive partner, Song of Songs presents a female character who dominates speech and takes most of the sexual initiatives—at least in terms of words. The male is either quoted (e.g. 2:10–14), or speaks rarely (e.g. 1: 9–11, 15; 2:2; 4:1–15; 5:1; 6:4–10;

female lover is the first and last to speak, as well as the most frequent speaker, and sometimes her male beloved speaks only indirectly, through her speech."[28] The question is, why does Solomon (and more importantly, the Holy Spirit) create this uneven distribution of speech in the Song? What is the significance of this literary emphasis? And what impact might it have on our understanding of what the book is doing canonically?

The Theology of the Song: A Survey of Views

The theology of a book revolves around the larger transcendent truth(s) it intends to communicate. Expressions of the Song's theology are varied, though certain themes recur. Garrett raises the question of whether the Song "preaches Christ." Granted, the Song is not allegorical.

> It is Christocentric, however, in the same sense that practical teachings of Proverbs and Deuteronomy are Christocentric. Christ is both Lord over the created order and giver of life. God originally pronounced the creation of man and woman good and decreed that their union should be the most profound of human relationships, and Christ brings this aspect of mortal life to a realization of the creation ideal. . . . It is in the sphere of a new covenant relationship with God in Christ, with transformed attitudes, Spirit-driven enablement, and the awareness of sins forgiven that husband and wife can find the union of openness and fullness of blessing God intended.[29]

Garrett's observations are valid but his view of the Song's theological ramifications seems too narrow, especially in view of the vast scriptural reservoir of the marriage metaphor. What the Bible teaches about the marriage relationship should inform our understanding when God employs that metaphor throughout Scripture to describe the divine-human relationship.

Eugene Merrill writes that the Song's purpose is "to glorify romantic love and to celebrate the purity of sexual intimacy within the bonds of married life."[30] "Its bold, graphic imagery of lovemaking between the Shulamite maiden and her beloved came to be understood in Jewish exegesis as a parable depicting the Lord's love for Israel and, in Christian hermeneutics, a picture of Christ's love for the

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etc.)." David M. Carr, "Passion for God: A Center in Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23 (2001): 20. Carr, however, sees the relationship depicted in the Song, "featuring as it does a prominent female voice and a different vision of male-female relationships" as "probably grounded in some kind of alternative women's discourse within ancient Israel." Similarly, Gledhill writes, "The initiatives of the girl in seeking romantic encounter and stimulating desire are far more numerous in the Song than those of the boy. This subtle [?] disproportion may be a deliberate attempt by the author gently to challenge the pronounced patriarchalism of OT Hebrew society." T. D. Gledhill, "The Song of Songs," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 216. Such explanations exemplify a horizontally preoccupied tunnel vision regarding the Song's canonical role and significance.

[28] Köstenberger and Goswell, 299.

[29] Garrett, 380.

[30] Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 639.

church."[31] Accenting the divine side of this relationship, however, overlooks the Song's distinctly lopsided dialogical emphasis on the Shulamite's love for the beloved, not the other way around.

Merrill sums up the Song's theological significance: "Theologically, the message is that what God has created is intrinsically good and beautiful and that man and woman, in their love and admiration of one another, are fulfilling the creation mandate that imparts to the two of them together the authority to have dominion over all things and to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:28)."[32] But the Song says nothing about procreation[33] or dominion. The Song focuses on the delights of the relationship itself, and especially through the Shulamite's eyes. Merrill describes the Song as a theological paradigm for a higher relationship—"that of the Lord for his creation and, in particular, for mankind created in his image"—that furnishes a glimpse "into God's indescribable and inexhaustible love for all beings in all places and at all times."[34] This emphasis is so broad and generalized, however, that it risks subverting the Song's point and hortatory power. Merrill's portrayal not only reverses the Song's emphasis on the Shulamite's love for her beloved but also flattens the specificity of the Song's theology into a generic message about God's love for humanity. The Song does not depict mere compassion or love in general. It is laser-focused on a particular species of *relational* love—the supremely *exclusive* relationship of romantic love in the context of marriage. To be sure, God does love creation and mankind in general; but that is not the category of love that the Song of Songs spotlights and praises.

David Moore and Daniel Akin argue that although allegorizing tendencies have gone too far at times,

> marital relations are to be an earthly picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). In the Song of Songs we are given an idealistic portrayal, replete with imagery fit for the garden of Eden (e.g., Song 4:12–5:1), of the relationship between the king and his bride. While maintaining that the song is about human love, human love does not exhaust the greatest Song humanity has ever encountered. Indeed, the Bible sings the beauty of the love of God.[35]

Once again, the emphasis on God's love for man, however admirable and biblical, misses the Song's distinctive and repeated focus on *her* love for *him*—and by way of application, on man's love for God, not the other way around.

Dennis Kinlaw notes (*contra* Merrill) that marital love is more than a means to the end of procreation: "The prospect of children is not necessary to justify sexual love in marriage. Significantly, the Song of Solomon makes no reference to procreation. . . . The Song is a song in praise of love for

[31] Merrill, 639.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Song 3:4 and 8:5 technically refer to procreation with reference to the birth of the Shulamite and the beloved themselves (respectively), but not with reference to the relationship between the Shulamite and beloved.

[34] Ibid., 639–40.

[35] David G. Moore and Daniel L. Akin, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,* HOTC (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 138–39.

love's sake and for love's sake alone."[36] But he also goes further than Garrett in recognizing a larger theological undercurrent.

> Song of Songs is more than a declaration that human sexual love in itself is good. Historically, Judaism and Christianity have agreed. Have they been wrong so long? Their argument was allegorical. Their intuition may have been correct even if their exegetical method left something to be desired. This writer concurs with their position and believes there is biblical support for that intuition. That support rests in the analogical nature of the relationship between biblical election and human marriage.
>
> The use of the marriage metaphor to describe the relationship God has to His people is almost universal in Scripture. From the time God chose Israel to be His own in the Sinai Desert, the covenant was pictured in terms of a marriage. Idolatry was equated with adultery (Ex. 34:10–17). Yahweh is a jealous God. Monogamous marriage is the norm for depicting the covenantal relationship throughout Scripture, climaxing in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. God has chosen a bride.[37]

Kinlaw is on the right track. It is not that God initiated a relationship with Israel and then cast about trying to think of a good analogy to describe the nature of that relationship. Human marriage exists (in part) to mirror the divine-human relationship, not vice versa. But correlating the Song to the divine-human relationship needs to reflect accurately the literary emphasis of the Song. God has chosen a bride; but that point views the Song through the wrong end of the binoculars. That is not the side of the relationship that the Song accents. The Song is not about the man choosing the woman, nor does it forestage his love for her. By a two-to-one ratio, the Song sings her love for him.[38]

Longman, too, recognizes that the Song's emphasis on marital love "does not exhaust the theological meaning of the Song."

> When read in the context of the canon as a whole, the book forcefully communicates the intensely intimate relationship that Israel enjoys with God. In many Old Testament Scriptures, marriage is an underlying metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. . . . In spite of the predominantly negative use of the image, we must not lose sight of the fact that Israel was the bride of God, and so as the Song celebrates the intimacy between human lovers, we learn about our relationship with God. So we come full circle, reaching similar conclusions to the early allegorical approaches to the Song. The difference, though, is obvious. We do not deny the primary and natural reading of the book, which highlights human love, and we do not arbitrarily posit the analogy between the Song's

[36] Dennis Kinlaw, "Song of Songs," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:1207. Is it truly love for love's sake, however? Or is it love for the loved one's sake?

[37] Ibid., 1208.

[38] Indeed, she "not only speaks more often but also initiates the relationship and pursues it." Longman, *Song of Songs*, 15.

> lovers and God and Israel. Rather we read it in the light of the pervasive marriage metaphor of the Old Testament.[39]

Because the NT also adopts the marriage metaphor, he adds, "Christians should read the Song in the light of Ephesians and rejoice in the intimate relationship that they enjoy with Jesus Christ."[40] Longman enunciates the same view in his later commentary on the Song but fills out the picture considerably. After explaining the errors of the allegorical view and defending the Song as a celebratory depiction of human marital love, he nevertheless argues for a theological reading of the book as well.

> Read within the context of the canon, the Song has a clear and obvious relevance to the divine-human relationship. After all, throughout the Bible God's relationship to humankind is likened to a marriage. . . . The allegorical approach was not wrong in insisting that we read the Song as relevant to our relationship to God. . . . More than any other human relationship marriage reflects the divine-human relationship. . . . The allegorical approach erred in two ways, however. First allegorists suppressed the human love dimension of the Song, and, second, they pressed the details in arbitrary ways in order to elicit specific theological meaning from the text.[41]

In other words, in dismissing an allegorical view of the Song, *das Kind nicht mit dem Bade ausschütten*; we need to dump the allegorical bathwater without ditching the theological baby. One can discard an allegorical reading without rejecting the Song's analogical-theological relevance, just as one need not superimpose an allegorical hermeneutic over a literal and applicational reading of Ephesians 5:22–33 to recognize the analogical-theological mystery that Paul underscores in 5:29–30 and 32.[42] Longman moves the discussion of the Song decisively in the right direction. Still, a dimension of that divine-human relationship—borne out by the textual data of the Song and the canonical data of the rest of the OT—is missing from the discussion. Can we be any more specific about the ramifications of the Song for Israel's marital-covenant relationship to God (or ours to Christ)?

I will argue that a canonical-theological[43] perspective that "navigate[es] between nonhistorical and nontheological readings of the text"[44] preserves the Song's theological relevance, which is distorted by

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[39] Tremper Longman III, "Song of Solomon, Theology of," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible,* ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 743.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Longman, *Song of Songs,* 67, 70.

[42] For a helpful discussion of the identification of the mystery in 5:32, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 775–81.

[43] The characteristics of canonical theology in the context of OT studies include (1) "focus[ing] on the final canonical form"; (2) "interpreting texts in light of their broader Old Testament contexts"; (3) "reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture"; and (4) viewing the Old Testament as not merely historically descriptive but "prescriptive." Though the approach was championed largely by Brevard Childs (devoted as he was to historical-critical views of the text), it is possible to adapt a canonical-theological approach without such baggage. See Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm, *Understanding Old Testament Theology: Mapping the Terrain of Recent Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 91–101, 104–9.

[44] Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 464.

an allegorical reading and lost by a purely horizontal interpretation. The goal of a canonical-theological approach "is to focus on the function" of the book's "canonical position and on its historical role as part of Israelite . . . literature."[45]

But not all canonical-theological readings emphasize the same conclusions or points of contact. House's "canonical synthesis" underscores the Song's affirmation of the institution of marriage (à la Genesis 1–2 and the records of the patriarchs), the permanence of marriage, and the heterosexual nature of marriage as God has designed and intended it.[46] House, however, comes closer to the mark of the Song's *distinctive* function and role when he observes that "the love depicted here puts the adulterous love Israel shows for Yahweh . . . to shame." But, like so many others, he parallels "God's love for Israel and the love reflected in Song of Solomon"[47] in generic terms that seem to overlook the fact that the Song highlights one specific side of that marital love in particular: the woman's.

Themes of the Song

What are the core ideas communicated by the dialogue and actions of the protagonists? Garrett states the Song's horizontal message as succinctly as anyone: "The message is that the mutual pleasures of love" within the marriage relationship "are good and possible even in a fallen world. The song is a testimony to the grace of God and a rejection of *both* asceticism and debauchery."[48]

Moore and Akin express the message of the Song in similar terms[49] but explore the implications of this message a bit further. They argue that the Song's ideal of marital love is characterized by the first two qualities listed below. To those, however, I will add four more significant and equally suggestive characteristics. All of these characteristics of the relationship illustrated in the Song become relevant for the canonical-theological proposal developed below.

Mutuality: Reciprocal Satisfaction

The Song describes a reciprocity of relationship between the woman and the man; each is fully satisfied in the other. Dorsey further corroborates this idea. As one of the Song's central themes, "the reciprocity, or mutuality, of the lovers' love" is "conveyed by the matching of reciprocal expressions of love. . . . These structuring techniques underscore the point that the two lovers are equally in love."[50] This mutual satisfaction is accomplished not merely by each seeking to satisfy oneself in the other, but by each so surrendering to the other that self-satisfaction becomes a byproduct of spousal satisfaction.

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[45] House, 463. I have generalized House's specific statement about the Song to underscore the broader value of the canonical-theological approach.

[46] Ibid., 466–69.

[47] Ibid., 465.

[48] Garrett, 380.

[49] Moore and Akin, 140.

[50] David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 213. The Song, he adds, portrays a "mutuality of romantic love that is virtually unparalleled in ancient Near Eastern literature," displaying "a surprisingly high view of woman and a remarkable vision of the ideal of equality and delightful reciprocity in the marriage relationship."

Exclusivity: Undivided Affection

One reason for the potency of this reciprocal delight is the total exclusivity of the relationship. The intensity of this love (more on this below) is increased and explained by the fact that there is no wish for anyone else and no room for a competing affection. Their love occurs within the freely embraced covenantal confines of an exclusive marriage relationship.

> There is no hint of any illicit sexual activity. . . . In the scenes of greatest intimacy (4:9–12), the girl is called (literally) "my sister-bride," which puts the couple in the marriage bed. . . . The intimacies and the delights of love are experienced within the bond of a secure relationship . . . . There must be no intruders; so in biblical terms, adultery is a most serious offense, the breaking of a bonded relationship.[51]

Kaiser proposes Proverbs 5:15–21 as the "entrée" to the Song, where Solomon extols the sanctity and satisfaction of the sexual relationship within the singularity of marriage; indeed, Song 4:12, 15 echoes the same metaphors as the proverb, where the beloved describes his bride as a spring, a fountain, and a well of flowing water.[52]

Purity: Virtuous Passion

This characteristic grows naturally out of the previous one, and yet it is distinct enough to warrant separate emphasis. Because the Song expresses this passion within the context of marriage, the delight described is innocent and appropriate and, therefore, candid and unashamed (cf. Gen 2:25). The Song "presents the purity and wonder of true love" and "teaches the beauty and holiness of the marriage-love relationship that God has ordained for humanity."

Intensity: Consuming Ardor

The Song sustains a high level of passion, each for the other; the mutual expression of that ardor is what the entire Song is about. It is "a highly romantic book.[53] The point is so obvious from the imagery and language of the book that it might be thought hardly worth mentioning, but it is often ignored. Note that the lovers speak to and of each other frequently and in great detail. They relish their pleasure in each other not only with physical action"—which, it should be noted, is actually minimized in the Song—"but with carefully composed words."[54]

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[51] Gledhill, "The Song of Songs," 217. Mitchell, too, takes pains to emphasize that sexuality outside the bounds of the covenantal relationship of marriage is a perversion of the divine gift itself and all that it signifies. Mitchell, 279–81.

[52] Kaiser, 145.

[53] Bell emphasizes this point as well, to counterbalance the overemphasis of some interpreters: "This book is really about romance, not primarily about sexuality" (274).

[54] Garrett, 379.

In other words, the Song highlights a love that is, above all, passionately *expressed*. Moreover—and this is crucial to emphasize—*the locus of this passion*, this desire and delight that is expressed by each for the other, *is not in an act or event*. That leads to the next characteristic.

Relationality: Person-Centered Delight

This consuming passion *is focused not on an act, but on the person.* This is as significant for the theological role played by the marriage metaphor in Scripture as it is for the nature of an authentic marriage relationship itself. Sexual union, consistently reserved in Scripture exclusively for the marriage relationship, becomes itself a physical metaphor for the unique relational (comm)union of two *persons* into a unitive intimacy.

> [T]he union of the spouses' bodies has a more-than-bodily significance; the body emblematizes the person, and the joining of bodies emblematizes the joining of the persons. It is a symbol that participates in, and duplicates the pattern of, the very thing that it symbolizes; one-flesh unity is the body's language for one-life unity.[55]

That abstract fact is visibly illustrated by a unique physiological reality. Consider the implications of one expression easily overlooked, though twice spoken: *his left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me* (2:6; 8:3). That language conveys not merely a close encounter, but a *face-to-face* encounter. The divine design of human biology is illustrative of the relationality built into human sexuality. For every other species, copulation is a purely functional, instinctual act that conveys—even on the level of its physical mechanics (anterior-to-posterior)—no concept of intimacy, unity, or (comm)union. By contrast, the physiological design of the characteristic human union (anterior-to-anterior, face-to-face) is unique to humans, and physically expressive of the nature of the marital relationship as a holistic communion between two persons. Given the illustrative function of this full-orbed relational union within the context of divine revelation, the exclusivity and consuming nature of this preoccupation with another *person* is theologically significant.

Divinity: Love as a Divine Gift

Mitchell captures this principle most succinctly: "The love that is celebrated by the married couple through their sexual intimacy is kindled by God himself."[56] That married love is a creation and gift of God (a fact affirmed elsewhere in Scripture; Gen 1:26–28; Heb 13:4) is underscored in the Song's dramatic climax in 8:6—its "theological highlight."[57]

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[55] J. Budziszewski, "The Natural Laws of Sex," *Touchstone,* July/August 2005, https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=18-06-022-f. Budziszewski's article is the most forthright and insightful treatment I know on how God has (and has not) designed human sexual intimacy to work.

[56] Mitchell, 281. Mitchell complains that the theological import of the statement is missed by many English translations. The ESV and NASB are among the few that reflect the divine reference.

[57] Mitchell, 6. The translation of 8:6 that follows in the text is Mitchell's.

For love is as strong as death,
and ardor is as fierce as Sheol.
Its flames are flames of fire,
the flame of Yah.[58]

The Song's assertion that such love is ultimately a divine gift sanctifies the mutuality, exclusivity, purity, intensity, and relationality of married love.[59] It is a gift of the God who is love (1 John 4:8, 16) to those he created as man and woman in his own image.

A Canonical-Theological Proposal

A common canonical perspective views the Song as a commentary on Genesis 2:24–25, "a manual on the blessing and reward of intimate married love."[60] Other approaches similarly fixate on the Song as a depiction of the ideal marriage—almost Eden revisited amid a fallen world.[61] "The Song's principal reference," therefore, "is not to Christ and the Church or to Jehovah and Israel but to the husband/wife relationship."[62] As such, "the Song is wisdom's reflection on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a woman within the institution of marriage."[63] Even on this view, however, many also concede a theological dimension inherent in the biblical use of the marriage metaphor.

> From the creation story in Genesis 1–2 to the marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 21, human sexuality is presented as a specific gift from God to his creation, and serves as a suitable metaphor

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[58] Mitchell describes the final expression in 8:6 (שַׁלְהֶבֶתְיָה) as "the single most significant phrase in the Song," which "tragically most expositions downplay and mistranslate" (1188). See Mitchell's detailed defense of this reading (1185–92). Despite Mitchell's lament over the majority report, the list of those who share his view and translation is not inconsiderable. A sampling of others who argue for this reading include Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation, and Commentary* (New York: KTAV, 1974), 74; Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 190–92; D. Phillip Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form: Seeking Poetic Structure in the Song of Songs*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 327; Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 144; Hess, 237, 240. Regardless of one's view of 8:6, that the flame of marital love is a sacred gift from God is consistent with other revelation in any case (Gen 2:24–25; Prov 5:15–19; Eccl 9:9; Heb 13:4).

[59] Others have identified some of these same characteristics outlined above. E.g., Longman, *Song of Songs*, 70: "From the Song we learn about the emotional intensity, intimacy, and exclusivity of our relationship with the God of the universe." Ernest C. Lucas also calls attention to certain characteristics about the nature of the relationship described in the Song, including its "equality," "mutuality," loyalty, "exclusivity," and its "'responsible' attitude to love." *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Psalms & Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 197–98.

[60] Kaiser, 146. Cf. this same view of the Song as commentary in Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion & Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible,* NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 207; R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 265; G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 37; Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther,* NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 30–31.

[61] Hamilton, 307–8.

[62] Van Kleeck, 49.

[63] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 575.

> to illustrate the relationship between God and his people. The Old Testament is as replete with references to Israel as the wife of the Lord as the New Testament is with references to the church as the bride of Christ.[64]

In short, the Spirit of Christ who superintended the writing of the Song (1 Pet 1:11) intended it to be more than merely a commentary on human marital love. Even most theological readings of the Song, however, give almost no attention to the specific ramifications of how the relationship is depicted in the Song—not only the corollaries of its positive expressions, but also the corollaries of its foil-like negative implications.

Stephen Dempster comes tantalizingly close to the specific emphasis I am proposing when he remarks, "When reading this text, the reader hears Jeremiah's oracle, Ezekiel 16, and Hosea 1–3." But then the arrow strays from what I suggest is the Song's canonical-theological bullseye. He continues:

> There is the reminder of the passionate and fiery love that Yahweh had for his people before the crisis [the captivity]. An exiled Israel hears the ending of the song perhaps as a melody to a different drum from when the original audience heard these words:
>
> > Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned (Song 8:6-7).
>
> Such a text inspires hope for Israel, since it suggests that God will not abandon his beloved.[65]

To be sure, God's love for Israel is incontestable and unending. But if we apply the Song's language consistently, we are not the "beloved"; God is. And if we take the Shulamite's dialogical dominance in the Song as purposeful and significant, then the Song's analogical relevance emphasizes not so much a reassurance of *God's* love, but a call to God's people to emulate the *Shulamite's* love.

The Song is a poetic expression of love within the marriage relationship, which functions as the primary analogy for a spiritual reality unfolded throughout Scripture—an analogy that God himself has chosen as the primary metaphor for depicting the nature of the relationship between himself and his people.[66] Since God has designated the marriage relationship as that primary analogy, the Song necessarily and inherently conveys far-reaching biblical-theological ramifications in its broader canonical context. That is why it is significant, for example, that *the Song especially highlights not the male side of the relationship* (analogous to God's love), *but the female side* (analogous to the love of

[64] Carr, 37. Actually, however, the OT is *far more* replete with references to that relationship than the NT.

[65] Dempster, 207–8.

[66] It should go without saying that this analogy does not extend to the sexual dimension of the marital relationship; unfortunately, however, that caveat needs to be spelled out in view of recent writings that seek to apply the sexual dimension of marriage to the divine-human relationship, and even to draw explicit parallels between sex and spirituality. Even when God uses the marriage metaphor, he always speaks of his relationship to his people in covenantal and relational terms, never in sexual terms. The closest the metaphor comes to sexual innuendo is when it describes the human *breach* of that relationship in terms of adultery and prostitution. As will be seen below, Ezekiel 16 and 23 are quite graphic in illustrating negatively the nature of Israel's adulterous abandonment of Yahweh.

God's people for him). Insofar as marriage furnishes a pervasive divine illustration of the relationship between God and his people, Song of Songs furnishes a divine illustration—a model—of the ideal posture of the human side of the divine-human relationship. The Song's prevailing positive motif of marital love expressed by the Shulamite for her beloved stands in glaring contrast to the OT's prevalent negative motif of Israel's habitual spiritual adultery and prostitution.[67]

Amid a canonical revelation awash in repeated and (often) explicit references to Israel's spiritual adultery against her divine Husband, the Song depicts the antithesis to that covenantal adultery. As such, *the emphasis depicted in the Song is not so much Yahweh's love for Israel, but what Israel's love for Yahweh should look and sound like*. However intentional or not on Solomon's part, on the canonical level the Song functions as a live commentary on the adulterous defection of Israel from her covenant obligation to love Yahweh entirely and exclusively (Deut 6:4–5). The Shulamite's verbal domination of the Song's dialogue is an unshushable vocal testimony to the kind of passionate adoration and exclusive devotion Israel should have for her Husband (Isa 54:5). The Shulamite was—throughout Israel's history—a timeless witness to what Israel should have been in her relationship to Yahweh, but was not. And insofar as the NT continues the use of that marriage metaphor, the Shulamite remains an enduring model for God's people today.

The Song includes no explicit identification of such an illustrative use of its female protagonist; it stands on its own as a vivid depiction of the marital ideal. Nevertheless, God's pervasive employment of the spiritual/covenantal marriage/adultery motif throughout the OT to describe the nature of his people's defection from him—to which the Song depicts such a magnificent exception—strongly suggests an implicit illustrative intention.

This is not allegory through the back door. The Song really is first and foremost about human marital romance. But God, not man, created marriage. And God, not theologians, decided to make the marriage/adultery motif the primary metaphor under which he describes and discusses the nature of the covenantal relationship between himself and his people. The remainder of this article will focus on briefly tracing the biblical theological use of that metaphor throughout the canon.

A Biblical-Theological Survey of the Marriage/Adultery Metaphor

The marriage/adultery metaphor surfaces in almost every corpus of the biblical canon. If the Shulamite's example of single-hearted devotion and passion is both an indictment of and model for God's people, the best way to demonstrate this canonical function is by conducting a biblical theological survey of God's frequent use of a theme that is the Song's diametrical opposite: covenantal defection as spiritual adultery.[68]

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[67] The view proposed in this article does not necessitate that the Shulamite be flawless in all her interactions with the beloved. Even if some passages in the Song may be interpreted as a failure on the Shulamite's part, the standard she represents need not be perfection but, rather, an unshakably exclusive devotion that always compels her to return to her beloved even in spite of sin and failure.

[68] One invaluable work for filling out such a survey is Raymond C. Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003). He begins by treating marriage in Genesis 2 as the necessary backdrop to the study of spiritual adultery. This context is essential for understanding and interpreting the enormity of spiritual adultery when it begins to surface later in the redemptive story. The rest of the work is a detailed,

Old Testament

Pentateuch

The metaphor is rooted in the garden of Genesis 2 with the divine institution of the one-flesh union between one man and one woman. The exclusivity of monogamy is built into the created order by God from its very genesis. If the ultimate goal was purely procreation, there are far more efficient ways of filling the earth than monogamy. But in the plan of God, from the commencement of creation human marriage exists for more than merely procreation; it is also designed to mirror the divine-human relationship, setting the stage for God to employ marriage as a metaphor to describe the nature of his relationship to his people.

Exodus 19:3–6 identifies the unique relationship that God covenants with Israel "above all the nations of the earth," and to which she accedes. Exodus 20:2–6 is the first enunciation of the concept of *divine jealousy* toward his people.[69] Exodus 34:14–16 reiterates God's jealousy even more forcefully and contains the first sexual metaphor for spiritual infidelity. God describes the worship of any other god as "playing the harlot" and "whoring after other gods" (i.e., prostituting themselves). We can become so accustomed to this metaphor, sanitized by its biblical usage, that it fails to shock us that God would choose such a repugnant metaphor to describe how he views the spiritual unfaithfulness of his people.

Leviticus 17:7 and 20:4–6 restate the harlotry motif in connection with the pursuit of other gods. In Numbers 15:39 God commands the Israelites to attach a tassel to their robe as a visual reminder, "that you may not follow the harlotry of your own heart and your own eyes." The verb *follow* is the same term used repeatedly (13x) to describe those who *searched* or *scouted* or *spied out* the land. In other words, the tassels were a visual warning against *exploring* the harlotry that lurked within them. The verse casts the net much wider (and deeper) than merely external, physical idolatry.[70] Nevertheless, the Pentateuch closes with the sad forewarning that "this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land . . . and will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them" (Deut 31:16). The Historical Books chronicle that national descent.[71]

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systematic, biblical-theological treatment of passages that develop the theme of spiritual adultery. Ortlund does not, however, draw any connection between this theme and the canonical-theological function of the Song of Songs that I am proposing. I believe these two themes function in counterpoint as contrasting images of God's people.

[69] We think of (and often experience) jealousy in terms of suspicion, distrust, and paranoia. But in certain contexts, jealousy is an entirely appropriate emotion. How we express it can sometimes be sinful; but the expectation of loyalty and devotion from someone with whom we have a covenant or family relationship is a righteous expectation.

[70] "Verse 39 does not specify idol worship as the harlotry in view. Nothing in the passage requires so narrow a referent. This ambiguity has the positive exegetical function of broadening the field of reference to all the wayward desires of the heart and the lust of the eyes. The language concerns Israel's 'playing the harlot' after their own hearts and eyes, implying without limitation the various temptations which may be imagined, perceived, and caressed through the senses. . . . The net force of the declaration is that all the sinful preferences of the autonomous self, running contrary to the law of God, are a kind of whoredom" or prostitution. Ortlund, 40.

[71] Solomonic authorship would place the Song early in the nation's canonical history, lending weight to the canonical-theological function proposed in this article, whether or not the later sacred historians and prophets were conscious of the contrastive function of the Shulamite. At the same time, however, even a late date for the Song would not undermine its

Historical Books

After God miraculously preserved them through the wilderness and established them in the land, as if on cue, Israel ignored her godly leadership and played the prostitute not only with other gods (Judg 2:17; 8:33) but even with Gideon's ephod (Judg 8:27). The Chronicler underscores the irony that they prostituted themselves with the gods of the very people "whom God had destroyed before them" (1 Chr 5:25). Nor was this true only of the largely apostate northern kingdom; the southern kingdom followed in their steps as well (2 Chr 21:13).[72]

Prophets

Israel's infidelity to their covenant relationship with Yahweh is particularly pronounced in the Prophets.[73] The development of this metaphor takes a new twist through God's instruction to Hosea to take a wife of promiscuous tendencies, "for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord" (Hos 1:2). God is making it very personal—as if *your* wife entered into multiple adulterous affairs and prostituted herself freely while still living under your roof, enjoying your protection and provision. God then issues the first prophetic call to the people to abandon their harlotries before he shames them publicly (Hos 2:1–13). The passage takes an unanticipated, undeserved, impossibly merciful and affectionate eschatological turn when God promises to woo the nation back to himself in language at least conceptually reminiscent of the Song (Hos 2:14–20).

In Isaiah 1, Jerusalem "the faithful city has become a harlot" (1:21). Judah's "spiritual whoredom is seen to translate into social meltdown, for the offences decried in vv. 21-23"—murder, rebellion, robbery, bribery, exploitation of the vulnerable—"are not religious but moral and social in nature" and the symptoms of a "deeply personal defection from Yahweh."[74] And yet, like Hosea, Isaiah includes a glorious future reversal by way of an extended eschatological marriage metaphor (Isa 54:4–10).

Through Jeremiah God again uses the metaphor of Judah's harlotry to describe her wanton abandonment of him: "on every high hill and under every green tree you lay down, playing the harlot" (Jer 2:1–5, 20–24). The language of love in the Song is sensually rich yet beautiful in the purity of its passion, because it is expressed within a legitimate marital relationship. Here, the language is sexually explicit but vulgar and repulsive; God portrays his people as a camel or donkey in heat, desperately searching to mate. So pathetic was Judah's frenzied quest for any replacement for Yahweh that "she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees" (Jer 3:1–9).

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canonical-theological function. Either way, prospectively or retrospectively, the adoring Shulamite functions as a foil to adulterous Israel.

[72] Though it does not warrant a separate section, the spiritual adultery motif also finds its way, however briefly, into poetic literature as well (Ps 106:39).

[73] The degree to which the prophets (or historians) may have been aware of the Shulamite foil in the canonical-literary background is irrelevant to the Holy Spirit's superintending design. It is unlikely that the biblical authors saw any significance in the omission of Melchizedek's genealogy from Genesis 14 until the writer of Hebrews discloses its Christological implications (Heb 7:3).

[74] Ortlund, 79.

A witness against Israel's adulterous desertion of her covenantal Husband, the Shulamite all the while modeled the pure passion of a wife delighted in and devoted exclusively to her husband. By virtue of God's persistent use of marriage as his preferred metaphor for his covenant relationship with Israel, she exemplified the delight and devotion that Israel should have had for Yahweh alone. If you want to see what Israel should look like with respect to her God, look at her.

It is important to remember that these prophetic diatribes did not originate from the puritanical opinions of a few antiquated old fogies. In each case, they are quoting Yahweh's words and viewpoint. And through no prophet does God speak more bluntly than Ezekiel. Ezekiel features two chapters of embarrassingly explicit imagery to describe Judah's marital infidelity.

Ezekiel 16 is the longest literary unit in Ezekiel. The language in Song of Songs, though often sexual, is poetically discrete; the language in Ezekiel 16 is shockingly graphic. "No one presses the margins of literary propriety as severely as Ezekiel."[75] Again, however, if we take inspiration seriously, Ezekiel is merely the human mouthpiece. His testimony is that what he writes is "the word of the Lord that came to me" (16:1). These are not the independent word choices of a crass and crotchety old prophet; they are the words "breathed out" by God as he speaks to and through the prophet. The interpreter faces a dilemma, then: trying to convey the force of divine language without unduly offending public sensibilities. The fact is, it is offensive because God jolly well means it to be offensive. The description of God's people here is the ultimate antithesis to the picture we have in the Song of Songs. Judah has become not merely an adulteress, nor even a harlot; she has become, in the common parlance of God's choosing, a nymphomaniacal slut.

In 16:1–14 God's love for Jerusalem is personified and allegorized.[76] The oracle is specifically addressed to Jerusalem (16:2–3) as a theodicy justifying the utter decimation of that city.[77] He reminds Jerusalem of the pagan background from which he redeemed her when she was unattractive, unpromising, and utterly helpless (16:4–5). Nevertheless, God shed his kindness and compassion on her (16:6–7) and graciously beautified her (16:8–14; cf. 2 Chr 6:5–6; 9:1). But then something very ugly starts to happen. Imagine the pure and lovely heroine of your favorite romantic story—whether Cinderella or Snow White, Dickens's Amy Dorrit or Gaskill's Molly Gibson, or (to make it as personal as God takes it) your own fiancée or wife—turning to adultery, choosing to become a prostitute. It is a revolting, offensive thought that such stories should end that way. That is the point, and that is exactly how God reacts.

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[75] Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 466. Whereas previous oracles "softened potentially offensive ideas with euphemisms (e.g., 7:17)," in chapter 16 "Yahweh throws caution to the wind" and describes Judah's adulterous defection in the earthiest of language. After identifying some of the oracle's most explicit vocabulary, Block adds that "the semipornographic style is a deliberate rhetorical device designed to produce a strong emotional response." Block, 467.

[76] "This prophetic oracle is a parable about a despised orphan who became the wife of a king, then gave away all his gifts to become a harlot"—a story of "grace and ingratitude, of God's love spurned." Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 167–68.

[77] "Jerusalem's total destruction could be justified only as a response to some enormous evil. The purpose of this oracle is to describe that sin in the most graphic terms so all who witness it will recognize the justice of God. . . . Radical evil requires a radical response." Block, 466, 470.

God describes Jerusalem's arrogant conceit and her ungrateful betrayal in committing spiritual prostitution (16:15ff.). The language grows exceedingly graphic—more so in Hebrew than in most translations—as God describes Jerusalem's incurable infatuation with the surrounding culture under the metaphor of a wife-turned-prostitute. The verb זנה (prostitute oneself, be a harlot) occurs twenty-one times in Ezekiel 16; and the references to high places (16), images (17), pagan offerings (18–19), and pagan worship (20–21) indicate the character and locales of this behavior. Though the books of Kings do not characterize the nation's idolatry in this way, it is the fullest documentation of what this spiritual adultery and fornication looked like.[78] They multiplied their idolatrous adulteries at every intersection and eagerly made themselves available to anyone and everyone other than Yahweh (25)—the Egyptians (26), the Assyrians (28), the Babylonians (29). God is not describing literal forays into sexual immorality (although that may well be a side-effect of much of the idolatry). He is using married immorality as a metaphor to describe how he views their defection from him and his covenantal claim on their exclusive affection and allegiance. But they left him and joined themselves to these idolatrous cultures with an obsessive desperation that disgusts even the nations that they want to be like. Yahweh describes his reaction to this betrayal not only in terms of an offended God but in the language of a wronged and grief-stricken husband:

> I was crushed [lit., broken, shattered] by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the LORD; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them. (Ezekiel 6:9–10)[79]

Again, off in the canonical distance stands the Shulamite bride in the Song of Songs, faithfully modeling the pure passion that God's people should have had for him, their Husband, alone. But it gets even worse. Yahweh describes Jerusalem's behavior in terms of a dysfunctional and insatiable lust to be like—and be liked by—the surrounding nations (16:30ff). God bluntly observes, in effect, that a prostitute at least does it for money, but Judah is so desperate to be like them that they are willing to pay for the privilege of becoming their whore. The sin God is addressing is not ultimately sexual—though there are moral effects in the behavior of his people. The sin God is addressing is deeply spiritual, cultural, religious, and relational.

How does this kind of frenetic, obsessive, idolatrous, adulterous behavior start? It did not begin with random Israelites who one day happened to see a gold idol and think, "Wow, that's so beautiful it must be god! I think I'll adopt that as my god and worship it." That's not how idolatry works. Idolatry is religious but never merely religious; it is social and cultural. Israel's idolatry was often not a total abandonment of Yahweh and a wholesale substitution of some other religious culture. Often it

[78] See, e.g., 2 Kings 16:1–4, 10–18; 21:1–15. One can trace the trajectory of this behavior throughout the books: 1 Kings 3:2–3; 11:7–8, 13; 14:23–24; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4; 17:9–19; 18:4, 22; 21:3; 23:5, 8, 9, 13.

[79] For a discussion of whether such a passage is adequately explained under the rubric of anthropomorphism, see my article "Greater Is He Than Man Can Know: Divine Repentance and an Inquiry into Anthropomorphism & Anthropopathism, Impassibility and Affectability," *JBTW* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 73–93.

was either idolatry bootlegged in and cross-dressed as the worship of the true God (Exod 32) or idolatry unabashedly adopted alongside their continued worship of Yahweh (Jer 7:9–10; Ezek 23:38–39)—up to their high places for an idolatrous fling, then back down to Yahweh's temple as though it was all perfectly natural. The prophets all describe God's disgust with their worship and sacrifices to him for that very reason. Fawning affection for the surrounding culture cannot coexist with a genuine, Shulamite adoration for God and God's culture, for the same reason that John expresses: the two are diametrical opposites and mutually exclusive (1 John 2:15).[80] *Idolatry—spiritual adultery—always begins with an admiration, affection, and infatuation with the ways and values of a neighboring culture.* Idolatry is not a merely religious or ideological phenomenon; idolatry and culture go hand-in-hand. Idolatry is not ultimately *about* the *idol*; it is about the accompanying *culture*, *values*, and *lifestyle*. If you want confirmation of that, read Ezekiel 23.

In Ezekiel 23 God delves into another account of Israel's marital infidelity. She is not merely an adulteress, nor even a harlot; she has become something even worse. The chapter describes both Israel and Judah as obsessed nymphomaniacs. The verb עגב (to have sensual desire, to pursue erotically) occurs eight times in the OT, and seven of them are in Ezekiel 23. God tells another parable—an allegory, in fact—about two women. By the end, God's metaphorical language becomes what we might almost call obscene (23:20)—but that is because the actual behavior he is describing is, to him, obscene. Again, we must remember that God is not directly describing the physical sexual immorality of all the Israelites with their pagan neighbors; God is describing their idolatrous obsession with the surrounding pagan culture via obscenely metaphorical sexual language. Why? *Because Israel's religious idolatry was a form of marital betrayal and infidelity of the worst imaginable kind*. It was an infatuation with the up-and-coming surrounding pagan culture.

> But she increased her harlotry; she looked at men portrayed on the wall, images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, girded with belts around their waists, flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like captains, in the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity. As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality; so she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them. She revealed her harlotry and displayed her nakedness. Then I alienated Myself from her, as I had alienated Myself from her sister. (Ezek 23:14–18)

Their adulterous fascination was fixated not on the gods, but on the people: their dress, their pomp, their style, their impressive appearance, their pride and security. Judah's breathless response to what they saw was, in essence, "That's what I want! That's what I want to look like! That's who I want to be like!" In short, Judah idolized them. What form did this idolization take? Religious idolatry? This was

[80] Paul underscores the same contradiction—intriguingly, with specific reference to the Corinthian temptation to idolatrous syncretism: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." He follows this with a clear echo from the OT: "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1 Cor 10:21–22).

certainly part of it (cf. 23:36–39). Literal immorality with the Assyrians and Babylonians? Probably. Political alliance? Perhaps.[81] But unlike Ezekiel 16, the focus here is not on the religious dimension (idolatry proper) but on the cultural dimension: the people, the clothing, the status, and the culture of the surrounding nations. That desire to be like the nations around them is the OT expression of its NT counterpart: worldliness.

Worldliness is nothing more complex than world-likeness, and *world-likeness* is simply the opposite of *Godlikeness*, the antithesis of holiness—the concept of being set apart uniquely and exclusively for God, as a wife is to her husband. Worldliness is not an idea invented by paranoid puritanical fundamentalists. It is not even a new concept first introduced in the NT; it was going on all through the OT. Indeed, it began in Genesis 3:15.[82] Worldliness is simply identifying with the unbelieving world—preferring their company, emulating their culture, adopting their values over God's, or mixing it with God's and calling it "Christian" under the rubric of liberty. What the NT identifies as "the world" is not a neutral zone but a war zone, a kingdom of subjects governed and influenced by a spirit who is in declared and hostile opposition to God. Worldliness, like idolatry itself, is not an external sin, though it has external symptoms. Worldliness is a profoundly internal, spiritual, religious, and relational issue. The OT describes it as wanting to be like "the nations." The NT calls it conformity to "the world." In both Testaments, God calls it not just idolatry but adultery and prostitution. That is because religion and culture are inseparable; religion always expresses itself in the culture, and the culture that is embraced always works its way into one's religion. All of life and culture is religious, because all of reality is theological, because all of humanity has been created in the image of God and is either pursuing God or rejecting and rebelling against him.

Even from this vantage point, looking back at the Song of Songs through a wide-angle canonical lens, the Shulamite remains as the single, sterling example that Israel never emulated in her relationship to Yahweh her Husband.

> "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick!"
>
> "What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?"
>
> "He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:8, 9, 16).

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[81] Summarizing this passage, Cooper observes that "Judah's political prostitution was presented in explicit sexual terminology." Cooper, 228. But when did Judah rush into a political or military alliance with Babylon, and was then repulsed, as the passage describes? Jehoiakim became subservient to Babylon for three years, but then rebelled against them (2 Kgs 24:1). It seems nearer the mark to say that Judah's *cultural* prostitution is in view and presented in explicit sexual terminology.

[82] Genesis 3:15 guarantees the perpetual presence and temptation of worldliness and the unavoidable endemic enmity between God's people (the seed of the woman) and the world (the seed of the serpent)—an enmity that is not merely natural or incidental, but divinely ordained ("I will put enmity between"). For a thorough exploration of the trans-canonical significance of Genesis 3:15, see Jonathan M. Cheek, "Genesis 3:15 as the Root of a Biblical Theology of the Church and the World: The Commencement, Continuation, and Culmination of the Enmity between the Seeds" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2019).

In the context of the predominant metaphor God has chosen throughout the canon to portray his relationship to his people, the adoring Shulamite depicts the ideal wife and, as such, the consummate foil to adulterous Israel. It is no wonder that God delights in, and that the best of songs celebrates, the kind of pure passion and devoted admiration of such a woman for her husband—because Yahweh never got it from the nation he favored and chose out of all others. One day he will.[83] And as the NT indicates, he still looks for it from his people today.

New Testament

The marriage/adultery metaphor does not die with the OT but resurfaces in the NT. Familiarity may not always breed contempt, but it can certainly kill curiosity. We may become so acclimated to NT language that we never pause to marvel over it.

Gospels

On at least three different occasions Jesus referred to the religious leaders of his day as an "adulterous generation" (Matt 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38). Why *adulterous?*[84] This was not a swipe at the personal morality of some in his audience; it was a concise and picturesque commentary on the spiritual character of these Jews as a whole, echoing the language of the prophets.[85] The OT background of that language that we have already surveyed corroborates this conclusion. And yet, if there is one sin of which these Jewish leaders were not guilty, it is pagan idolatry in the classic religious sense—which only underscores my earlier argument that spiritual adultery involves much more than merely bowing down to false gods.[86] One wonders whether the word *adulterous* caught their attention and made them think of any of those OT passages.

Epistles

Paul echoes God's language of jealousy when he writes, "I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin [like a Shulamite bride] to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2). In Paul's most classic use of the marriage metaphor, his instruction to wives and husbands is likened to and grounded in the higher reality between Christ and his church (Eph 5:22–33). Like the Song of Songs, Ephesians 5 is first and foremost about the human marriage

[83] It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the eschatological reversal of Israel's adultery, but it is promised even in some of the stiffest condemnations we have surveyed (e.g., Jer 3:11–20; Hos 2:14–23; 3:5).

[84] This is the same root used in Ezekiel 16:32 (LXX), "You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband."

[85] Citing this passage, Ortlund comments, "Jesus responds to his contemporaries with denunciations not unlike those of the Old Testament prophets" (137). Lane likewise notes that this is "an expression colored by the strictures of the prophets against idolatry (cf. Isa. 1:4, 21; Ezek. 16:32; Hos. 2:4)." William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 310.

[86] It is often asserted that the Babylonian captivity cured the Jews of idolatry, but that is not my point here. One has only to read Ezra and Nehemiah with a modicum of attentiveness to see that the exiles were still as susceptible to idolatry and its concomitants as they were prior to the captivity. This was not the case with the NT-era religious leaders. Yet, spiritual adulterers they were nonetheless.

relationship and, secondarily by analogical application (not allegory), about the divine-human relationship.[87]

The NT passage most reminiscent of the OT marriage/adultery motif is James 4:4–5.

> Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

The connections implied in the OT are made explicit here: adultery equals friendship with the world, which in turn arouses divine hostility. Instead of reserving their love and devotion for Christ, these had, by prioritizing their own pleasure (ἡδονή, 4:1, 3) and lust (ἐπιθυμέω, 4:2) and by their affection (φιλία, 4:4) for a world at enmity with God, put themselves on the side of God's enemies. Also, verse 5 again links jealousy to the marriage metaphor; it is the same OT concept of God's righteous claims on the singular devotion of his people. All reality—from angels to humans—is divided into two sides: those who are God's and those who are in rebellion against him. In the OT it was Israel and "the nations"; in the NT it is the church and "the world." To dote on and flirt with the world, let alone to pant and pursue and lust after the world—desiring to be like and to be liked by the surrounding culture—is to commit spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery is no better than physical adultery just because it is *only* spiritual. It is not just *spiritual* adultery; it is spiritual *adultery*.[88]

Revelation

The marriage metaphor that pervades both the Old and New Testaments appropriately comes to final fruition in Revelation—the consummate book of consummation. The positive eschatological marriage imagery in Revelation 19 and 21 is brightened by its intentional contrast to the preceding negative imagery of Revelation 17–18, where the angel shows to John "the judgment of the great harlot" (17:1).[89]

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[87] "Paul is the one who lifts the hermeneutical capstone into place by revealing what our intuitions may have suspected all along, *viz.* that marriage from the beginning was meant to be a tiny social platform on which the love of Christ for his church and the church's responsiveness to him could be put on visible display. Human marriage is finally divulged to be emblematic of Christ and the church in covenant, destined to live together not as 'one-flesh' for a lifetime in this world but as 'one spirit' for eternity in a new heavens and a new earth." Ortlund, 172.

[88] For some penetrating practical applications of spiritual adultery, see Ortlund, 174–76. Also, for readers who may wonder why 1 John 2:15–16 is not included, the primary focus of this NT survey is not worldliness but the marriage/adultery metaphor.

[89] This description is "indicative of her spiritual harlotry and representative of an ecclesiastical or religious facet that is a counterfeit of the real. In prophetic language, prostitution, fornication, or adultery is equivalent to idolatry or religious apostasy (Is. 23:15-17; Jer. 2:30-31; 13:17; Ezek. 16:17-19; Hos. 2:5; Nah. 3:4). . . . With this background it is beyond dispute that this woman . . . is the epitome of spiritual fornication or idolatry. She leads the world in the pursuit of false religion whether it be paganism or perverted revealed religion. She is the symbol for a system that reaches back to the tower of Babel and extends into the future when it will peak under the regime of the beast. . . . So this woman represents all false religion of all time, including those who apostatize from the revealed religion of Christianity." Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 282–83.

Of all the images God might have chosen to depict the character of this eschatological atrocity, why a whore? Why is a prostitute the divine persona of choice to epitomize this final expression of human mutiny against God? If the ultimate issue at stake in history is a *kingdom* issue between God and Satan,[90] why is Babylon not depicted more simply as, say, a *rebel?* The essence of "prostitution" (literal or metaphorical) is the selling on the public market of what is intended to be private and sacred and devoted to one—whether it is one's body or one's soul and worship. Prostitution is taking what God has given for one use only and merchandising it publicly for profit.[91] This whore prostitutes her soul and worship—which rightfully belong exclusively to God—to the Beast and to the dragon, apparently in exchange for a considerable degree of power, since she is the one *riding* the Beast and therefore in control (for the time being). She is also described as drunk with the blood of saints, implying that part of the services she has sold is an effective role in helping the Beast hunt down and destroy the saints (who would not worship the Beast or his image). Like all prostitutes, she is a tool and a slave.

Against this backdrop of the divine destruction of all prostitutional defection from the Creator, Revelation 19 (vv. 6–9) and 21 (vv. 2, 9–11) complete the biblical-theological marriage metaphor with the marriage celebration of the Lamb (Christ) and his wife ("the saints").[92] "The Bible, like the Song of Songs, ends with a bride calling to the one who loves her to come (Rev. 22:17, 20; Song 8:14)."[93]

Conclusion

It is neither accidental nor insignificant that folded into the creation motif that begins and ends the Bible is the marriage motif. It is a metaphor chosen and reiterated throughout by God himself, and it bookends his self-revelation. Within that canonical context, the Song of Songs eternally enshrines the Shulamite's feelings and expressions of loving marital devotion first and foremost on the literal and horizontal (human-human) level and secondarily—not in spite of but precisely *because* of the literal level—on the analogical and vertical (divine-human) level. Neither she nor the Song functions on an allegorical level. In the broader canonical-theological context, however, she becomes a theological, analogical metaphor for God's people, under both the Old and New Covenants. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that in the rest of the canon, God himself repeatedly employs a husband-wife metaphor analogically.

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[90] Kingdom vocabulary dominates the Apocalypse. The βασιλ- word family shows up 39x; θρόνος occurs 47x; ἐξουσία appears 21x.

[91] Someone who sells her labor, skill, time, or knowledge for legitimate purposes is not a prostitute. That is why the metaphorical definition of "prostitution" is the selling of one's time and services to an unworthy cause.

[92] "According to Jesus, there will be no sex or marriage in heaven as we know them now, but neither will there be any singleness, for both will have been replaced by a greater reality, the final union between Christ and his people, in which all of the redeemed will be included (Rev. 19:6–10)." Webb, 34.

[93] Ibid. "So," Webb adds, "from a New Testament perspective, the love depicted in the Song is not only a taste of what was given in creation, but a sign of what will be consummated in the new creation—a sign of the gospel. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31–32)." Marriage, notes Ortlund, "is a divine creation, intended to reveal the ultimate romance guiding all of time and eternity" (173).

The problem consistently spotlighted by this theological metaphor is the disaffection and unfaithfulness of Israel as the adulterous wife of Yahweh. In contrast, this Song memorializes a consummate picture of the pure and passionate longing of the Shulamite for her beloved. Even though the Song is primarily about marital love—or rather, *because* it is primarily about marital love—it *necessarily* has theological and Christological relevance, because God himself has made the marital relationship his paradigm of choice to picture the relationship between him and his people.

Just as the Book of Ruth is the counterweight of covenantal family-loyalty in the context of the rampant disloyalty that characterized the era of the Judges,[94] the Song of Songs is the counterweight of covenantal marital-loyalty in the larger canonical context of Israel's lack of love and loyalty in her covenant relationship to Yahweh. The Song is the richest image of what should be the posture of Yahweh's people toward him.[95] The canonical-theological observation espoused here should not confuse illustration with interpretation. Just as the marriage relationship is addressed quite literally in the NT yet the marriage metaphor is applied illustratively on the spiritual level, the same may be done here with the Song in its OT context without doing any violence to the text or compromising the dignity of the divine-human relationship.[96]

On a personal level, the Shulamite's opposite is Gomer (Hosea 1, 3). Just as Gomer represents the adulterous unfaithfulness of Israel to Yahweh, the Shulamite's passionate love and loyalty to her husband (her beloved) is the ideal and ultimate foil to Israel's adulterous infidelity to her Husband (her Beloved, Isa 5:1). The Shulamite is the standard of passionate fidelity with the power to shame the nation for its unconscionable infidelity. And because God employs the marriage metaphor trans-testamentally, she remains for all of God's people the standard of passionate admiration and exclusive fidelity both to one's spouse and to one's God. What does that look like?

> To love God truly is not simply to keep his commandments, but to thirst for him as a deer thirsts for flowing streams (Ps. 42:1), and to long for him as a bride longs for her groom. For that is how we ourselves are loved by God . . . . When what should be the fruits and accompaniments of love [i.e., obedience] are mistaken for love itself, the heart sooner or later goes out of religion, however committed to orthodoxy and good works it may be [like the Ephesian church which forsook its

[94] Ruth 1:1 is important for locating the story not only chronologically but theologically. Throughout the era of the Judges Israel forsook (עזב) the Lord (e.g., 2:12, 13; 10:10, 13, 16). That they failed to be loyal to Yahweh is apparent not only from the storyline but also from the conspicuous absence of the word חֶסֶד, which occurs only twice in Judges (and one of those notes the *absence* of loyalty, 8:35). By contrast, loyalty is a conspicuously present and controlling motif in the Book of Ruth, both in word (1:8; 2:20; 3:10) and action (1:14, 16–17; 2:11; 4:14, 15).

[95] Garrett issues an important and appropriate caveat: "Sexual language should not be brought into the vocabulary of worship and devotion via allegorism or any other means" (357). Likewise, Gledhill concedes that "there is some biblical justification for a moderate typological approach. But the danger of this hermeneutic is that of thinking that the relationship between the believer and God is highly emotional or even erotic." "The Song of Songs," 215.

[96] "We could justifiably treat the Song of Songs as an extension of the marriage metaphor that occurs in many places in the Bible." Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., "Marriage," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 539.

> first love, Rev. 2:4], and it becomes a burden rather than a joy. The Song of Songs is there to stop love going out of our relationships, with God and with one another.[97]

When we fail to measure up to the Shulamite's example, or even like Judah and Jerusalem wander wantonly into sin, chastity can be recovered. The NT introduces us to another woman well-known for her prostitution (Luke 7:36–50). She was no Shulamite. But when she came to Jesus, and poured out on him her repentance, and gratitude, and devotion—he received her, forgave her, and comforted her. He does that for all who return to him like that.

[97] Webb, 35.

Moore, Russell. *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America.* New York: Sentinel, 2023. 256pp.

The title of Russell Moore's book might lead readers to guess that he is writing about the increasing number of "Nones," the people who identify with no particular religion or religious body. While that topic is certainly germane to Moore's discussion, it is not his chief point. When he writes about "losing our religion," he has two main ideas in mind.

The first is the distinction, often drawn in evangelical preaching, between religious people and true followers of Jesus Christ. Preachers sometimes tell sinners that religion cannot save them; only Jesus can. People can go through the forms of religion and even adopt a religious identity while rejecting Christ, just as they can receive and follow Christ without putting on religious airs. Moore believes that a significant proportion of modern evangelicalism is using religion, and particularly the religious structures of evangelicalism, to mask a departure from devotion to Christ. Moore believes that evangelicalism needs to lose this religion and to get back to following Christ.

The second sense in which Moore uses the expression "losing our religion" is in the sense of failing to exercise informed, righteous anger. He believes that some evangelicals have become involved in so much religious pretense that they are saying and doing things that should provoke justifiable anger from biblical Christians. He says (and shows) that he personally is angry about some of these things.

What sorts of things make Moore angry? One is perceived hypocrisy in the conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The other is Donald Trump. Moore is at his angriest when these two converge. Indeed, he suggests that his anger over this convergence was the very thing that led to his exit from the SBC.

For some years, Russell Moore was a poster boy for success in the Southern Baptist Convention. After earning his PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he served briefly as an associate pastor. He was then offered a professorship in ethics and theology at his *alma mater*. Within three years he had become dean of the School of Theology and was promoted to the vice-presidential level. He then served four years as pastor of an SBC church in Louisville, simultaneously taking an increasing role in convention politics. Then in 2013 he was appointed president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), a subsidiary organization of the SBC. He was one of the brightest rising stars in the Southern Baptist sky.

Moore's trajectory began to change with the candidacy and then presidency of Donald J. Trump. Like many evangelicals, Moore expressed alarm over Trump's personal morality. Additionally, Moore echoed the concerns of many Trump opponents over issues such as race and immigration. Vocalizing these concerns placed Moore at odds with a segment of the Southern Baptist leadership that supported Trump.

Around this time, accusations were leveled against a couple of prominent Southern Baptist conservative leaders. These accusations also came at roughly the same time that the "Me Too" movement was riveting American interest with its demand to "believe all victims." Moore echoed these concerns within the SBC.

Moore's willingness to criticize old-line SBC leaders and his refusal to support Donald Trump led to closer inspection by powerful figures in the convention. These figures decided that his position on issues such as race and immigration was less like theirs and more like that of their political opponents. Soon there were accusations that Moore was "woke" and that he was a "cultural Marxist." This controversy eventually led to Moore's departure, not only from the ERLC, but from the Southern Baptist Convention altogether.

This background (which Moore references throughout his book) is essential for understanding *Losing Our Religion*. The book is an indictment specifically of the SBC, but also of the political tactics and internal inconsistencies of political versions of conservative evangelicalism. Moore says at the outset that he is angry, and the text shows it.

What upsets Moore is that (as he sees it) evangelicals who have aligned with Donald Trump have given up their biblical witness. The titles of his chapters disclose what he thinks they have lost in the process: their credibility, moral authority, identity, integrity, and stability. Of course, the problem that Moore perceives is larger than Trump, but Trump is the focus. On average, Moore singles Trump out by name every six pages, besides alluding to the former president many more times without naming him. Outside of God and Jesus, Trump is the most frequently named individual in the book.

Is *Losing Our Religion* simply an exercise in what some on the Right would call "Trump Derangement Syndrome?" No, Moore's work cannot be so easily dismissed. Donald Trump really does confront biblical Christians with a dilemma. On one side of the dilemma is a history in which evangelicals used to insist that character matters in political candidates (a fact of which Moore reminds his readers). Trump is clearly not a man of character. His repeated infidelities, his demonstrated disrespect of women, his willingness to engage publicly in gutter talk, and his eagerness to default to personal abuse rather than measured argument are the marks of an unprincipled man.

Moore thinks that evangelical leaders have backed Trump so they can gain political influence. As Moore sees it, these churchmen have been willing to trade their moral reservations about Trump in exchange for access to the levers of power. Such leaders have been willing to excuse their promotion of Trump by claiming that they are not voting for him to be a pastor, by minimizing the significance of his transgressions, by denying that he has committed them, by claiming that he has recently trusted Christ and is now a baby Christian, and even by claiming that Trump has done God's work.

Moore's accusations are easy to substantiate, but the situation is a bit more complicated than he portrays it to be, which leads to the other side of the dilemma. Most evangelicals who have voted for Trump have probably not done so because they wanted power or because they admired or even liked the man. More likely, they have been voting against the alternatives. Before Trump took office, the Supreme Court had forced the entire nation to pretend that two people of the same sex could be married to each other. The Obama-Biden administration was moving toward forcing people to recognize that men could become women or *vice versa*. Children who questioned their "gender identity" were to be given drugs and even surgeries to make them look like children of the other sex. The promoters of this agenda intended to apply it eventually to all institutions, including Christian churches, schools, and adoption agencies. There were to be no religious exemptions. At the same time, people who affirmed a realistic and biblical view of marriage, sex, and gender were to be denied

privileges that were available to the rest of the public. They were even to be subjected to civil penalties. Hillary Clinton made it clear in advance that she would further these policies; the Biden-Harris administration has consistently tried to push them.

Under these circumstances, evangelicals could (and can) perceive Trump as the lesser of two evils. Indeed, when men are being admitted into women's and girls' private spaces, when men are trouncing female competitors in women's sports, when children are being mutilated because of gender confusion, and when violent male criminals are being imprisoned with women, Trump's transgressions pale to the point that he can seem virtuous by comparison. That is why many evangelicals have held their noses and voted for him.

Moore knows all about this dynamic. He replies by noting (with Hanna Arendt) that choosing the lesser evil is still choosing evil. Moore seems to think that the solution lies in rejecting both alternatives and trusting God for the result. His point is certainly defensible, but it is not the only conclusion at which biblical Christians can arrive without violating Scripture or conscience. To substantiate his point, Moore appeals to the example of certain kings in Israel and Judah who appealed to Gentile alliances for help, noting that God uniformly condemns those appeals. The status of Israel and Judah as a covenant people, however, limits the usefulness of this analogy. No clear teaching of Scripture requires Christians to become Never Trumpers.

As Moore sees it, the same attitude that excuses the transgressions of Trump was also used to excuse the misdeeds of certain Southern Baptist leaders. Oddly, he never names those individuals specifically, though his descriptions make it clear whom he means. While Moore was head of the ERLC, various pastors and other leaders were accused of sexual predation. Among these were prominent architects of the Southern Baptist resurgence. On Moore's view, too many of these accusations were excused or swept under the rug. He himself spoke out against them, with the result that considerable ecclesiastical pressure was brought to bear against him.

The story Moore tells is believable, even to a non-Southern Baptist. What Moore describes is something that happens somewhere in nearly every circle of organized Christianity. He is right to be angry about it. What is not right is that he should be surprised, let alone shocked. Moore says that he believes in total depravity. He should not be surprised to find that people—even Christian people—act depraved. He should not be surprised to discover that people are willing to cover up depravity when it suits their purposes. But that is not the main problem.

More to the point is the way that the SBC works. In the SBC, churches have formally banded together to erect institutions, including the ERLC, to serve them. While the churches remain technically autonomous, the convention formally ties them to the structure of seminaries, missions, the Cooperative Program, and (among others) the ERLC. Rule number one in this situation is that convention employees must not offer public criticism of other convention entities, and particularly of the presidents of those entities. There is no quicker way for an employee in an SBC institution to face disciplinary measures than to offer such public criticism.

Moore was a convention employee. When he went after pastors, churches, and heads of other institutions, he broke the rules. He should have anticipated what would happen. The reaction may not have been right or fair, but it was foreseeable.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with Moore's book is his uneven handling of the Left and Right. He holds the evangelical Right responsible to behave in a thoughtful, reasoned, and biblical way. Yet he minimizes the degree to which critical theory (cultural Marxism) has begun to reshape evangelical and Southern Baptist sensibilities from the Left. He seems to dismiss concerns that evangelicals are increasingly woke. Nevertheless, critical theory has begun to set the agenda for many evangelicals. Many see critical theory as a helpful analytical tool. Surely that is at least as great a threat to biblical integrity as the concerns that Moore addresses.

So why not rebuke the Left? An easy guess is that Moore was not spanked by the woke crowd. In fact, the more he protested Trump, the more he became their darling. No, Moore was spanked—hard—by convention polemicists and Trump supporters. Evidently, the locus of Moore's spanking still hurts.

Moore's work has value, but it could have had a much greater value. The concerns that he raises are real, and Christians ought to face them. He channels his pain to energize and direct his presentation. Unfortunately, that same pain leads him sometimes to exaggerate the faults of those he criticizes while simultaneously blinding him to the related and opposite concerns—concerns that may well be more important than the problems he attacks. If Moore had provided a corresponding critique of critical theory and an account of the spread of wokeness within evangelicalism and the SBC, his work could have been much stronger. As it stands, it lacks balance.

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Bauder, Kevin T., and R. Bruce Compton, eds. *Dispensationalism Revisited: A Twenty-First Century Restatement.* Plymouth, MN: Central Seminary Press, 2023. 278pp. + 15pp. (front matter).

This book is a festschrift for Charles Hauser Jr., who taught at several institutions, including Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary (an institution now carried on by Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa) and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. The authors of the various chapters were students and/or colleagues of Charles Hauser. The authors include both traditional/revised and progressive dispensationalists, but the book reads more traditionally since the progressive dispensationalists wrote on topics of dispensational agreement whereas some of the traditional dispensationalists argued for points of distinction in the intramural dispensational discussion.

Some of these chapters are excellent statements of standard dispensational positions. Ryan Martin provides a fine exegetical survey of Romans 9–11 that ably demonstrates that these chapters disallow any form of supersessionism. Edward Glenny contributes a clear articulation of the premillennial position coupled with brief but cogent critiques of amillennial readings of Revelation 20. This chapter provides a superb introduction to the premillennial position, and those who would take the time to track down the sources mentioned in the footnotes would be led to some of the best resources from all sides of the debate. Jonathan Pratt provides a solid defense of the pretribulational rapture. The latter part of the chapter, where Pratt makes his case from Revelation 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4–5, was more convincing than the arguments mounted earlier in the chapter from 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 and Revelation 12:5.

Other chapters argue for distinctives of traditional dispensationalism. Douglas Brown explains why the glory of God was included as a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, though it is also a significant feature of other systems of theology. Brown notes that this was an effort by the traditional dispensationalists to posit a unifying principle of history in response to charges that dispensationalism undercut the unity of Scripture by having two purposes for two peoples of God.

Roy Beacham defends a very specific understanding of the literal interpretation of prophecy: "Any hermeneutical viewpoint that espouses any form of other-than-, less-than-, or more-than-literal fulfillment of God's foretelling negates the declared purpose and evidentiary worth of this genre" (41). There is wide agreement among dispensationalists with Beacham regarding "other-than" and "less-than" fulfillments, but the exclusion of "more-than" is a point of contention among dispensationalists. If everything God predicted happened exactly as God said it would, but more happened in addition to what God predicted, how does the "more-than" negate God's purposes for prophecy or violate the integrity of the Promiser? In a footnote Beacham explains his view of how "more-than" interpretations work: "God promises to do *x* but instead he does *y,* which, in their view, is > *x*" (51n32). But promising *x* and doing *y* does not describe an *expansion* of the promises; it describes *replacement* under the label of expansion. Nonetheless, Beacham concludes the footnote by arguing against *expansion* in principle. However, it is difficult to see how *expansion* can be eliminated without predictive prophecy being exhaustive. For instance, is not the fact that the fulfillment of certain prophecies regarding Christ is

divided into events that happened in the first advent and events that will happen in the second advent an expansion upon what was revealed in the OT?

Beacham is also critical of canonical interpretation. He is right to be concerned about appeals to canonical interpretation that negate promises made to Israel. But canonical interpretation seems simply to be the way that related texts are read. If a person is reading a series of novels and one character seems ambiguous or evil in earlier volumes while a later volume reveals him to have been a secret agent working for the good, that later information will necessarily reshape how those earlier scenes are understood. Likewise, when the seed promise of Genesis 3:15 is read in light of the progressive revelation that develops that promise, readers gain a richer understanding of the promise. The abuse of canonical readings does not negate its proper, even inevitable, use.

Bruce Compton makes the case that the kingdom of heaven/God refers only to the rule of Christ on earth in the coming millennial kingdom. He denies that the kingdom is present in any sense during the church age. Compton makes the best case for the millennium-only view of the kingdom that can be made, and if one feels compelled to accept such a viewpoint, the exegesis can be made to work. However, the biblical text itself seems to push interpreters in another direction. Matthew 13, for instance, is a problem for Compton's thesis, for it seems that its parables do precisely what Compton proposes Jesus never did: teach that there will be a phase of the kingdom in the inter-advent period. These parables envision a time when Christ's kingdom will appear insignificant and invisible and in which the sons of the evil one co-exist with the sons of the kingdom. Compton does land significant critiques against those who limit the reign of Christ to his spiritual rule in the lives of believers. But his objections do not land with those who believe that the realm of the kingdom is the earth even in this inaugurated stage when Christ rules in the midst of his enemies. Compton concludes his chapter by observing that his approach helps keep the church on mission by not giving the church a social mandate. However, there are those who hold to the presence of the kingdom who also are reticent about a social mandate for the institutional church. The kingdom is a broader category than the institution of the church, and sphere sovereignty provides a theological category to distinguish the mission of the institutional church from the mission of Christians in other institutions.

Kevin Bauder's chapter on Israel, the church, and the people of God was the most thought provoking. Bauder notes that *people* can be "plural for *person*" with "people of God" meaning "the sum total of all saved individuals." However, it is another usage of *people* that is in play when discussing the church and Israel: "*people groups*" (72). Israel was identified as a people of God because it was a nation chosen by God. The church is also identified as God's people, even though it is a multi-ethnic group. Bauder argues that the church can be considered an ethnic-group equivalent because all of its members are united to Christ. After the return of Christ there will be many peoples of God as the nations turn to God for salvation *en masse*.

Bauder's chapter provides an excellent survey of the evidence that shifted my thinking from a simple affirmation of a single people of God to a more complex view. A weakness of the chapter is the absence of the role that covenant plays in forming a people of God. Israel was God's people because God entered into a covenant with Israel (cf. Exod 19:5). In the NT, Israel can still be identified as the people of God (e.g., Luke 2:32), but the people terminology can also be applied more broadly to all

of the redeemed because all the redeemed are in covenant with God (e.g., Matt 1:21; Heb 2:17). The church is also referred to as the people of God, often in passages quoting OT texts that referred originally to Israel (cf. 2 Cor 6:16–18; 1 Pet 2:9–10). Contrary to Bauder, it is not necessary to find a way to make the church another ethnic group in order to apply the *people* language to it. Rather, terms that were ethnic when originally applied to Israel are applied to the church metaphorically because the church is the New Covenant body of people possessed by God just as Israel was the Old Covenant people possessed by God.

Though initially dubious about Bauder's proposal of many peoples of God, I found myself persuaded by the evidence. For example, the most plausible textual variant in Revelation 21:3 refers to peoples of God: "God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God" (CSB). Thus, in this last statement of the covenant formula the plurality of the peoples of God is emphasized. And yet, this phrase is announced from heaven at the descent of the new Jerusalem, which is described in terms that reinforce the unity of the people of God. So is there one, two, or many peoples of God? The answer is "yes," depending on the sense in view. The Bible uses the "people of God" terminology in various ways. It can be used of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. It can be used of the church as the New Covenant people of God. It can be used of all the redeemed throughout the ages. And it can be used of redeemed nations in the new creation. This formulation differs somewhat from Bauder's but is indebted to his thought-provoking chapter.

Other essays in *Dispensationalism Revisited* cover topics such as the covenants, Israel and the church in Acts, and patristic views of Israel. Overall the book contains a number of excellent, persuasive essays. Other essays, though less persuasive in my view, nonetheless provide strongly argued cases for traditional dispensational positions.

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DeRouchie, Jason S. *Delighting in the Old Testament through Christ and for Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 286pp. + 26pp. (front matter) + 50pp. (back matter).

Jason DeRouchie's volume is a study in how to read the OT as a Christian from the perspective of progressive covenantalism. After an introduction in which he makes the case that the OT is an important part of the canon for Christians to love and read, the book divides into four parts. In the first part DeRouchie argues that the OT writers knew that God was giving them revelation that would become clearer "and more meaningful for those living in the messianic age of restoration," which he takes to include the present era, "than for those living before it" (17). Thus, the OT must be read with the knowledge of the coming of Christ and his accomplishments in the history of salvation if it is to be rightly understood. In part 2, DeRouchie argues for a "redemptive-historical, Christocentric model" in which Christ is seen as the goal of salvation history and the one in whom all the OT promises are fulfilled (73). Part 3 expands on this final point. It "considers why and how *every* promise is 'Yes' in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20)" (132). The fourth part examines the Christian's relation to the Mosaic law. DeRouchie argues, "The Mosaic law does not *directly* bind the Christian in a legal manner, but we treat all the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive when we read them through the lens of Christ" (193).

This book exhibits several strengths. While making a case that "God gave the Old Testament for *new* covenant believers" (19), DeRouchie notes his agreement with Walter Kaiser that the interpreter should first interpret texts in light of preceding revelation. He also expresses that he is "highly sympathetic" to those who "limited meaning to *human* authorial intent," though he notes that E. D. Hirsch (on whom biblical scholars embracing this position rely) has revised his firm distinction between *meaning* and *significance* (25n14). He does argue that "the full meaning of some Old Testament texts can transcend the human author's understanding . . . because God's purposes often far exceed human understanding (Deut. 29:29; Eccl. 8:16–17; Isa. 55:8–9) and because he was authoring not simply individual books but *a* book (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) whose parts were 'incomplete' until Jesus 'fulfilled' them by his coming (Matt. 5:17; 11:13; Rom. 10:4)" (25). But when he makes a case for a Christocentric reading of the OT, DeRouchie insists, "Significantly, the redemptive-historical, Christocentric model I am proposing does *not* appeal 'to a hidden divine layer of meaning on top of the biblical writers' intent.'" (73; replying to a charge made by Abner Chou in *TMSJ* 33.2 [2022]: 219).

Part 4's treatment of the law and the Christian is another generally strong point in the book. DeRouchie summarizes this section of the book as follows: "The thesis is this: The Mosaic law does not directly bind the Christian in a legal manner, but we treat all the Old Testament laws as profitable and instructive when we read them through the lens of Christ" (193). In establishing this thesis DeRouchie builds on Brian Rosner's excellent volume, *Paul and the Law*.[1] The law as the Mosaic Covenant is "repudiated" and is "replaced" by "the law of Christ" in the New Covenant. Nonetheless,

[1] *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God,* NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

Christians "reappropriate" all of the Mosaic law as it testifies to who God is, as it prophesies the person and work of Christ, and as it provides wisdom for Christian living.

DeRouchie also outlines four ways that Christ fulfills the law (208–9). (1) "*Maintains (no extension)*." This would include laws like those found in the second table of the Decalogue. (2) "*Maintains (with extension)*." This would include laws in which cultural particularities are taken into account in application or when the principle embodied in a law is extended to a new situation. (3) "*Transforms*." DeRouchie holds that the Sabbath command is transformed into spiritual rest in the New Covenant era. Certain laws that required capital punishment within Israel are transformed to require excommunication in the church. (4) "*Annuls*." DeRouchie cites the dietary laws as an example of this category. With this category especially, he emphasizes that these laws still retain a pedagogical value for the believer even though they have been annulled. He helpfully outlines a method for Christian use of the law and provides four case studies that align with each of these four categories.[2]

However, DeRouchie's treatment of the law includes a few stumbles as well. In an otherwise good critique of theonomy, DeRouchie argues that passages about the nations' walking according to the law of Yahweh (e.g., Isa 2:2–3) refer to individuals from many nations being brought into the body of Christ in the present age. On this point DeRouchie exemplifies the weakness of progressive covenantalism regarding a biblical theology of the nations. Progressive covenantalists tend to dissolve this biblical teaching on nations into the multiethnic church. The theonomists are not wrong in seeing the conversion of the nations in Isaiah 2; they are wrong in applying a passage about the (pre)millennial reign of Christ to the present age.

DeRouchie also argues that neither the law of Moses nor the law of Christ is the standard for the state. Rather, "the principles of nature (i.e., image bearing and community justice) associated with the Adamic-Noahic covenant" form the standard against which civil laws are measured (226). The Mosaic law, as fulfilled in Christ, remains relevant for the church, not the state. However, if the Mosaic law is, in part, God's implementation of natural law or creational law to Israel's cultural context and place in redemptive-history,[3] the neat separation that DeRouchie sees between the Adamic and Noahic Covenants and the Mosaic Covenant is not so neat. Without succumbing to the theonomist error, Christians who are active in the political realm can still learn from God's implementation of creational law to Israel in their implementation of creational law in their own contexts.

The most significant weakness of this volume is found in the third part. DeRouchie's thesis for this part of the book is as follows: "Through Jesus, God empowers Christians to appropriate Old Testament promises faithfully without abusing them" (132). His deployment of 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him," seems to imply that all the promises of God are for Christians. However, the fact that all the promises of God find their "Yes" in Jesus does not mean that those promises are "Yes" for all believers in the same way. In one place DeRouchie acknowledges this. He notes that Micah's prophecy that Christ would be born in Bethlehem is fulfilled only in the life of Christ. He also observes that the wisdom promised to Solomon was secured for Solomon (and

[2] For additional assessment of DeRouchie's categories for applying the OT law, see Ken Casillas, "Evaluating Progressive Covenantalism's Approach to the Application of the Mosaic Law," *JBTW* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 30–33.

[3] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 40–41.

only for Solomon) by Christ on the cross. With these two examples DeRouchie implicitly acknowledges that some OT promises have particularities that preclude an ecclesial fulfillment. And yet DeRouchie also argues that the land promises given to Abraham and his seed are transformed in the New Covenant so that God's people, including the Gentiles, will inherit the new creation. This creates a significant theological problem. If a promise is "transformed" so that the actions performed are other than what was promised for someone other than for whom it was promised, then the promise was not kept. Elsewhere DeRouchie acknowledges that "*Christ Maintains Some Old Testament Promises with Extension*" (178). The land promises better fit this category. These promises will be fulfilled for Abraham and believing Israel within the borders promised, *and* the land promise will be extended for believing Gentile nations in the new creation in their own lands (cf. Rev 21:24).[4]

It is evident from this book that Jason DeRouchie delights in the OT and desires for God's people to do so as well. Parts 1, 2, and 4 are generally reliable guides for reading the OT as a Christian.

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[4] Compare Wade Loring Kuhlewind Jr., "'I Will Plant Them in This Land': An Analysis and Critique of Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant* with Special Attention to the Progressive Covenantal Land-Promise View" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2018).

Little, Tim and Angela. *Song of Songs for Singles: Lessons on Love from King Solomon*. Ankeny, IA: Faith, 2023. 266pp. + 8pp. (back matter).

This book is authored by a professor of OT at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary and his wife Angela. The target audience is high school students and above (11). The book arose as Tim recognized the need for singles to hear the Bible's message about sexual intimacy to counteract the worldly ideas that otherwise shape their thinking. The book progresses sequentially through the Song of Songs; so in one sense it could be read as a commentary on the Song. However, its target audience affects the nature of the commentary: "As we wrote *Song of Songs for Singles,* we imagined what we would approve of our young teenage son reading. Writing from this perspective has obvious disadvantages. For example, we will not answer some questions because to do so could unintentionally awaken the sleeping desires of the innocent. Those desires need to sleep (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)" (11). In general, the Littles succeeded in addressing their target audience, though the discussion of Song 4, while guarded, may be too much for a high schooler and more appropriate for someone approaching marriage. Likewise, the discussion of Song 5 also seemed more suited to older singles—those preparing for marriage—than for the high school audience.

The Littles hold that just as Proverbs is directed primarily at the son, the Song is directed primarily at daughters. Of course, both books are applicable to people of both sexes and all ages. They reject the allegorical and dramatic readings of the Song. Though Solomon is the author of the book, the primary man in the book is neither Solomon nor a historical man. Instead, he (as is the woman) is constructed by Solomon the poet to instruct the readers in wisdom about marriage. Solomon writes himself into the book as an example of what not to be (see especially 8:11–12).

This book evidences wide and deep reading in the scholarly literature, and it exhibits swift movement from the biblical text to application. For instance, chapter 2 draws on the work of Shalom Paul to argue that the latter part of 1:4 is a continuation of the woman's speech, not a speech of the virgin daughters (as in the NKJV, ESV, CSB). The same chapter also applies 1:2 to singles by arguing that they do not need to know about lovemaking in general. They should wait to learn what pleases their spouse when/if they marry.

Some chapters are less a commentary than an essay on a topic raised by the passage under consideration. Chapter 3 takes Song 1:5–11 as an opportunity to launch a discussion on the topic of beauty. The discussion is well done. It argues that beauty is objective. It draws on the Bible and on general revelation to sketch out some universals regarding beauty. It distinguishes between objective beauty and subjective tastes, and it cautions readers about becoming locked into a specific culture's tastes regarding beauty. The Littles rightly acknowledge the reality of blemishes, and they observe that some people are more beautiful than others. They note that the woman in the Song acknowledges her blemishes while the man rejoices in her beauty. They encourage the husband to delight in his wife's beauty. They observe that flaws that are the result of the Fall may be fixed, while warning against seeking to "correct" things that are not a result of the Fall. They warn against making too much of beauty, but they note that beauty is not insignificant and that adornment can be biblical.

In the chapter that discusses the adjuration refrain (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), the Littles define love. They distinguish between family love, neighbor love, and the "permanent, exclusive, jealous unquenchable kind of love" that the Song is concerned with (84). They argue that love has both an intellectual and affective component. The adjuration refrain urges the readers, with a particular focus on the virgin daughters, not to awaken love until it pleases, which the Littles take to mean "until you can take pleasure in it." They observe that the question many young people ask is, "How far can we go?" The biblical question is, "Does this awaken love?" This question is then applied to the topics of kissing and dancing. While they note that there are different kinds of kissing and dancing (e.g., kissing as a greeting in some cultures or dancing in celebration of a military victory), the question at hand is romantic kissing and the dancing of a couple. In both cases, the Littles argue against the conclusion that these are permitted because there is no Bible verse forbidding them. These actions awaken love.

Song of Songs 3 is a challenging passage to interpret. The Littles understand 3:1–5 to indicate that the wife pursues her husband sexually. She is not merely passive. She especially pursues him when he is in a dangerous situation: in the streets at night (the lurking place of dame folly). She brings him back to the chamber of love. The authors take the remainder of chapter 3 to refer to Solomon's wedding, but they do not identify Solomon and his bride with the couple who is the focus of the Song. I believe this is the correct interpretation, but I would have benefited from some additional reflection about why a Solomonic wedding is included here.

Many of the applications proposed should be readily accepted by Bible-believing Christians. In their discussion of 1:12–2:7 the Littles discuss the power of words and the need to restrict flirting to marriage. They also affirm the appropriateness of flirting within marriage. Their treatment of 2:8–17 deals with the ideas that marriage leads to a "happily ever after" and that sexual temptation disappears after marriage. They claim that these verses envision a separation between the partners, which provides the occasion for sexual temptation (though, it must be observed, that sexual temptation is not explicitly present in the text). They also focus on the statement concerning the little jackals that spoil the vineyard—connecting these with little sins of selfishness or even larger sexual sins against a spouse.

Other interpretations will cause readers to stop and think. The Littles understand Song 5 to be about the wife's selfish rejection of her husband's sexual advances. While she is understood to be wrong, the husband rightly accepts her refusal. His departure actually arouses her desire, which is then expressed in the beginning of chapter 6. The Littles then take the rest of chapter 6 to refer to the couple's working through the resulting difficulties that arise from chapter 5. I am open to this interpretation of chapter 6 but not entirely persuaded.

The Littles argue that Song 7:11–8:4, as well as other parts of the Song, present the wife as the primary initiator of sexual intimacy. They do not deny that the husband may initiate (Song 2:8; 4:3; 5:2ff.), but they think the creational pattern is for the wife to initiate. Further, they lay on the wife the responsibility to initiate (and suggest she do so several times a week). Part of their concern has to do with husbands whose desires have been distorted by pornography combined with a widespread belief in Christian circles that wives are to submit passively to their husband's desires. They are correct that this combination is likely to lead to marital problems, and their solution could be practically helpful

in certain marriages. But it seems to over-read the text to conclude that the wife should be the primary initiator of intimacy while the husband remains somewhat passive.

While there were appropriate warnings about not being married for selfish reasons and while the final chapter appropriately stressed the importance of pursuing marriage, there was perhaps insufficient acknowledgment that God may not open the way for every individual to be married. The Littles do briefly engage with 1 Corinthians 7, but they take the "present distress" (7:26) to refer to a localized time of trial. However, it seems that Paul explains his meaning in verses 29 and 31: "This is what I mean, brothers, the appointed time has grown very short. . . . For the present form of this world is passing away" (ESV). In other words, Paul advocates singleness for the sake of promoting the Lord's interests in the world in these last days while also recognizing that many will marry (and encouraging the married to also give primary to the Lord's interests within their marriage).

These critiques should not detract from the overall accomplishment of *Song of Songs for Singles*. Song of Songs is a difficult book to interpret, and issues surrounding marriage and sex are often controversial. *Song of Songs for Singles* rightly recognizes that the message of the Song is essential for equipping young people with a biblical view of these important topics, and it effectively challenges unbiblical ideas while attractively presenting the Bible's better way.

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Shenvi, Neil, and Pat Sawyer. *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society.* Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2023. 486pp. + 15pp. (back matter).

In the contemporary socio-political landscape, some Christians have become worried about the rise of critical theories, social justice ideologies, "wokeness," and the like. *Critical Dilemma*, by Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, aims to clarify what all these words mean, how they appeared in our society, and how they relate to traditional Christian faith. Does it succeed?

It is hard to say. Shenvi and Sawyer assume that most of their readers are going to already agree with them about major points of doctrine, ethics, and political vision. Though a certain level of education and familiarity with scholarly discourse will make reading *Critical Dilemma* easier, the book is not addressed *to critical theorists*. Shenvi and Sawyer occasionally address non-Christian readers, and they include an entire chapter on the basics of evangelical theology, but it is hard to imagine that they expect the book to be widely read outside evangelical circles. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the book is supposed to explain critical theory to the church or to supply an encyclopedia of resources for debating it. As an explainer, it is too repetitive and, at times, both a little too polemical and a little too scholarly. But as an encyclopedia, it is missing some key elements to make it useful as a reference work. There are some good features of the book, but overall, it is hard to know who would actually benefit from reading it. In this case, the whole is somewhat less than the sum of the parts.

When someone criticizes a scholar, and especially a *popular* scholar, an all-too-common rejoinder is that the critic has not "done the reading." Shenvi and Sawyer have done the reading. At times their pains to show their work become tedious and contribute to the book's overall defensive tone. Nevertheless, scanning through the footnotes (and often also the main text) will give the reader an adequate introduction to the core of contemporary critical theory. Specialists in these fields might quibble with the interpretations of various figures' work, but it is hard to fault the book for trying to articulate something like a consensus view.

Moreover, Shenvi and Sawyer often acknowledge where the critical theorists have a legitimate point. Critical theories often insightfully identify specific problems, including ways in which past generational sins continue to have effects today. They are frequently about genuine issues, even if the treatments of those issues are unpersuasive.

Not everything is great about the book, though. First, it suffers from being neither scholarly nor merely popular. Though there are many footnotes, there is no bibliography and only a minimal topical index. (There is a complete Scripture index.)[1] These criticisms are not complaints about the authors' work *per se;* this is an editorial problem, but a noteworthy one.

[1] For example, the term *critical social theory* is treated in some detail in pages 61–68. These pages are mentioned in the index. But in chapter 7, entire sections are headed with labels that include *critical social theory,* and the discussion is an important addition to the treatment in the earlier chapter, yet none of these pages appear in the index. Similarly, some thinkers are called "postmodernist" (e.g., Foucault, *Critical Dilemma*, 82), but this term is not defined, and does not appear in the index.

Second, the limited reference tools within the book encourage reading it straight through (even though it is fairly long). However, reading straight through reveals several repetitive parts and several digressions (including two entire chapters labeled "an excursus"). Some sections are borrowed from other works. Again, a stronger editorial hand would help.

There are more substantive issues as well. Treatments of critical theory perennially struggle to define the view. Shenvi and Sawyer make a fair attempt. Their arguments work better if academic critical theory and "popular" critical theory are closely related. But it is possible, perhaps even likely, that academic critical theory and its popular versions are not actually consistent. Critical theory is not just one thing, which the authors acknowledge at times. Thus, it is not always clear where the ideological problems are.

For example, in chapter 13 Shenvi and Sawyer argue that ideas from critical theory will devastate the church. But *which* ideas are problematic? The ones specifically mentioned are the popular ones. Let us grant the warning about them. (As many people are finding, half-baked social theories are devastating to *any* organization.) Yet churches risk pushing away legitimate, faithful scholars simply because they are not strongly opposed to something called "critical theory." A book like Christopher Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory* might receive less engagement than it warrants simply because of the last two words in the title.[2]

As another example, in chapter 12 Shenvi and Sawyer try to establish a link between gender theory and egalitarianism (as a view about the role of women in the church and home).[3] But what is the actual link? Egalitarians and gender theorists sometimes cite the same scholars, and there is a historical coincidence between the two movements (depending on how you look at them). Yet one can be skeptical about traditional roles without doubting the gender binary. Contemporary gender theory is much worse than biblical wisdom, for sure, but not everything that American Christians assert is actually biblical wisdom. It is incorrect to make a one-step inference from someone's use of terms associated with critical theory to a conclusion about their theological convictions or biblical faithfulness.

Finally, Shenvi and Sawyer's historical and social analysis is one-dimensional. It is true that ideas have consequences, but so do more prosaic material concerns. Moreover, *popular* ideas—those held by ordinary folk and well-known public figures, rather than by scholars—often exert more influence than academic theories, and their sources are even less intelligible.[4]

Nevertheless, two legitimate and interesting questions seem important: (1) Why does it seem like everyone is "woke" now? (2) Why doesn't the traditional Christian view have more influence?

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[2] Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022).

[3] "Some Christian readers will likely reject a traditional view of gender and sexuality. . . . [They] argue that the Bible does not require a distinction between the roles of men and women either in the family or in the church. This position is known as egalitarianism" (*Critical Dilemma*, 376). Note the opposition between egalitarianism and "traditional" views.

[4] See Hunter for a critique of the "idealist" view, according to which the ideas a culture holds are the most important factors for determining its character. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Everyone is woke now because they think it is in their interest to be so. Many professional spaces are explicitly left wing and privilege those who are willing to adopt its language. Consider academia. For a scholar who is not yet firmly established in professional life—in academia, this is almost everyone, or so they think—refusing to go along with the ideological culture could jeopardize an entire career. It is far easier to just play along, and it is often advantageous to be the most forceful proponent of the dominant ideas.

A related phenomenon occurs in the broader culture, where a natural explanation for the rapid growth of critical theory is social media, abetted by smartphones. Shenvi and Sawyer barely acknowledge these circumstances. They trace the "Great Awokening" to 2012, when the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was created in the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin. The technology itself is noteworthy. In the year before and after this event, both Facebook and Twitter had experienced enormous growth, driven primarily by smartphone usage. A few months earlier Twitter had added a feature showing public engagement with each post, and Facebook added hashtag functionality a few months later. This confluence of technologies makes social media function like the academic world, where participating according to dominant ideological norms is a key step to higher status.

The decline of religious practice matters too. In contemporary society, wokeness partially fills the cultural void left by the decline of historic Christianity. Public righteousness remains essential, but reconciliation is elusive. The new purity culture is just the old purity culture, but with different taboos. The woke religion has all the same Pharisaical impulses[5]—these are default reactions among sinners—but with new names for its sins and no place for forgiveness and absolution.[6]

But if wokeness is a substitute religion, why doesn't traditional Christian social thought have more influence? First, at least in the American evangelical world, pietist impulses are strong and tend to limit careful, systematic thinking about secular human affairs. Second, the decline of merely traditional, cultural Christianity isn't all bad. It is easier to see the difference between mere tradition and the religion of the NT. Those who find contemporary culture distasteful and oppressive may find that of all the masters one might have, Jesus is the easiest.

Third, and sadly important, is (inadvertently) illustrated by Shenvi and Sawyer's book. Critical theory is most visible in discussions about race and gender. But why these two fields? Here we need to review an argument from a generation ago: Christians were wrong about interracial marriage; now they are wrong about homosexual marriage. As a bit of logic, this argument is clearly invalid. But as a point of rhetoric, it is devastating. In the middle of the twentieth century, traditional sexual ethics were often bound up with a racist ideology and cloaked in the language of Scripture. Now, when gender theorists reject creational norms, they say Christians misused the Bible to defend racism, and now they are misusing it to defend heteronormativity. Again, the point is not that this is a good argument—it isn't—but that it is a socially and rhetorically effective way of excluding Christian witness.

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[5] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012; reprint, New York: Vintage, 2013.)

[6] See Marilynne Robinson, "Puritans and Prigs: An Anatomy of Zealotry," *Salmagundi* 101/102 (1994): 36–54.

Often what is needed is a thorough, patient, and honest statement of what Christians actually believe the Bible says. Shenvi and Sawyer model this discipline well in *Critical Dilemma*. American Christians would do well to become better at saying what they believe on various social matters without simply resorting to biblical proof texts or parroting a political party platform.

Sometimes ideological movements collapse under their own self-contradictions. Sometimes they are dismantled and resisted by effective argument. Often it is a mix of both. But choosing a strategy is hard: should we just leave the error alone to collapse of its own accord, or should we actively resist (Prov 26:4–5)? If the latter, we risk spending time and energy on something that might not really be worth it. But if we are wrong about the former option, then we will have simply yielded to a destructive ideology.

Shenvi and Sawyer's book seems caught in this dilemma. There is evidence from the broader society that the cartoon versions of wokeness have outlived their usefulness.[7] Yet while the tides of intellectual fashion rise and fall, sometimes even a temporary bulkhead against a dangerous error is necessary. Thus, even though this review has emphasized some limitations of *Critical Dilemma*, the book itself contains plenty of wisdom and insight, along with tools to resist the pull of either the woke or the anti-woke. Though contemporary critical theory is not Christianity, neither are many of the cultural alternatives to it. Discerning the truth remains critical.

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[7] E.g., Rachel Poser, "Ibram X. Kendi Faces a Reckoning of His Own," *The New York Times Magazine,* June 4, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/04/magazine/ibram-kendi-center-for-antiracist-research.html.

Marsh, Cory M., and James I. Fazio, eds. *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*. El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023. 372pp. + 10pp. (front matter) + 13pp. (back matter).

Unlike many recent works that caricature dispensationalism, *Discovering Dispensationalism* assembles twelve scholars from eleven academic institutions to present a sympathetic, researched, and well-documented study outlining the threads of dispensational thought that appear through church history. Each chapter employs a subject-area expert to examine the characteristic traits of dispensationalism. In so doing, the authors dismantle specious and libelous charges made by dispensationalism's opponents, while leaving intact the reality that Christians tend to choose theological and hermeneutical systems based on a complex set of factors including personal background, church tradition, preferred logical approach (inductive/deductive), and personally resonating biblical themes (redemption/glory of God). In other words, the book does not present an attack on covenant theology but a refutation of inaccurate claims against dispensationalism. An extensive bibliography follows each chapter so that the reader can see at once the primary sources that each contributor utilized.

In chapter 1, Cory Marsh cites some of the oft-repeated falsehoods leveled against dispensationalism. These include the following:

(1) it is an entirely recent innovation (the historical argument of the book refutes this charge);
(2) it is anti-intellectual (the academic caliber of the scholars involved refutes this charge; moreover, intensive inductive study of Scripture is hardly anti-intellectual);
(3) it is antinomian (this charge is impossible to sustain when nearly all early dispensationalists were Calvinists);
(4) it is a prosperity gospel (this charge is libelous and a straw-man argument); and
(5) it encourages societal neglect (this charge is ironic since it contradicts the fourth charge above and is provably false given the missional emphasis of dispensationalism that dwarfs the outreach of its theological counterparts).

Marsh identifies the purpose of the book: "to demonstrate the historical fact that so-called 'dispensational' ideas are not novel and they were not invented by the gentry class of western thinkers in the nineteenth century" (9). Along with his co-authors, he argues that "hermeneutics is the perennial issue at play," while simultaneously contending that dispensationalism is more than a hermeneutic; it is a biblical theology (11, cf. 355). Marsh concludes the first chapter by surveying the contributions of the other authors.

In chapter 2, James Fazio addresses the precursors to dispensationalism that appear in the NT era. He analyzes the meaning of the NT word for *stewardship* (οἰκονομία) from which the concept of dispensation arises. The point of this exercise is to demonstrate that the later use of the word *dispensation* by dispensationalists is consistent with apostolic usage. Darby, for example, focused on human stewardship of divinely delegated administrations (41). Fazio concludes the chapter with a summary of what he considers to be the six defining features of a properly constituted dispensation.

In chapter 3, Paul Hartog deploys his considerable knowledge of patristics to compare and contrast Larry Crutchfield's and Charles Hill's perspectives on the presence and absence of dispensational features among the ante-Nicene fathers. Hartog displays an irenic tone and unrelenting logic that readers of his previous works have come to recognize. He proves conclusively that premillennialism (chiliasm) was the earliest doctrine of the church regarding eschatology. Specifically, all the extant witnesses of the apostolic church were premillennial. Hartog shows that Hill has failed to demonstrate his primary claim—that there is a necessary connection between millennialism and an intermediate state of the righteous in Hades—and that Hill tends to twist the available evidence to suit his agenda (Hartog identifies Hill's primary fallacy as begging the question, 78–79, 82). For example, Hill frequently levels the libel at early chiliasts that they acquired their premillennialism from Judaistic and pagan sources although those same early chiliasts claim they received this teaching from the apostle John himself. Basically, Hill urges his reader not to believe eyewitness testimony but his own theological agenda nearly 2,000 years later. Hill repeats Augustine's error in which he blended Manicheanist dualism into Christianity, then accused literal interpreters of being Judaistic. Finally, Hartog concludes that while it is impossible to identify dispensationalism as a fully developed system in the early church, several key traits (consistent with dispensationalism and inconsistent with the theological alternatives) were present (e.g., consistent interpretation).

In chapter 4, Jeremiah Mutie contends that dispensational precursors are evident in the Nicene era. His argument is particularly important because allegorical interpretation of prophecy had superseded literal interpretation in this era, but many church fathers insisted that literal interpretation and premillennialism were correct in the face of growing pressure to conform to an allegorical method. Mutie, like the other contributors to the volume, does not assert that dispensationalism existed in any developed form but that the traits and characteristics that constitute dispensational were present. It can hardly be reasonably asserted that Darby invented dispensationalism *de novo* in the 1800s if the parts and pieces that make up dispensationalism existed throughout church history. One of the most telling evidences in the Nicene era comes from the reaction of Dionysius of Alexandria. Dionysius admitted that the Book of Revelation teaches chiliasm (in his critique of Nepos); so he attacked the authenticity of Revelation. That is, some allegorists of the Nicene era recognized Revelation is properly premillennial (93). To such church fathers, the only way to institute amillennialism was to dispense with Revelation altogether by rejecting its canonicity. By the end of the chapter, Mutie has collected a list of chiliasts including Cyprian, Nepos, Lactantius, Methodius, Hilary, Hesychius, and Sulpicius Severus, with some additional traits later recognized in dispensationalism that appear in Jerome and Augustine.

William Watson carries the argument forward in chapter 5—demonstrating that core traits of dispensationalism were preserved even in the medieval era by some of the church fathers whose literal interpretation of Scripture would later lead to the Reformation. The organized Roman Catholic Church of the medieval era suppressed inductive study and literal interpretation of Scripture. Both are perilous to magisterial authorities, who brook no rivals. Watson shows that individuals such as Andrew of Caesarea, Aspringius, Cyril of Alexandria, Isodore of Seville, Theodoret, and others held certain

biblical truths on the basis of a natural hermeneutic. Once that hermeneutic revived in the church, the Reformation was inevitable.

Ron Bigalke points in chapter 6 to the reemergence of a more widely used literal hermeneutic as a key factor in the Reformation. While the Reformers adopted a literal interpretation of wide swaths of Scripture, they retained a Roman Catholic hermeneutic in regard to prophecy with a resultant Roman Catholic eschatology. Thus, Bigalke observes, "A consistent application of the Reformation's hermeneutical principle would be the catalyst for what would later become known as dispensationalism" (158). If the same hermeneutic that led to the Reformation were applied consistently by the Reformers and their followers, the outcome in their eschatology would be widely different.

Mark Snoeberger argues in chapter 7 that "the distinction between Israel and the church is the watershed between dispensationalism and non-dispensationalism" (188). Snoeberger then shows how Calvin interpreted Romans 11:16 in an entirely novel fashion in order to subvert what Paul transparently says, namely, that there will be "a restoration of the Jewish people in the eschaton" (189). Bucer and Beza disagreed, and "John Owen sharply disavowed Calvin's (Augustinian) interpretation of Romans 11:26," as well observing that if Calvin is correct, then Paul is incoherent (192). The remainder of Snoeberger's chapter shows how a distinct hope for Jewish restoration persisted in the Puritan and other Reformed communities, and this hope is more consistent with dispensationalism than with its theological alternatives.

Max Weremchuk presents the lengthy chapter 8 on John Nelson Darby. He collects crucial background information that shows Darby's "novelty" does not lie in the invention of new doctrines (as asserted by some critics) but in an insistent return to inductive study of Scripture as the foundation for theology (213). Darby restructured long-held biblical doctrines into a particular coherent form.

A series of chapters brings the book into the present. In chapter 9, Larry Pettegrew traces the movement of dispensationalism to America and shows its revivalist and missionary tendencies. Phillip Long addresses the Mid-Acts movement in chapter 10. This subset of dispensational thought lies between the ultra-dispensationalism of Bullinger and the traditional or moderate dispensationalism of Dallas Theological Seminary. Thomas Ice provides chapter 11 as a survey of the ascendance of dispensationalism in the twentieth century. He demonstrates that virtually all early dispensationalists were Calvinists (surely a shock to the many Arminian dispensationalists today). Ice also shows that wherever a literal hermeneutic is adopted, premillennialism results, but established theological traditions serve as one of the greatest obstacles to the adoption of a literal hermeneutic (321). Darrell Bock contributes chapter 12 as an explanation of progressive dispensationalism. Bock also offers several cautions regarding the sensationalism that some popular teachers have resorted to in teaching about the future. Such sensationalism allows those who object to dispensationalism to make a false equation between the system as a whole and the unbridled pronouncements of a few. Marsh and Fazio collaborated on a final, summary chapter that emphasizes the biblical-theological nature of dispensationalism (in specific contrast to systematic or historical theology). The editors insist that dispensationalism is not identical with a consistent hermeneutic but that a consistent hermeneutic leads to something approximating dispensationalism. The one is the cause; the other, the effect.

This reviewer found only a few items of critique in regard to the book. First, one might wish to see a more thoroughly edited text. The number of misspelled, omitted, or repeated words surpasses what the reader might be accustomed to in an era of spell checks and grammar checks. Other readers will find the case inconclusive. Though the authors and editors admit they cannot demonstrate a developed form of dispensationalism earlier in church history, one could always hold out hope that an alternative system might have developed from premillennialism, consistent interpretation, a distinction between Israel and the church, and inductive reasoning. The book, then, does not prove that these four traits *must* lead to dispensationalism but that some of the features of dispensationalism also appear in the earlier centuries of the church. Yet since this critique lies outside the scope of the authors' stated intent, the reader should be content to let them demonstrate their own chosen point.

Discovering Dispensationalism ought to have its place among studied theological texts precisely because it helps dispensational theologians understand the heritage of their theology, and it helps covenant theologians avoid unnecessary missteps in their assertions about the origins and nature of a competing description of God's work in this world. The reader must recognize the intended purpose of the work to profit best from it. He will not find a comprehensive explanation of dispensationalism or developments within the dispensational community. He will find evidence that dispensationalism is not a fringe, novel, or unfounded system but a fruition of sound hermeneutics, emphasis on Scripture, and inductive reasoning based on the evidence that God has chosen to reveal and then preserve in his Word.

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Naselli, Andrew David. *How to Read a Book: Advice for Christian Readers*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2024. 160pp. + 16pp. (front matter) + 46pp. (back matter).

From his introduction onward, Naselli confronts the fact that readers may view his book with skepticism. Those who already enjoy reading surely do not need further motivation (or do they?), and those who do not like to read . . . well, will they really be persuaded by reading a book *about* reading? Heavier and more comprehensive tomes on the topic exist (for example, Mortimer J. Adler's classic four-hundred-plus page, *How to Read a Book*), but Naselli captures the essential *why*, *how*, *what*, and *when* of reading in a succinct 160 pages. He writes from an explicitly Christian perspective, and he defends reading as more crucial for believers than for unbelievers due to the supremely valuable Word that Christians possess and the supremely valuable Person that Christians seek to glorify.

Naselli's writing style is lucid, engaging, succinct, and highly structured. Because he favors structured lists, some readers might find the itemization of key ideas in each chapter distracting. However, those who intend to use the book formatively—either to enhance their own reading practice or to guide students in the process of reading well—will find the structure in this book both memorable and pedagogically valuable. Naselli addresses logic, sentence constructions, best resources, and worldview at key points in his argument. He also punctuates his theme with interesting, supportive details. For instance, he notes that John Milton may well have been the last person who read every existing book in English, and if a person reads twenty-five books a year for fifty years, he will have browsed only 0.0007 percent of existing books (2).

I expected to walk away with a greater sense of guilt (for failing to read adequately) and a lesser motivation (to read wisely and well), but Naselli avoids painting a world in which reading is the only thing Christians ought to do and depicts instead a world in which thoughtful, intentional, exceptional reading becomes more achievable to his own readers. It is not that our present culture is illiterate but that it is indifferently or carelessly literate; and ignorance, sciolism, and weak character thrive in that indifference.

How to Read a Book consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, "Why Should You Read?" points to life, growth, and joy as three compelling motives behind sound reading. The concept of reading for life highlights the Scriptures, which bring light and life (Ps 119:130). Reading for growth involves the expansion of the mind, experience, and discernment—all of which make the Christian reader a more effective servant of God. Reading for joy dispenses with status seeking and reaches for the principled intentionality of enjoying God and his work (20–21).

Chapter 2, "How Should You Read?" offers insights that promote sound interpretation so that the reader arrives at a real understanding of the author's intent in communication. This is a special concern of Christians, who believe that integrity is a virtue, and who want to represent an author's beliefs and argument accurately. Two subsections—on the nature of uncertain arguments (ones that are "unclear, false, or invalid") and the types of propositions and their relationships—are worth the price of the book. (Second-year Greek students will note strong similarities between the relationship of propositions and the uses of the Greek participle.) The chapter then transitions to an explanation of

three levels of reading (survey, macro-, and micro-reading) and explains how the reader utilizes variable levels of attention and intensity to accomplish different purposes in his reading.

Chapter 3, "What Should You Read?" helps the overwhelmed reader face the 170 million existing books and select ones that are worthwhile. These include (in order of priority), the Scriptures, books that strengthen character and doctrine, books that make a person excel in his calling, books that give a true grasp of reality, books that the reader enjoys, books that model good writing, and books recommended by trusted friends and advisors. Naselli's advice spans fiction, non-fiction, theology, fantasy, and vocational reading. He directly confronts and rebuts the claim that fiction is trivial and a waste of the Christian's time (117–19), and he consciously draws heavily from C. S. Lewis's views on the nature and value of fantasy reading and novels as windows into humanity.

Chapter 4, "When Should You Read?" guides the reader to choose the best times for reading by addressing common excuses for the inability to read (no time, no desire), by suggesting different times that may prove ideal to a specific reader, and by offering alternative suggestions (audio books).

The book concludes with four appendices ("Forty of my favorite books," "Twenty-two tips for cultivating a culture of reading for your children," "Why and how I use social media," and "Why and how I organize my personal library"). Readers will find much practical advice up to the very end of this book. At the very least, those who believe that they are called to ministries involving substantial research will want to consider the library organization tips of Appendix D. Apart from some system of organization, the researcher will find himself unable to recollect the source of crucial information later.

Not all readers will be comfortable with Naselli's repeated reference to and praise of the Harry Potter series, but he explains his reasons for his recommendation and recognizes the differences of opinion that other believers may have regarding this series without simply dismissing their concerns as unfounded (68–70). The fairly strong sampling of Douglas Wilson's books (106–7, 119–21, 130) in a chapter on *what* a Christian should read feels, perhaps, imbalanced given the sheer breadth of available resources and Christian authors.[1] It is true that Naselli's work does not represent itself to be a list of books that Christians *ought* to read; however, readers are likely to assume that the cited works are among the best that could be read, and this assumption is doubtful. Perhaps a wider referencing of "best resources" would make up for this deficit. I do not consider Appendix A to have provided this wish-list of best resources precisely because of its heavy reliance on C. S. Lewis (9/40 books) and J. K. Rowling (7/40 books) and its limited scope. However (and this is a major caveat), Naselli *explicitly engages* the fact that he does not include a more comprehensive reading list (161–65). He *knows* that some readers will register this complaint and has consciously chosen a shorter, more reader-friendly format instead of supplying a lengthy reading list (for exactly the reasons he states). Therefore, it is helpful for the reviewer to protest that he desires a longer list, and it is just as helpful to recognize the author's own stated intent and not hold him to a standard that exceeds his purpose.

[1] Wilson is a Reformed Presbyterian pastor and writer, pedobaptist, presuppositional apologist, postmillennialist, and Christian nationalist (theonomic postmillennialist) who has contributed to classical Christian academies as an alternative to secular education. Some of Wilson's in-print assertions regarding a purported racial harmony in the Antebellum South are seriously problematic, and some of his theological views seem sufficiently close to the New Perspective on Paul that his own presbytery deemed them to be heretical.

Apart from these quibbles, *How to Read a Book* compels the distracted, overly busy Christian who is not inclined to read well or often to confront the question: what really matters in the deployment of my time? Naselli contends that one answer is thoughtful, effective reading of the right kind of books. He does not wish his own readers to pass up the vital opportunity for personal enrichment and enjoyment as well as the exercise of stewardship entrusted to them by God.

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Childers, Alisa, and Tim Barnett. *The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive, and How to Respond.* Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2023. 277pp.

Paul, Luke, and Demas labored side-by-side in the early-church era. When the apostle penned his epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, he sent greetings from his fellow laborers (Col 4:14, Phlm 1:24). Sadly, only Luke remained with Paul to the end of his ministry, "for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10–11).

Jesus predicted that this kind of thing would happen time and again. In the parable of the soils, he described a sower who cast his seed indiscriminately on the surrounding land. Some seed "fell into good ground, and brought forth [lasting] fruit" (Matt 13:8). Other seed fell on stony ground, and "immediately it sprang up," but when the sun came out the plant withered away because it had no moisture or depth of earth (Mark 4:5). Christ explained that the latter soil typified apostates who seem to embrace the gospel gladly at first but fall away when temptation comes (Luke 8:13).

In *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett demonstrate that apostasy continues unabated in the twenty-first century. Nowadays it goes by a different name, *deconstructionism*, which the authors define as "a postmodern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard" (26). As the definition implies, deconstructionism deifies internal feelings (my truth, my comfort, my sincerity, my self-constructed identity) and defies external authority (God, his Word, parents, pastors). Every man therefore gets to do that which is right in his own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Anyone who says otherwise is considered oppressive, toxic, abusive, and power hungry.

Childers and Barnett note that deconstructionism originated with Satan in the Garden of Eden. He tempted Eve first by saying, "Hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Then the serpent patently denied God's words: "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [God], knowing good and evil" (vv. 4–5). Satan wanted Eve to disbelieve that God was loving, truthful, and sufficient (46).

This is a part of the process all deconstructionists go through when they begin to apostatize. Often, the process will begin with a crisis or a series of difficulties—possibly "unanswered prayer, unexpected suffering, and unwanted hardship" (84). Sometimes would-be apostates see real or imagined sin (adultery, racism, sexism, embezzlement) within professing Christianity and use it as an excuse to question the faith. Ultimately, they abandon Scripture's teaching on inerrancy, complementarianism (i.e., men and women have equal value but different roles), sexual morality (particularly homosexuality and abortion), Christ's vicarious atonement, and the final judgment of the wicked.

According to deconstructionist coaches, it does not matter where these exvangelicals end up spiritually as "belief-building should be 'self-determined'" (112).[1] As Jo Leuhmann has said, "Everyone lands wherever they land. There is no right place to land with deconstruction. Some people land away from faith. Some people land in a different type of faith. Some people become agnostic. Some people

[1] Citing Katie Blake, "What Is a Belief Artisan? Learning to Be Creative with Your Beliefs," accessed January 12, 2023, https://drkatieblake.com/blog/2022/8/4/what-it-means-to-be-a-belief-artisan.

become a different type of Christian. Some people become atheists. And all of those routes in deconstruction are valid and to be respected" (111).[2]

Interestingly, Childers and Barnett see doubt as a virtue, as long as it does not end in total apostasy. They believe doubt "is sometimes a necessary path to spiritual maturity" (169). Therefore, they wish "to teach Christians to doubt well" (222). The authors, however, fail to recognize that doubting God is a sin. While many saints in the Old and New Testaments distrusted God at times, they were never commended for this action. Rather, they were rebuked for having "little faith" (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). James also exhorted his readers: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . but let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (1:5–8). Scripture is clear that doubters of God ought not to be commended, but rather admonished to cry out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Apart from this weakness, the authors do an excellent job analyzing deconstructionism and cautioning Christians not to baptize the term as a synonym for biblical reformation (19).[3] They also do good work critiquing scholars in the "evangelical deconstruction project,"[4] who "tend to appeal primarily to sociology and history rather than Scripture" to determine what is right or wrong (144–152). Some readers may wish Childers and Barnett had included further discussion on those who supposedly do not deconstruct yet claim to de-church, decenter, decolonize, and/or disentangle their faith. Are such individuals truly reforming in accordance with Scripture, or are they moving towards primitivism, antinomianism, and postmodernism? Also, what should Christians make of the seemingly high number of exvangelicals formerly from Charismatism or CCM? Toward the end of the book Childers, a former singer with ZOEgirl, acknowledges that "if you combine depression, the tension of celebrity, the shallowness of so much of the commercial Christian world, the full realization of your own brokenness, and some bad church experiences, you are ripe for deconstructionism" (246). Many would add emotionalism to her list.

Mature believers reading this book may be convicted of the need to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet 3:15). They likewise may feel compelled to pray more earnestly for those under their care, that Satan would not sift them like wheat (Luke 22:31–32). Pastors especially may be encouraged to preach a more robust theology and practice among their flocks, and to call them to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ

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[2] "Our Journey of Faith Deconstruction," accessed March 19, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+Vl8b3YeePZA (quotation starts at 3:53).

[3] "There are a number of reasons why the word *deconstruction* should not be baptized, redeemed, or Christianized to mean something healthy or positive. First, what pastors call 'good deconstruction' (i.e., using the Scriptures to challenge the ideas you hold) doesn't match the common use of the word in the culture, which usually calls for the rejection of Scripture as a standard. . . . Second, when people redefine words, the first casualty is clarity, and communication is compromised" (19, 21).

[4] Particularly Kristen Kobes Du Mez (author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*), Jacob Alan Cook (author of *Worldview Theory, Whiteness, and the Future of Evangelical Faith*), and Beth Allison Barr (author of *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*).

is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust ye shall know that we are not reprobates" (2 Cor 13:5–6, cf. Heb 10:38–39).[5]

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[5] Readers may also wish to further their studies on this topic by reading John Owen's classic, abridged and made easy to read by R. J. K. Law: *The Naure and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel,* Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2021).

Atherstone, Andrew, and David Ceri Jones, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Fundamentalism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 715pp. + 20pp. (back matter).

Since the publication of Ernest Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism* in 1970, there has been a renaissance in historical studies of American fundamentalism. This hefty volume is the culmination of over fifty years of scrutiny of the movement. It is not a perfect work, but it provides a summary of relevant scholarship and makes a significant contribution to the literature.

In writing about fundamentalism, the handbook wrestles with a problem that plagues every scholar dealing with this subject—definition. Exactly what is fundamentalism, and who deserves the label *fundamentalist*? Many writers within the fundamentalist movement define fundamentalism in terms of their own practice and that of their constituency, which is limiting. One could limit a study to "card-carrying" fundamentalists, those who openly identify with the movement, but does such a delimitation do full justice to the movement? Brian Stanley puts the matter succinctly: "Defining fundamentalism, and distinguishing it from other styles of conservative Protestantism, is no straightforward task, as this Handbook well illustrates" (495).

The editors survey the definitions that have appeared in the scholarly literature (3–18), but they do not decide on a single option, instead allowing each author discretion. One result of this editorial decision, however, is that the contributors to this volume are rather diverse in their approaches. Paul Emory Putz blends common theological and sociological approaches as he identifies "common patterns" of fundamentalists (which he agrees are not universal), including "a predominantly white racial identity, a belief in dispensationalism, a commitment to Keswick spirituality, and an outsider perspective—a sense of cultural marginalization—influenced by adherence to strict behavioral standards" (419). Robert Glenn Howard and Megan Zahay are more theological as they note four "traits" of fundamentalists: "biblical literalism, spiritual rebirth, the need to evangelize, and the 'end times' interpretation of biblical prophecy" (652). Sometimes the interpretations clash. D. G. Hart gives a nuanced argument for why Presbyterian confessionalists such as J. Gresham Machen are not really "fundamentalists" (92–107), while John Maiden anachronistically identifies B. B. Warfield as a fundamentalist (167).

Mark Hutchinson deals adroitly with the challenge of definition. He notes that the term *fundamentalism* can be useful "on a local level" but "imposed across the board as a form of multipurpose 'swiss army knife' term, it can be misleading" (688). He identifies three categories of definition: "self-identifying" (those who actually label themselves as fundamentalist), "criteria identified" (those classified as fundamentalist, often by outsiders, by adherence to similar doctrines and ideas), and "other identified" (a term from outside the ideology, such as academics and journalists, to describe fundamentalists as "other" than the observer, those "not on our side") (691–95).

A particular problem faced by the authors is what to do with movements that are similar yet distinct, those sharing some characteristics and even sources with historic fundamentalism but rarely defining themselves in this way. Gerald King, for instance, sees fundamentalism, the Holiness movement, and Pentecostalism as sharing common roots in Pietism (133). Yet how far does such a

common source allow these movements to be treated together? Do we lose precision by generalizing too much?

The book has many strengths. Part I, "Historical Developments," may be the best section, with first-rate studies that include considerations of *The Fundamentals* (by Geoffrey R. Treloar), big-tent revivalism (Josh McMullen, summarizing his longer monograph[1]), Spurgeon and the Downgrade Controversy (Thomas Breimaier), the Scopes trial (Constance Areson Clark), Princeton and fundamentalism (D. G. Hart), and fundamentalism in Northern Ireland (Andrew R. Holmes). Each of these articles provides full accounts of the chosen topic with relevant and perceptive observations. Furthermore, the bibliographies in nearly every article are unmatched and a rich resource for anyone wanting to read more about fundamentalism.

Considering how often studies of fundamentalism focus on political or socio-economic interpretations, the handbook provides a commendable emphasis on theology (219–342), although it concentrates on topics seen as peculiar to fundamentalism, such as inerrancy, creationism, conversion, ecumenism/separatism, and premillennialism. The inclusion of conversion is notable, showing how fundamentalism draws from the broader evangelical heritage. An approach that would further enrich study of the topic would be to discuss the points that fundamentalists themselves identified as their "fundamentals" and what they taught about them. Doing so would give fair place to the role of theology in the movement.

Other topics may be useful to the reader, depending on his or her interests. Readers can delve into essays on education (home school, higher education), cultural practices (alcohol, popular music, sports), current issues (abortion, the environment), as well as standard academic categories (gender, sexuality, class, race). The drawback with some of these topics goes back to the challenge of definition. Not all of the individuals and groups discussed under these headings would identify themselves specifically as fundamentalists (Pentecostals, conservative Anglicans, CCM artists, etc.). The reader will have to discern.

Because the volume addresses such a wide range, conservative Christian readers will find some ideas that challenge them and others that they challenge. Yet there are certainly insights to be gained. Emily Suzanne Johnson, for example, notes how fundamentalists (and other conservatives) shifted from a traditional hierarchical view of gender roles to a more nuanced complementarian approach (450). She credits this development to the fact that women influenced the movement by filling the leadership roles allowed them in the fundamentalist subculture. But one might also suggest the change displays the tendency of Christians to respond to cultural challenges by closer attention to the testimony of Scripture. One of the values of history is helping Christians discern which ideas they hold are merely cultural and which are actually based on Scripture.

Of course, there are problems with the volume. Often the authors judge fundamentalism not on its own terms but according to the authors' viewpoint. There are specific critiques as well. Paul Gutjahr repeats Stewart Cole's mistake from *History of Fundamentalism* (1931) that the Niagara Bible

[1] Josh McMullen, *Under the Big Top: Big Tent Revivalism and American Culture, 1885–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Conference put forth a five-point summary of essentials (226), when the "five points of fundamentalism" are a later development. Also, although C. I. Scofield attended the Niagara Bible Conference and addressed it, he did not lead it (227).[2] However, almost none of the contributions in this book are without some value. It provides an important resource in studying the history and nature of fundamentalism.

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[2] To give Guthjar credit, however, he has a brief, clear discussion of the Common Sense Realism school of philosophy—the idea that "all people enjoyed a 'common sense' that enabled thoughtful observers to recognize truth when they saw it" and that in addition to the normal human senses all people shared "a common moral sense . . . that intuitively moved them to act on truth when they encountered it" (220). Those who encounter discussions of Common Sense Realism in their study of American Christianity will appreciate his description.

Hummel, Daniel G. *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. 360pp. + 40pp. (back matter).

Histories of dispensationalism vary in tone, often depending on whether they originate from within the movement or without. Charles Ryrie's *Dispensationalism Today* (1965, later revised in 1995 as simply *Dispensationalism*) is a classic statement from within, defining and defending the movement and providing some historical context. *Progressive Dispensationalism* (2000) by Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock maintains a respectful tone even as it seeks to revise older versions of dispensationalism. On the other side is C. Norman Kraus's *Dispensationalism in America* (1958), which is, to put it mildly, unsympathetic. This work by Daniel Hummel leans in the direction of Kraus and is certainly not history from within, but Hummel has written one of the fullest histories of dispensationalism.

Foremost among its strengths is the book's comprehensiveness. Hummel helpfully lays out the origins and development of the dispensationalist system, doing a fine job of describing the development of both scholarly and popular dispensationalism. He explores thoroughly the views of John Nelson Darby, one of the chief fountainheads of the movement, showing his influence but also how later interpreters modified his system, selecting and rejecting points according to their needs. For example, he points out how Darby emphasized reliance on spiritual illumination in understanding the Scripture as opposed to the devotion of later dispensationalists to a plain reading of the Bible (46). Likewise, Hummel observes that later dispensationalists did not generally adhere to Darby's idea of the ruin of the church, that is, that the modern institutional church is irredeemably corrupt, necessitating that believers follow a highly decentralized pattern of church order like that practiced by the Plymouth Brethren. An interesting fact Hummel notes is that the term *dispensationalism* itself dates only from 1927 in the writings of Philip Mauro, an acerbic critic of the movement. Hummel in fact prefers the label "new premillennialism" (as opposed to the older historicist premillennialism) as a descriptor prior to 1927.

The work offers numerous other helpful particulars. Hummel notes that along with the increasingly systematized dispensationalists, such as the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary, there were also what one might call "sort-of dispensationalists," such as John R. Rice and Bob Jones Sr., who favored pretribulationalism and end-times declension but were otherwise not system dispensationalists. They were an important if underappreciated factor in American dispensationalism.

Hummel also describes—and indicts—popular, or "pop," dispensationalism (or as one of my former colleagues labeled it, "Christian science fiction"). He describes particularly Hal Lindsey (*Late Great Planet* Earth) and the writing team of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins of the *Left Behind* series. He points out Tim LaHaye's influence in both religious and popular culture, such as how LaHaye extrapolates principles of dispensationalism for current application. For example, LaHaye taught a "pretribulational tribulation," an oppressive "humanist tribulation" against Christians just before the rapture (272). LaHaye's idea highlights a problem with popular dispensationalism. Despite the argument of dispensationalists that there are no prophetic signs prior to the rapture of the church, many still presume to find signs and insist that the event must come soon. Hummel quotes an apt observation from Carl Henry: "Fundamentalism was not wrong in assuming a final consummation of

history, but rather in assuming this is it" (229). Christ's imminent return means that one should be ready for the coming of Christ but that one must also be ready to wait.

Hummel's work, however, has flaws along with its virtues. Some are simple mistakes of fact. Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III) was the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, not his cousin. Bob Jones Sr. never became "an independent Baptist." The famous filmmaker is Orson *Welles,* not "Wells." J. Frank Norris had nothing to do with the founding of the John Birch Society, dying six years before it was founded. Baptist John Piper is not a member of the PCA. Likewise, it is odd to refer to "centuries" of postmillennial consensus on the Bible in the 1800s when the postmillennial system was not that old (53). One might also debate some of the terminology. Hummel refers to academic dispensationalism as "scholastic" instead of "scholarly." The connotation of "scholastic" recalls the common perception of medieval Catholic theology or Protestant orthodoxy of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as arid and narrowly punctilious, a label that could slant perceptions.

One can identify some problems even in the author's title. The book might better be called the "rise and *decline*" of dispensationalism rather than its "rise and *fall.*" Even Hummel admits that although dispensationalism has passed its height of influence (perhaps in the middle of the twentieth century), there are still advocates of dispensationalism in some schools, churches, publications, and other organizations.

In reckoning with the theological impact of dispensationalism, Hummel simplifies a complicated narrative in tracing what we would call "easy-believism" primarily to the "free-grace" teachings associated with many dispensationalists. The roots of easy-believism are broader, found more in the democratization of American theology associated with the nineteenth century and particularly Charles Finney's version of the New England Theology, which Hummel himself acknowledges as part of "the American revivalist tradition" (11). That the free-grace teaching contributed to the concept of easy-believism is highly likely, but there are other factors to consider. Also to be noted is that nearly all of the early dispensationalists, including J. N. Darby, sound rather Calvinistic on soteriology (as Hummel himself notes).

This discussion of free-grace teaching suggests a problem with the work, a tendency to stress too greatly the larger impact of dispensationalism. To justify the subtitle of the book, "How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation," the author suggests effects of dispensationalism on American culture greater perhaps than the evidence will bear. For example, he claims that dispensationalists played a significant role in fostering the sentiment for national reunion between North and South after the Civil War in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a sentiment that ignored the civil rights of African Americans. He cites James L. Brookes and D. L. Moody as particular examples. Undoubtedly some (perhaps many) of these premillennial leaders felt that way, but was such a concept really key to their theological agenda? And were they markedly influential in promoting that sentiment? It is too much to say that sectional reconciliation was a "project by white northern evangelicals" (348) as though it were their creation, and they were its mainstay. The tendency in American society was strong and far from dependent on certain religious leaders. Christian leaders undoubtedly shared a range of ideas common (and sometimes bad) in their era, but that is a very different matter from viewing them as a source. Yet in defense of the author, it does appear that some

ideas derived from dispensationalism such as the rapture and the idea of an end-times individual leader known as the Antichrist do seem to have permeated American culture to a great extent. How wide their influence is may be debated.

Despite these criticisms, one must recognize the value in how the author pulls together so much history into one coherent narrative. I would add this book to the reading list for students of the history of dispensationalism, perhaps in connection with other histories.

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Porter, Stanley E., and Alan E. Kurschner, eds. *The Future Restoration of Israel: A Response to Supersessionism.* McMaster Biblical Studies Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2023. 396pp. + 20pp. (front matter) + 32pp. (back matter).

Volume 10 in the McMaster Biblical Studies Series is a collection of twenty-one essays from a rather eclectic assortment of scholars who, despite whatever other differences may divide them, agree on the title issue. The contributors are by no means uniformly dispensational. The list of authors includes the more predictable (Bock, Chisholm, Glaser, Hultberg, Kaiser, Saucy, Vanlaningham) along with an intriguing range of other specialists. Most of the essays are categorized under four headings: The Covenants and Israel's Future, The Nations and Israel's Future, Paul and Israel's Future, and Jesus and Israel's Future. These are capped off by a brace of essays on the historical and evangelistic impact of supersessionism.

Porter and Kurschner explain in their introductory essay that although the English term *supersessionism* is only a couple of centuries old, the concept dates to the second century and finds its "definitive statement" in Augustine. The concept has historically been fueled by varying motivations, from a desire to see Israel judged for its rejection of Messiah (*punitive* supersessionism) to a belief that Christ entirely fulfilled Jewish prophecy and law (*economic* supersessionism). This volume aims to rebut any "view that denies any future divine promise and blessing to national Israel"—including the position that admits a future revival of individual Jews but rejects any restoration of Israel as a national entity (5). The editors present a concise history of supersessionist theology, from its punitive expressions among the church fathers, to the Reformation's inheritance of its Augustinian expression, to its "ugly theological turn . . . in the early nineteenth century" (8). The introduction concludes with a helpfully succinct, one-paragraph summary of each of the remaining twenty essays. It is impossible in the allotted space to overview every essay, so this review will necessarily be selective.

Walter Kaiser ("The Christian Church: Built on the Foundation of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants") expresses amazement that within the span of a mere century, the early church could have "changed so dramatically from what the Jewish Apostle Paul had taught" in Romans 11 about the partiality and temporality of the Jews' fall from grace and the irrevocability of God's promises to the fathers, to the confident assertions of Justin Martyr, Cyprian, and others that God had altogether abandoned the Jews and redirected all their promises to the mostly Gentile Christian church (38–39). Kaiser traces this early error "to an incorrect conclusion about the subjects, contents, and duration of the Abrahamic covenant" (41), and he emphasizes the implication of Genesis 15:17 regarding the absolute "unconditional, unilateral" eternality of that covenant including the land promises that are reiterated throughout Scripture (43)—while effectively countering the misreadings of Gary Burge, Chris Wright (42–43), and N. T. Wright (46). Israel's restoration to the land has nothing to do with Israel's deservedness and everything to do with the integrity and glory of the God who promised (50).

Michael Vanlaningham ("A Response to Progressive Covenantalists' [and Others'] View of the Land Promises for Israel") rebuts a series of five key assertions from Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum that undergird the progressive-covenantal perspective. For Vanlaningham, the bottom line is that this

view relies on "overly-subtle, perhaps even surreptitious caveats" folded into God's land promises that would seem to imply that "God lacks integrity in keeping his promises" (83).[1]

Darrell Bock ("Israel's Future as a Nation and Reconciliation") surveys a series of prophetic passages (both OT and NT) that particularly highlight Israel's central role of international blessing and reconciliation. Like Vanlaningham, Bock argues that at stake in this debate is "the character of God and his revelation. . . . The veracity of God and the clarity of his communication are both in play," for "he stakes his reputation upon completing this promise" of Israel's future restoration as a nation (102–3). This does not imply, of course, that non-restorationists reject or devalue God's veracity; but it does imply that such a view undermines the clarity of God's communication, resulting in a redefinition of God's veracity.[2]

Mark Saucy posits the intriguing assertion that having a national identity "is an intrinsic dimension of what it means to be human according to the image of God." Consequently, "without a re-born nation [of Israel] and the global, culture-level restoration it represents *for this earth*, messianic soteriology does not claim the fullness of human life that Jesus intended when he stated, 'salvation is of the Jews'" (126, emphasis original). Saucy explores the theocratic role of Israel both against the backdrop of the concept of national identity established in Genesis, and in the light of the NT's eschatological "soteriological narrative" of the "salvation of our nationed humanity in Christ" (ibid.). From the historically programmatic Psalm 2 with its portrayal of the *nations* raging against Yahweh until his Anointed inherits the *nations* and rules over them, to Daniel's depiction of Messiah's eternal dominion over "every people, *nation*, and language," to Jesus' call to disciple the *nations*, to "John's Apocalypse . . . with its narrative-controlling place at the end of Scripture's story and deep roots in the Old Testament" (137), which declares Christ as "the ruler of the *kings* of the earth" (1:5) who comes to "strike the *nations*" (19:15–16) and in whose light the *nations* (not merely a mass of regenerated individuals) will walk (21:23–24) and experience healing as *nations* (22:2)—the soteriological metanarrative of Scripture never devolves into individualism but maintains its focus on humans as *nations*. In that regard, the *national* restoration of a regenerated Israel under the New Covenant is essential; "in its future role on the world's stage, national Israel will lead the way . . . as the exemplar of the greatness of God's name in salvation" (139).

Alan Kurschner ("Should the 144,000 in Revelation 7:3–8 Be Identified as the Great Multitude in 7:9–17: A Response to Gregory K. Beale") offers a thorough, multi-faceted, and exegetically grounded defense of the 144,000 as consisting specifically of ethnic Jews. His core argument is that "the narrative logic depicts . . . the appearance of the great multitude in 7:9–17" as "*concurrent*" with "the sealing in 7:3–8"—rather than a "*recapitulation*"—indicating that these are "two distinct groups

[1] For a thorough treatment of this subject see Wade Loring Kuhlewind Jr., "'I Will Plant Them in This Land': An Analysis and Critique of Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant* with Special Attention to the Progressive Covenantal Land-Promise View" (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2018).

[2] If even this language sounds unfair or extreme, consider P. E. Satterthwaite: In view of the OT's linkage between resurrection and national restoration (e.g., Ezek 37; Dan 12), the fact that Jesus' resurrection did not trigger Israel's national restoration was "a startling development which entailed *a radically revised understanding of God's faithfulness to His promises,* particularly in respect to the nation of Israel." "Biblical History," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 49 (emphasis added).

and not two different perspectives of the same [international] group" (143–44, emphasis original). His rebuttal of Beale addresses the latter's illegitimate-totality-transfer fallacy in his understanding of *doulos* in 7:3, clarifies the purpose of the sealing, distinguishes between the wrath of the beast and the wrath of God, explores the import of *meta touto* in 7:1, and refutes Beale's conflation of the "four winds" in 7:1 with the four horsemen in 6:1–8.

Stanley Porter ("Romans 9–11 and Especially Romans 11:26 in the Context of Paul's Argument in Romans") summarizes four major views regarding Romans 11:26 ("and so/thus all Israel shall be saved"). (1) The Ecclesiastical View—the standard, historical supersessionist view held by Calvin, Harnack, Barth, N. T. Wright, Richard Hays, *et al.*—interprets the phrase as a reference to the international church, which has replaced Israel itself as the people of God. (2) The Eschatological View (Bruce, Cranfield, Dunn, Stuhlmacher, Moo, Schreiner, *et al.*) sees the phrase as an expressly "ethnic designation" denoting "a mass-conversion of Jews at or just prior to the Parousia" (220). (3) The Remnant View ("relatively unpopular") also sees "Israel" as an ethnic designation but interprets it as the salvation of the Jewish remnant throughout time. (4) The Two-Covenants View (followed by adherents of the "Radical New Perspective") implies two covenantal means of security or salvation (a curious feature, given the long-lived demonizations of old-line dispensationalism for that very accusation). Having suggested both strengths and (especially) weaknesses in each of these views, Porter then propounds his own argument for seeing "all Israel" in 11:26 as referring to "the new Israel as an extension and reconstituted ethnic Israel based upon ethnic Israel as its root or base and including Gentiles, all of whom have attained salvation by the same means" (228)—by virtue of Paul's all-important olive tree analogy, which organically connects both Jews and Gentiles to the patriarchal root. Porter differentiates this view from replacement theology and from the purely technically ethnic view. There are some explanatory quirks: in 11:1 *mē genoito* means "Indeed not," but in 11:11 the same expression means "Indeed *or probably* not" (225, emphasis added); in 11:26 "Paul says, there is an expectation that 'all Israel' *can* be saved" (227, emphasis added). Porter also resorts to what seems an astonishing example of question-begging: "Paul by referring to the 'new Israel' makes clear that this is an Israel newly reconstituted" (228). Perhaps it is the implication of the quotation marks that makes the statement seem more egregious than intended, but Paul does not, in fact, refer to a "new Israel" at all, but to "all Israel." While the essay does counter supersessionism, it makes no definitive contribution to titular focus of the book (*The Future Restoration of Israel*).

Michael Brown ("The 'Seed' as Christ in Galatians 3:16 and the Wrong Deductions of Replacement Theology") focuses his attention on a specific interpretation of a specific text by a specific (and more recent) species of supersessionism. The specific species of supersessionism is known variously as *fulfillment theology*, *inclusion theology*, or *transference theology*—though adherents (Brown identifies, e.g., Storms, Lehrer, Gordon, Burge, Blume, N. T. Wright) often expressly disavow any connection to replacement theology (278–79). The specific text is, of course, Galatians 3:16. And the specific interpretation claims (a) that Christ (as the new and consummate Israel) is the true recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant land promise *instead of* the biological descendants of Abraham so that the original terms and recipients of the covenant become obsolete and irrelevant; or (b) that Christ himself *is* the land (with the same results); or (c) both! While other passages are marshaled for additional

support (e.g., John 15), "the locus classicus" for this view is Galatians 3:16 (280). Brown notes that such an interpretation contradicts not merely the Abrahamic Covenant passages but a whole swath of OT Scriptures that perpetuate the land promises, as well as Paul's express argument in Romans 11:28–29. (I would suggest that, even more significantly, it also contradicts the express reiteration of the land promises within the very context of the New Covenant itself—Jer 32:37, 41; Ezek 36:33; 37:25; 38:28; Isa 60:21.)

What was missing, however, from Brown's arguments (indeed, from most arguments surrounding Gal 3:16) is the astonishing specificity of Paul's citation. The apostle does not argue for the phrase "to thy seed" but "*and* to thy seed." The "and" is odd, unnecessary, and superfluous . . . unless Paul has a particular point and passage (or passages) from the LXX in mind. The specific phrase that he cites (*kai tō spermati sou*) appears in only four Abrahamic Covenant passages (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7; 48:4), and in every case, the phrase explicitly has the eternal land-promise component of the covenant in view. That Paul has the land promise in view is obvious when he refers to "the inheritance" in 3:17–18. For fulfillment-inclusion-transference theologians to conclude from Galatians 3:16 that Christ *himself* is the land is exegetically and theologically bizarre; likewise (as Brown rightly asserts), their claim that Christ becomes the *sole inheritor* of the land promise to the exclusion of all the rest of Abraham's seed bristles with complications as well. Their view that Christ, as both biologically the Seed of Abraham and theologically the Son of God, is the *consummate* Heir of the Abrahamic land promise is, indeed, a thorny problem, but it is a problem for fulfillment theologians themselves. They have claimed much more than they realize. One could hardly posit a more potent guarantee of a coming earthly kingdom where Christ will rule over a restored Israel than to argue that Christ will *personally* inherit the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant—and then, as Son of Man, share that inheritance and reign with "the saints of the Most High" (Dan 7).

This review has only scratched the surface selectively, but it has attempted to scratch a bit deeper here and there. Thanks to the scope of its essays, the depth of their arguments, and the theological breadth of its contributors, *The Future Restoration of Israel* repays an attentive reading.

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Echevarría, Miguel G., and Benjamin P. Laird. *40 Questions about the Apostle Paul.* 40 Questions Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023. 306pp. + 13pp. (back matter).

Miguel G. Echevarría is an associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written books on the Pauline and Johannine Epistles. He holds a PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary. Benjamin P. Laird is an associate professor of biblical studies at the John Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University. He holds a PhD from the University of Aberdeen and a ThM and MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written several books on the NT canon.

Unlike other books in this series (such as *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*), the articles are not attributed directly to one of the co-authors; therefore, it is impossible to determine what each author would affirm. The questions are grouped into three sections.

The first section contains eleven questions concerning the apostle Paul's pre-Christian and Christian life. Questions in this section address where Paul was born and raised, what we know about his family, his education, his motivation to destroy the church, his early years of ministry, his first missionary journey, his second and third missionary journeys, his final years of life, his death, his missionary strategy, and his primary opponents.

The second section consists of twelve questions about the writing and authority of Paul's letters. Questions address when and where Paul wrote his letters, whether Paul's companions assisted in the writing and distribution of his letters, whether Paul's letters resembled the style and structure of contemporary letters, when and how Paul's writings were first collected and published, whether Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews, what happened to Paul's lost letters, why some scholars question the authenticity of certain Pauline canonical letters, what the basis is for affirming the authenticity of disputed Pauline letters, whether Paul thought his letters were Scripture, why Peter said some of Paul's writings were "hard to understand," what sources Paul used, and how Paul used the OT.

The third section consists of seventeen questions about Paul's theology. The first question in this section addresses whether there is a center to Paul's theology. Others address his Christology, his view of atonement, conversion, baptism, the Lord's Supper, his understanding of the relationship between the law and the gospel, the role of faith and works in salvation, his eschatology, the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), the strengths and weaknesses of the NPP, whether *pistis Christou* should be translated as "faith in Christ" or "faithfulness of Christ," Paul's view regarding marriage, singleness and divorce, his teaching regarding the role of women in the home and church, whether Paul taught that some spiritual gifts would cease, his teachings about slavery and racial divisions, and whether Paul believed that the church replaced Israel.

Several chapters in this book are very helpful. The chapters on Paul's books and background are excellent resources that could be easily integrated into a NT survey course. The reflection questions for each chapter are helpful as well. The first three questions about where Paul was born and raised, what we know about Paul's family, and what we know about Paul's education are particularly valuable.

The book's best chapters are the two chapters about the New Perspective on Paul and the meaning of *pistis Christou*. In particular, the chapter on the strengths and weaknesses of the New Perspective on Paul articulates these clearly. The strengths of the NPP include its emphasis on Second Temple literature, a positive portrayal of Judaism, and the interpretation of Paul within his Jewish context. The weaknesses of the NPP include its strict assumptions about Jewish soteriology, its overemphasis on the role of covenant in Pauline thought, and its mishandling of the works of the law. The chapter on *pistis Christou* does an excellent job of contrasting the arguments for the objective (faith in Christ) and subjective genitives (faithfulness of Christ). The authors helpfully show that the arguments are not definitive and that good conservative scholars are on both sides of the issue.

The only major problem with the book was the last chapter about whether the church has replaced Israel. The authors do not believe that the church has replaced Israel (302) but argue for an over-realized continuity between the church and Israel (302–4). The chapter draws a firm conclusion without providing adequate evidence. The authors' strongest argument is the idea of the nations' being blessed through the promises of Abraham (Gen 12:3; 15:6; Rom 4:11–12; Gal 3:7–9). The authors evaluate the meaning of the phrase "and . . . the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16 and argue that the best sense of καί would be "that is" rather than a connective "and" (304–5), but this is the *least* grammatically likely of the available options. The authors claim that since there is no distinction in the body of Christ elsewhere in Galatians, there can be none here. In the opinion of this reviewer, their conclusion does not entail from the evidence. Many people who accept a distinction between the church and Israel, such as dispensationalists, acknowledge that there is no distinction in the church. The authors provide a footnote to Craig Keener's Galatians commentary for further options, but they draw definitive conclusions that are inadequately warranted. Regardless of the theological position of this reader, he will want to see a more adequate explanation of this issue.

The book's wealth of information and insightful analysis make it a worthwhile addition to any library—accessible to readers at all levels of study.

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Jobes, Karen H. *1 Peter*. 2nd ed. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 335pp. + 13pp. (back matter).

Karen Jobes was the professor of New Testament Greek and Greek exegesis at Wheaton College from 2005 until her retirement in 2015. She received her PhD in biblical hermeneutics from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1995. Her research interests are biblical hermeneutics, the Septuagint, Hebrews, the general epistles, and Esther. This volume is a revised edition of Karen Jobes's *1 Peter* commentary in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. The volume is a fine example of the series. It does an excellent job of fulfilling the series' goals by packaging excellent scholarship in a form accessible to scholars, pastors, and even the educated layperson. The commentary's first edition (2005) was already one of the better commentaries on 1 Peter but was due for revision. The overall structure of the commentary is unchanged, consisting of three sections.

The first section is a sixty-one-page introduction. Topics discussed in the introduction include the significance of the letter, date/authorship (apostolic, pseudonymous, or both), challenges to Petrine authorship (the Greek of 1 Peter, the *Sitz im Leben* of 1 Peter, 1 Peter's dependence on Paul, and the spread of Christianity), evidence for Petrine authorship, destination, recipients, the origin of 1 Peter, the purpose of the letter, the use of the OT in 1 Peter, major themes/theology, literary unity/genre, and an outline of the book. This introduction does an excellent job of giving an overview of the significant issues confronting students of 1 Peter.

The second section is the commentary, which is 260 pages long and divided into five sections. The first segment is 1:1–2, the greeting. The second segment is 1:3–12, the letter's opening, a reassuring message to God's people. The third segment, 2:11–4:11, discusses why and how God's people should live godly lives. The fourth segment, 4:12–5:11, is a message of consolation to the suffering church. The last segment, 5:12–14, is the letter's closing and greetings.

The last section is an excursus of fourteen pages. This excursus is a discussion of the nature of 1 Peter's Greek. The principal section of the excursus is a syntactical study consisting of seventeen criteria. The criteria are applied to 1 Peter, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. The analysis is displayed in a helpful chart on page 333. This analysis in the excursus attempts to demonstrate from the Greek syntax of 1 Peter any evidence of bilingual interference. Jobes concludes that there is definite evidence of a Semitic influence in the Greek of 1 Peter.

Two notable features from the first edition are carried over. One is Jobes's proposal that the recipients of 1 Peter were converted elsewhere besides Asia Minor (most likely Rome). Jobes argues that the converts were living in Asia Minor because Claudius used periodic expulsion of undesirables to colonize different areas of the empire to keep the peace in Rome. Jobes admits that this is a minority position. Still, she thinks it is the best explanation for how Christianity spread to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia, since most of these regions were not evangelized by any known apostle. The second feature is her in-depth analysis of LXX usage in 1 Peter. She specifically compares the uses in 1 Peter against their original LXX context.

There are five notable additions to the second edition. First, Jobes provides a refreshed translation based on the NA28 Greek text. The author's translation is used in the commentary unless otherwise

noted. Second, the author adds additional text-critical information for some OT quotations. Third, she standardizes references to the Greek OT. Jobes refers to the Pentateuch as the LXX and the rest of the books as the OG (Old Greek). The entire Greek OT is referred to as LXX/OG. Fourth, bibliographic information was revised and supplemented. Lastly, a section on the use of the OT in 1 Peter was added to the introduction.

There are five positive aspects to this commentary. The first positive aspect is accessibility to many different types of readers, as only a basic level of Greek is required. It is helpful for readers of all levels, just like the original 2005 commentary. The second positive aspect is its emphasis on the argument of 1 Peter rather than critical issues. It is undoubtedly essential that any commentary deal with important critical issues. Still, it is more important not to let the evaluation of the critical issues interfere with the explanation of the argument of a book. The third positive aspect is Jobes's discussion concerning the arrival of Christianity in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia. The fourth positive aspect is the in-depth analysis of OT quotations, which directly affects exegesis. This is a complex area in NT exegesis, and Jobes does an excellent job navigating the issues. The last positive aspect is the excursus on the quality of the Greek. The excursus is very helpful in refuting one of the major arguments against Petrine authorship. It provides strong evidence against the prevalent idea that the Greek of 1 Peter was too good for a first-century fisherman to write.

This reviewer sees only one negative aspect in this commentary: There does not seem to be enough extra content to justify the revision. I would recommend that a person who does not have the original 1 Peter commentary buy the more recent edition. Still, I am unsure how valuable this second edition would be for someone who owns the original commentary. The only exception to this caveat would be scholars specializing in the Petrine correspondence, who will want to get this second edition for its updated bibliography.

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Croft, Brian, and Ronnie Martin. *The Unhurried Pastor: Redefining Productivity for a More Sustainable Ministry*. N.p.: Good Book, 2024. 169pp. + 4pp. (back matter).

While pulpit committees breathlessly search for the next Charles Spurgeon, pastors are busy scrambling for the exits. The confirming surveys are relentless in their annual tracking of the sobering trend that transcends educational and denominational boundaries. [1] Pastors want out, and while many are only eyeing the doors, increasing percentages of a diminishing number of pastors are passing through them. All of this points to an alarming ministry exodus, one more notable than nearly any since, well, *the* exodus.

Desiring to encourage pastors in their ministries, Brian Croft and Ronnie Martin have collaborated on *The Unhurried Pastor*, a most helpful appeal for pastors to assess themselves spiritually and their philosophy of ministry scripturally. More than a decade ago, Paul Tripp described the ministry as a "dangerous calling."[2] He captured how much temptation lurks in a sacred calling when pastors so readily neglect to nurture their own spiritual lives, instead giving into the age-old lure of proving themselves by shaping their lives and schedule around the fool's gold of men's approval. The danger is certainly not a new one. We have often been warned. Philip Spener (1635–1705) wrote to a German Lutheran pastoral community in 1765, "How many a Christian minister, when by God's grace he first enters upon his office, has the experience that many of the things to which he devotes hard work and great pains prove to be useless, that he must begin all over again to reflect on what is more necessary, and that he wishes he had known this before and had been wisely and carefully directed to it."[3]

Several decades before Spener, in 1689 after Puritan pastors had been newly restored to their congregations following the Glorious Revolution, John Flavel (1627–1691) wrote "A humble supplication to the *more aged*, and as an Exhortation to *younger* Ministers and Candidates,"[4] in which he urged his fellow ministers in England concerning their renewed opportunity to exemplify scriptural ministerial priorities: "He will make the best divine that studies on his knees," "Take care you put not that last, which should be first; and that, again, first, which should be last," "A head well instructed is much to be desired; but a sanctified heart is absolutely necessary," and "It is one thing to be learned in the truths of Christ, another to be taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."

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[1] See "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year," Barna Group (2021), accessed August 17, 2024, https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/; "Pastors Share Top Reasons They've Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year," Barna Group (2022), accessed August 17, 2024, https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/; Peter Smith, "US pastors struggle with post-pandemic burnout. Survey shows half considered quitting since 2020," AP News, January 11, 2024, accessed August 17, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/christian-clergy-burnout-pandemic-survey-24ee46327438ff46b074d234ffe2f58c; and Darryl Dash, "The Coming Pastoral Shortage," The Gospel Coalition Canadian Edition, February 15, 2023, https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/straight-paths/the-coming-pastoral-shortage/.

[2] *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

[3] Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria,* trans. and ed. Theodore J. Tappert (1964; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 54.

[4] *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 4:15.

It is fitting that most of the final words Jesus uttered before his ascension were uttered to those who would be church leaders. His words are clear and simple—shepherd my sheep, teach, baptize, preach the gospel. Those who become so busy redefining ministry forget or at least overlook the heart of his counsel every bit as much as the religious leaders of Jesus' day did. Jesus' words not only command; they anticipate our propensity to distraction. Martin cautions us that today pastoral life is "hijacked by success driven strategies, edgy entrepreneurs, and leadership seminar gurus who tempt pastors to reinvent the pastoral life into something that can be measured on an Excel spreadsheet" (35).

The blessing of *The Unhurried Pastor* is that a tandem of contemporary ministerial brothers are willing to call attention yet again to the sin that so easily besets pastors and urge them to "keep a close watch" on themselves (1 Tim 4:16). Their call is not to a more lax and leisurely ministry but to a scripturally prioritized and purposeful one. Seminary students, pastors (young and old) and their wives, church leaders, and pastoral search committees all would profit wonderfully from a careful read. Martin and Croft provide a "push against the accepted busy and frantic practice of pastors today, as well as a push against our broader Western mindset, which assumes that to be productive we must always be busy, moving, and hurried" (13). Martin, in the "Preparation" and "Power" sections of the book (chapters 1–3 and 4–6 respectively), diagnoses and opens soul wounds into which he then pours the ointment of the gospel. Croft completes the book with the "Pursuit" section, with briefer chapters (7–11) of iron-sharpening counsel to structure pastoral practice that prioritizes practical biblical prescriptions. "Genuine pastoral productivity—of a kind that brings joy and longevity—is unlocked through the practices reflected in some of the titles of chapters that follow: humanity, humility, self-awareness, prayer, contemplation, silence, rest, friendship" (13). The writers blend candor with sympathy, personal transparency with brotherly love, and truth with grace to goad our remembrance that our privileged calling "lies in *being* more than *doing*" (14, emphasis original). Martin's concluding "Daily Spiritual Health Plan" (appendix) endeavors to weave the essence of the book into a model worth perusing with care.

My own notes from this little volume fill several typed pages. I have profited from repeated readings, particularly of chapters 1–6, and as I review my notes even now, even after more than thirty years of ministry, I find myself sliding from my chair to my knees to be instructed. Below is a sampling of some of the best contributions of the authors.

1. Humanity (19–32): We must admit and submit to our God-designed limitations. We are inadequate. We are not the Messiah. "Remembering that God is the one who takes you, places you, and keeps you prevents ministry from becoming the pinnacle of your identity. It also helps remove that rather large anvil of performance-driven spirituality that rides so heavily on your back—the kind of spirituality that seeks applause from an audience other than God in order to be affirmed. God has put us where we are. We work for him" (24).
2. Humility (33–45): "Your care for your body and soul helps you *become* the person you're called to *be*, before you spend even an hour doing the work of the *pastor* that people expect you to be" (37, emphasis original).

3. Hopefulness (47–59): "Waiting [on God] is putting a pause on our stirring without pausing our belief that God will not fail to deliver his goodness to us" (51).
4. Self-awareness (63–76): "Theorizing about our limitations does little good if we aren't daily grasping the reality that God didn't create us with hands big enough to hold *all things together*" (66, emphasis original).
5. Contemplation (77–87): "Contemplation provides the space for us to differentiate between what is true and what is not so that we develop healthier patterns of working and thinking" (79). "Prayer is the first recourse of wise people" (82).
6. Prayer (89–103): Prayer is "like water in the garden of our soul. It's doing something beneath the surface of our being that we can't always see but that we trust is going to produce something lovely—as long as we don't break our habit of consistent watering" (91). "Prayer is how I experience the peace of God, protect my heart from anxiety, and reposition it to rejoice" (92).
7. Self- (soul-) care (107–21): "I have spent most of my life pretending that strength and weakness do not and cannot coexist. By God's grace, however, I am continuing to learn that this combination is a key for living courageously and in the freedom of the gospel" (112).
8. Rest (123–28): "In fact, what I now understand to be rest and recreation I saw back then as laziness and lack of productivity" (123).
9. Silence (129–36): "Silence exposes the soul" (129).
10. Emotions (137–43): "A courageous pastor loves deeply and risks feeling deeply for others. Ultimately, it is the deeply feeling pastor who is able to stop, be still, feel with others, be present, connect on that human level, and minister God's grace" (140).
11. Friendship (145–55): "The unhurried pastor stops and takes the time to consider their need for care and invests in the types of meaningful pastoral friendships where that care is found. Friendship is precious, but every pastor must carve out time from the demands of his schedule to cultivate it" (154–55).

Hurry to read this book . . . but read it unhurriedly. You will appreciate the understanding, empathy, and pastoral sensitivity of Martin and Croft's timely counsel.

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Piper, John. *Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 163pp. + 3pp. (front matter) + 7pp. (back matter).

Conservative Christianity has long navigated tensions regarding the importance of education for individuals, society, and the church. On one hand, where the gospel has flourished, education has followed. Throughout most of its history, the church has established and advanced Christ-centered educational institutions. On the other hand, the church has seen formal education as a barrier to faith and spiritual fervency—appropriately so when formal education prizes intellectualism over faith. *Foundations for Lifelong Learning* does not overtly address these tensions; however, John Piper makes a persuasive case for Christ-centered formal education and lifelong learning.

Piper's thesis is consistent with his other theological writings. We glorify Christ best by enjoying or treasuring him above all. Believers, therefore, should understand education as "the process of growing in our ability to join God in this ultimate purpose to glorify Jesus Christ" (2). Piper asserts "that the great purpose of lifelong learning—education in serious joy—is to magnify Christ by enjoying him above all things and in all things, with the kind of overflowing, Christlike joy, that is willing to suffer as it expands to include others in it" (6).

Piper introduces several foundational principles in the introductory chapter. First, lifelong learning finds its end in serious joy. This phrase appears to be more than another expression of Piper's "Christian hedonism" ("God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."). Piper emphasizes a willingness to suffer in order to bring others along in this great purpose. Thus, he speaks not simply of joy but of serious joy. In this sense, Piper's exposition of serious joy might find wider acceptance than has his Christian hedonism.

A second foundational principle developed in the introductory chapter is that God reveals truth through both his Word and his world. Therefore, both merit study. Piper unequivocally affirms that Scripture and general revelation are not on the same authoritative plane. The Bible is primary and irreplaceable. The Bible is the authority without which we would grope in spiritual darkness. "But the decisive, saving power and authority of God's word," writes Piper, "does not cancel out God's world. The Bible gives the decisive meaning of all things. But the Bible itself sends us over and over again into the world for learning" (10). Piper's brief but compelling demonstration of how the Bible both "commands and assumes that we will know the world, and not just the word" is one of the book's strongest features (11). Christian educators who rightly emphasize biblical authority at times too quickly dismiss what Scripture assumes, illustrates, and even commands about understanding God's material world.

Building on the introduction, the book unfolds six habits of heart and mind for learning that best accomplish the aim to treasure Christ above all else. Piper does not correlate the habits—*observation, understanding, evaluation, feeling, application, and expression*—with success in particular professions or vocational service as is the bent of much education today, secular or Christian. In other words, he does not describe how these habits of learning help one become an eloquent preacher, inspirational teacher, innovative engineer, or a skilled surgeon. But he concludes that the result of practicing these habits "is a kind of maturity that makes a person more fruitful in whatever vocation God assigns" (161). Piper's

conclusion is difficult to refute. More importantly, his conclusion is refreshing in a culture that increasingly views education or learning as mere skill development and measures its value in transactional rather than transformational terms.

Piper's development of each habit in successive chapters is both theological and practical. Scripture abounds in each chapter. Most chapters end with enumerated lists for application. The chapter on *observation* is among the best in the book as Piper explains how our natural senses can serve spiritual purposes. "The created world is not incidental to God's self-revealing purposes, as if once we see him, we can dispense with the material world" (25).[1] In his chapter on *understanding*, Piper rejects the notion that logic is both cold and incompatible with God's purposes. Jesus not only used logic but also expected his hearers to follow his logic. The chapter on *evaluation* systematically establishes the necessity of correct judgments, arguing that observation and understanding are not ends in themselves. Regenerated image-bearers can learn to make correct judgments because God himself is the final, objective standard for all evaluation.

Feeling, as a foundational habit for learning, emphasizes that learning in God's design is more than cognitive and even moral; it is affective as well. Piper argues that an individual is not fully educated until rightly ordered affections accompany true thoughts and moral decisions. The final habits—*application* and *expression*—convey that education is incomplete unless lived out in both deed and word. Again, Piper develops the habit of expression in both theological and practical ways. Those who are truly educated in serious joy live fruitful lives through stewarding well the gift of language. In other words, they speak, and they write. Ironically, it is unusual to find such a strong claim about communication in Christian writings about education.

Throughout the book, the reader will encounter both thoughtfully provocative statements and paradoxes. For example, Piper equates natural abilities and spiritual gifts when discussing God-given aptitudes. "God ordinarily gives us natural abilities because he intends to use them. 'Spiritual gifts' are often natural abilities that have been sanctified and empowered by the Holy Spirit" (133–34). When advocating for creative expression in communication, Piper addresses the paradox of eloquence in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. He contends that Paul directed his criticism at an eloquence "aimed at self-exultation." The whole of Scripture does not condemn eloquence but in fact supports it, for "the Bible is replete with a kind of eloquence that creatively uses language for greater impact" (155).

If there is a substantive limitation to *Foundations for Lifelong Learning*, it is in the scope of its development and application. A companion volume would do well to apply these habits of heart and mind more fully to other disciplines such as the arts and humanities as well as social and natural sciences. Furthermore, Piper does not address implications for curricular and pedagogical choices. How the principles in this book apply more precisely to education is worth developing. Piper's concluding sentences hint at the breadth of what he has written and the absence of precision that Christian educators might seek in a book on this topic. "These are the habits of life, not just the habits of education. These are the foundations of living, not just the foundations of learning" (163). Again,

[1] See Andrew Wilson, *The God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

one is hard-pressed to disagree with Piper's claim even if there lingers a desire for a more precise treatment of education and learning.

In the end, Piper has developed a theology of learning that is biblical, and that is not a simple task.[2] Proverbs 2 describes the believer's responsibility to seek wisdom diligently and God's promise to give wisdom in such a way that one becomes wise, which is more than merely recognizing or understanding wisdom. Piper's foundational habits for learning outline a clear path toward this end.

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[2] See D. A. Carson, "A Biblical Theology of Education," *Themelios* 46, no. 2 (August 2021), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/a-biblical-theology-of-education/.