

Summer 2016 | Volume 20 | Number 1

The **JOURNAL**
of Ministry & Theology



Baptist Bible Seminary | South Abington Twp. | Pennsylvania

THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY

*Published semiannually by Baptist Bible Seminary,
South Abington Twp., Pennsylvania*

Jim Lytle
President

Mike Stallard
Dean of Baptist Bible Seminary

Gary Gromacki/Mike Stallard
Editors

Teresa Ingalls/Joy McGinniss
Editorial Assistants

THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY is a semiannual journal published by Baptist Bible Seminary of South Abington Twp., Pennsylvania. It is devoted to the growth of pastors and educators through interaction with contemporary critical issues and methodologies from the perspective of a biblical worldview. THE JOURNAL provides a forum for faculty, students, and friends of BBS to apply theology in ministry for the benefit of local church and parachurch organizations. Regular features of THE JOURNAL include articles on biblical exegesis; pastoral, biblical, and systematic theology; ethics; church history; missions; and ministry issues.

The views represented herein are not necessarily endorsed by Baptist Bible Seminary, its administration, or its faculty.

Subscription Rates: One year \$16.00 (\$21.00 foreign); Two years \$30 (\$36.00 foreign); Single issues available at \$9.00 each. Subscription requests should be sent in care of Journal Subscription Secretary, Baptist Bible Seminary, 538 Venard Road, South Abington Twp., PA 18411. All subscriptions are payable in U.S. currency, with checks made payable to Baptist Bible Seminary.

Postal Information for THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY (ISSN: 1092-9525). Address changes can be sent to the Journal Subscription Secretary per the above address.

Copyright ©2016 by Baptist Bible Seminary. Requests for permission to reprint articles, in whole or in part, must be secured from the editor and from the author of the particular article. Mail requests to THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY Editor, Baptist Bible Seminary, 538 Venard Road, South Abington Twp., PA 18411.

SPRING 2016 | VOLUME 20 | NUMBER 1

THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY

Contents

What Do Israel and the Church Share From a Traditional
Dispensational Viewpoint? 5

Mike Stallard, Ph.D.

The Descent and Ascent of Christ in Ephesians 4:8–10 27

Gary Gromacki, Ph.D.

Evaluation of *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*
..... 48

Joseph Parle, Ph.D.

The Church and the Transgender Issue 76

Michael Dellaperute

Implications for Pastoral Ministry Based on Paul’s Prayer
in 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13 123

Wayne Slusser, Ph.D.

Book Reviews 152

2 Timothy 2:2

*And the things that you have heard from me
among many witnesses, commit these
to faithful men who will be able
to teach others also.*

What Do Israel and the Church Share From a Traditional Dispensational Viewpoint?

Dr. Mike Stallard
Seminary Dean
Professor of Systematic Theology
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

Traditional dispensationalism has long frustrated non-dispensationalists with its focus on the distinction between Israel and the church.¹ Indeed, this distinction is, as Ryrie noted long ago, the *essence* of the dispensational approach to Scripture.² Such a conclusion should be overwhelmingly accepted by those interested in Bible interpretation. Nonetheless, the centering of

¹ This article is based upon a paper presented at the eighth annual Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 16–17, 2015, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA. One example of disagreement expressed by covenant theologians is Michael Horton’s statement: “Covenant theology begins with continuity rather than discontinuity, not because of any a priori bias, but because Scripture itself moves from promise to fulfillment, not from one distinct program to another and then back again” (*Introducing Covenant Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006], 20). Horton’s expression, while missing the mark, is superior to the caricature of dispensationalism found in G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 340–41. Also, see Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 428.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 44–47; *Dispensationalism*, rev. and expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 38–41.

dispensationalism on this needed doctrinal conclusion sometimes obscures the fact that most dispensationalists actually believe that Israel and the church share some important elements in God's historical plan. More importantly, such sharing between these two significant institutional creations of God means that dispensationalists have some theological wickets to discuss. Thus, the purpose of this article is to frame the sharing of various experiences between Israel and the church and thereby bring added precision to the excellent framework of a dispensational understanding of the Bible. To accomplish this task, review of several areas will be undertaken: past intensification of the distinction by dispensationalists, shared points between Israel and the church, and potential implications of such sharing using the pre-tribulational rapture as a case study.

INTENSIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Part of the needed discussion involves the extent to which various dispensationalists in the history of the tradition have ordered theological formulations that intensify the distinction between Israel and the church. Here we will review two such examples. First, Lewis Sperry Chafer offered the view that there are two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church:

There remains to be recognized a heavenly covenant for the heavenly people, which is also styled like the preceding one for Israel a "new covenant." It is made in the blood of Christ (cf. Mark 14:24) and continues in effect throughout this age, whereas the new covenant made with Israel happens to be future in its application. To suppose that these two covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church—are the same is to assume that there is latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Israel's covenant, however, is new only because it replaces the Mosaic, but the Church's covenant is new

because it introduces that which is God's mysterious and unrelated purpose.³

While respecting Chafer, it must be noted that this statement at least partly bases the theological conclusion about two new covenants on the prior theological conclusion that Israel and the Church have little or nothing in common relative to purpose. In fact, Chafer seems to amplify the distinction by his handling of the issue of two new covenants.⁴

In 2009, the Council on Dispensationalism dedicated its meetings to conversations about the new covenant. Three major views were robustly defended in that conference with a book published representing the positions.⁵ The two new covenants view was not among the views advanced by the speakers or authors. A majority of dispensationalists seemed to affirm that the church had some relationship to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 based upon NT revelation while believing that the promises to Israel relative to the new covenant will be carried out

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary P, 1948), 7: 98–99.

⁴ Charles Ryrie at times follows Chafer closely in this matter. He summarizes, relative to NT texts about the church and the new covenant, what he considers to be the most significant issue: "If the Church does not have a [separate] new covenant then she is fulfilling Israel's promises, for it has been shown that the OT teaches that the new covenant is for Israel alone. If the Church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in Scripture, then premillennialism is weakened" (*The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, reprint ed. [Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1981], 118). The bracketed term is this author's addition for clarity. In the matter of two new covenants, then, Ryrie asserts that premillennialism is threatened if the distinction between Israel and the church is not strictly followed.

⁵ Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012).

in the future kingdom precisely as God gave in the prophet Jeremiah. A strong minority argued that the church had no relation to the new covenant of Jeremiah but did not seem to insist on a separate new covenant for the church in the Chaferian sense. In fact, a study of dispensationalists prior to Chafer showed that few, if any, during the earlier period actually held to his position.⁶

A second illustration of possible intensification of the distinction between Israel and the church among dispensationalists involves the heavenly/earthly dichotomy that is well-known and controversial within the history of the movement. While it is not necessary at this juncture to go into all of the issues, the relation of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) vis-a-vis the millennium provides fodder for discussion. There has been an attempt by some dispensationalists to ensure that the future destinies of Israel and the church are spatially separated during the millennium. The result is the virtual absolutizing of the distinction. For example, Darby comments on the New Jerusalem with these words: "What follows is the description of the heavenly city, as before we had that of Babylon. Its heavenly character and millennial connection with the earth is revealed."⁷ This heavenly character for Darby is something that is more than a spiritual quality; it is a physical spatial reality. He goes on to note, "The vision goes on to shew its relationship to those on the earth, and its inhabitants: a seeming inconsistency, but no real one; for the city is viewed as the estate of the bride.... The connection of the holy city with the earth, *though not on it* is

⁶ Mike Stallard, "The Interpretation of the New Covenant in the History of Traditional Dispensationalism" in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* ed. Mike Stallard (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012), 73–106.

⁷ J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, reprint ed. (Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1980), 5:560.

everywhere seen,” (emphasis mine).⁸ When one also studies Darby’s summary of Hebrews 12:22–24, he appears to allow OT saints associated with Israel into this heavenly city. However, the spatial distinction still exists between the Jewish remnant on earth headquartered in the earthly Jerusalem (along with the Gentile earthly nations of the millennium) and this heavenly city of resurrected saints of all ages.⁹

Pentecost adds his support to this approach to some degree. While discussing whether Revelation 21:9 to 22:7 describes the millennium or the eternal state, he says, “It is generally agreed by interpreters of both views that the city seen in Revelation 21:10 is suspended over the earth.”¹⁰ When later outlining the city’s relation to the millennium and the church, Pentecost argues:

When the Lord returns with His bride to reign, her dwelling place is not to be left unoccupied for a thousand years. Rather, the place of occupancy is transferred from heaven to a position over the earth.... This dwelling place remains in the air, to cast its light, which

⁸ Ibid., 5:563.

⁹ Ibid., 5:342–44.

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 569. This particular writer does not necessarily agree with this statement. It is better to see the purpose of the city coming down in Revelation 21:1–4 to be the moving of the abode of the triune God to the new earth after the millennium so He can dwell with all saved men so that the curse is finally and fully lifted. The arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to note that this author agrees with the position of Robert Thomas in most details. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 457–58. Thomas notes, “Grounds for explaining this as a city descending like a space platform and hovering over the earth as this view sometimes proposes are nonexistent” (458).

is the shining of the effulgence of the Son, onto the earth so that “the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it”¹¹

To be sure Pentecost places all resurrected saints including those from OT Israel in this holy celestial city which hovers over the earth during the millennium. He cites those who disagree because this would not fully honor the distinction between Israel and the church overall.¹² Pentecost justifies his viewpoint of having both saints from Israel and the church within the city during the millennium by stressing,

It would thus be concluded that during the millennium the heavenly city will be brought into a relation to the earth, although not settled on the earth. The resurrected saints of all ages in that city will be in their eternal state and possessed of their eternal blessings, even though such is not true of things down on the earth itself.¹³

Therefore, Pentecost seems to be more concerned with the distinction between millennial non-glorified saints and resurrected saints at this point than he is with the distinction between Israel and the church. Nonetheless, national Israel on earth existing from the surviving remnant from the tribulation is still maintained in spatial distinction from the heavenly church saints within this scheme.

Two examples of theologizing within traditional dispensationalism have been given which highlight how distinctions are played out between Israel and the church. Neither of these examples appear to be a majority view among traditional dispensationalists at the present time. However, the

¹¹ Ibid., 577.

¹² Ibid. Pentecost here cites the commentaries of F. C. Jennings and Walter Scott.

¹³ Ibid., 579. Cp. Hebrews 12:22–24.

lesson to be learned from these examples is the need for all dispensationalists to examine their own arguments to see if the distinction between Israel and the church is serving as a theological switch to adjudicate the views in question. In all cases, there must be valid warrant found in exegetical and textual arguments. Along the way, we must also ask, “How absolute is the distinction?”

WHAT DO ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH SHARE?¹⁴

The One True God

It goes without saying that Israel and the church share the same God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, we should not rush by this important point. This is the same God who became incarnated in Jesus Christ and provided atonement through the gospel. The same Creator who raised up the nation of Israel within the history of nations also created the church on the day of Pentecost. While not belaboring the point, this sharing between Israel and the church actually allows a focus on unity in diversity that is theologically significant. It is the one, true, and living God who is able to do more than one thing in history, more than individual redemption of souls, who shows his sovereign power within the corridors of time. The multi-faceted nature of God’s work in the world’s timeline demonstrates his astounding glory. This is what Ryrie means when he talks about the doxological unifying theme of the Bible.¹⁵ The earlier dispensationalists referred to the same idea under the rubric of the doxological biblical purposes of God, highlighting the plural *purposes*.

¹⁴ The list of four areas shared by Israel and the church cited here is not intended to be exhaustive.

¹⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 40–41.

One striking example of how dispensationalists have voiced this biblical truth comes from A. C. Gaebelein. Several of his writings, decades apart, show amazing consistency in his thinking on this matter. In a 1901 article in *Our Hope*, Gaebelein outlined the multi-faceted plan of God's redemptive purposes brought to fruition by the second coming and associated events.¹⁶ Later in the 1930s, he writes a series of books highlighting the hopelessness of the present age over against prophetic hope offered for the church in the rapture, for Israel in the second coming and start of the kingdom, for the nations of the world, and for all creation. Of special note is his 1935 work *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope*.¹⁷ Gaebelein closed this volume with a prayer: "Even so Come, Thou Hope of the hopeless, Thou Hope of Israel, Thou Hope of the World, all Nations and Creation. Even so, Come Lord Jesus." This prayer is not exhaustive but demonstrates the many tracks in God's overall work which Gaebelein preached.¹⁸

¹⁶ Arno C. Gaebelein, "The Coming of the Lord, the Hope of Israel, and the Hope of the Nations and Creation," *Our Hope* 8 (September 1901): 194–99.

¹⁷ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope: A Study in World Conditions and Their Solution* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope"), 1935.

¹⁸ A covenant theologian might complain that the church is not mentioned in Gaebelein's prayer, thereby supporting the covenant accusation that for dispensationalists the church is a "mere" parenthesis in God's dealings. They would charge dispensationalists with believing that Israel is where the action is. However, in response, one would have to note that Gaebelein is clear in *Hopeless, Yet There is Hope* about the church's redemption as part of the overall plan. It just does not show up in the prayer explicitly. Furthermore, if one reads Gaebelein's commentary on Ephesians, he will find that Gaebelein believed that the presentation of the church in this NT book is "by far the greatest revelation" (*God's Masterpiece: An Analytical Exposition of Ephesians I-III* [New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1913], 2–3). Far from seeing the church as a mere parenthesis, he saw it as the highest truth.

Consequently, this close friend of Scofield and Chafer illustrates the doxological biblical purposes of God.¹⁹ What is being voiced in this analysis is that continuity and diversity are brought together. Such a doxological purpose stems from a shared God who is active in the life of Israel and the church albeit in distinct ways.

Individual Redemption

A second point of commonality between Israel and the church is individual redemption. For dispensationalists, this is also virtually assumed, but in the light of ongoing complaints from covenant theologians about the alleged false teaching of two ways of salvation (which never seems to go away), it is impossible to gloss over the issue.²⁰ Gaebelein comes to the

¹⁹ For further discussion, see this author's published dissertation: Michael D. Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen P, 2002), 234–45. This section of my dissertation was also adapted and published as Mike Stallard, "Prophetic Hope in the Writings of Arno C. Gaebelein: A Possible Demonstration of the Doxological Purpose of Biblical History," *JMAT* 2 (Fall 1998): 190–211.

²⁰ Dispensationalists over the last two decades have been fond of alluding to the horrid work of John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, Foreword by R. C. Sproul (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991). Gerstner accuses dispensationalists of being dubious evangelicals with a wrong view of salvation and even lays the groundwork for believing that our erroneous doctrine of salvation places us outside of salvation in the position of a Christian cult. Culprits of our alleged wrong thinking are found in our doctrine of two ways of salvation and antinomian tendencies for the present age of grace and others including how the distinction between Israel and the church leads to theological problems in the arena of individual redemption. I do not have access to his paper, but progressive dispensationalist Todd Mangum discussed the Chafer and Scofield problematic statements lending to a two ways of salvation position within dispensationalism. I attended his presentation and was

rescue once again. While Scofield and Chafer have debated passages in their writings, Gaebelein has crystal clarity on the issue: “for their (pre-Pentecost saints) salvation as well as ours (Church saints), is ‘not of works’ but of Grace alone.”²¹ With such a statement, one wonders why covenant theologians and other critics of traditional dispensationalism do not pay attention to a contemporary of Scofield and Chafer when his writings are perhaps more voluminous than those of Scofield and Chafer combined. Ryrie also assists us in this matter by his excellent discussion of the content of faith—the change throughout the progress of revelation that takes place in the level of understanding people had of the object of faith.²²

The significance of a sharing in the plan of individual redemption for Israel and the church lies once again in the idea of unity through diversity. The same God is providing the same individual redemption based upon the same gospel of Christ although the working out of the details might vary through the divergent contexts of the dispensations of history.

Elements of Purpose

A third area of sharing between Israel and the church is found in certain elements of purpose. For example, dispensationalists strongly affirm that the nature of Israel as a national, ethnic people is quite different from the nature of the church as an

disappointed with his lack of reference to Gaebelein’s clarity over against Scofield and Chafer.

²¹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Exodus: A Complete Analysis of Exodus with Annotations* (New York: Our Hope Publication Office, n.d.), 21.

²² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 105–22. See also Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries P, 1989), 376–79.

international, non-ethnic institution. However, within this diversity there is the shared spiritual purpose of being a light or witness to the world. One of the themes of the book of Isaiah relates to the Messiah as the light of Israel and the world (e.g., 9:2; 42:6). In addition, the prophet notes in Isaiah 43:9-10 that the people of Israel are to serve as witnesses to the other nations:

⁹ Let all the nations be gathered together,
And let the people be assembled.
Who among them can declare this,
And show us former things?
Let them bring out their witnesses,
that they may be justified;
Or let them hear and say, "It is truth."

¹⁰ "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD,
"And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I *am* He (NKJV).

The blind among the nations are to see the light by means of Israel's witness to and about God. The message is repeated in verse 12—"Therefore you are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God."

This same description is used for the church. In the NT, Jesus affirms that he is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). But he also plainly told his disciples that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They should let their light shine to point other people to the Father (Matt 5:13-16). The event of this teaching is pre-Pentecost, but the very character of Christians can be portrayed as light (Eph 5:8). From the reluctant missionary Jonah to the (at times) hesitant Jewish outreach to the Gentiles in the book of Acts, the people of God in Israel and in the church are said to witness and testify to the work of God that is available to those in the world.

Unfortunately, one must be careful at this point not to draw the analogy too tight. Covenant theology makes theological connections where dispensationalism observes simple analogies. The dispensationalist will not use the sharing by Israel and the church to identify the two. Israel is not the OT church. The church is not defined soteriologically as the collection of all of the saved of all time. Similarity does not prove identity.

God's Coming Kingdom

The final and most important area to be discussed relative to sharing by Israel and the church is God's coming kingdom. This topic has already been addressed to some degree earlier when reviewing possible intensification of the distinction between Israel and the church. At this point, what remains is to flesh out this author's understanding in brief terms of how Israel and the church share the millennium.²³

Beginning with Israel, one can easily point to the OT promises to restore Israel in a final, ultimate, righteous, and earthly kingdom in the physical land promised to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac (e.g., Isa 11:11ff; Dan 2, 7; Eze 36-48; Zech 12-14; Amos 9:11-15). The ruler of this earthly domain is to be Christ himself. The passages cited from the First Testament are enough. No NT texts are needed to confirm a straightforward reading of these texts, although they may be found (e.g., Matt 24-25; Rom 9-11; Rev 4-22). How can someone take the literal promise of eternal security for church age believers found in

²³ We will leave aside the issue of the eternal state for now. Suffice it to say that this author views the coming earthly kingdom of God initiated at the second coming as the millennium (the literal 1000 years) *plus* eternal state (new heavens and new earth). The OT prophets knew nothing of a 1000 years, only a forever, earthly dominion. There are both continuities and discontinuities between the two aspects of God's forever earthly kingdom.

Romans 8:28–39 if God did not mean his promises in these earlier and glorious OT contexts?²⁴ How can I understand promises to me individually and literally, if God did not mean to fulfill his land promises to national Israel? The upshot of all of these OT passages and a host of others shows that Israel will be on the earth during the millennium in glorious kingdom restoration centered in the Middle East in the land promised to Abraham.

At this point one must ask how the church saints fit into this coming kingdom. To be sure, dispensationalists do not see church saints in general living in or ruling in the land of Israel, although all nations will come up to Jerusalem to see the Lord (Isa 2:1–4). A key passage for understanding the role of church saints in the millennium is Luke 19:11–27. Right before the triumphal entry of Jesus, he tells them a parable because many of them, due to his proximity to Jerusalem, “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (NASB). In other words, there is a coming delay relative to the expectations of many of his Jewish followers. There is no reason to see a spiritual-only kingdom in view in these words. They were anticipating that Jesus, the healer of the sick and controller of the wind, would defeat the Romans and move ahead with God’s earthly kingdom program. His parable is intended to prepare them for the fact that his plan was not to do so at that time in history.

Commentators from various theological positions point out the historical backdrop to Jesus’ teaching. From the dispensational side, we can use Ironside as an example. Quoting at length to get the full force, Ironside’s comments are instructive:

²⁴ In describing the role that Romans 9–11 plays within the argument of the book of Romans, Woodrow Kroll comments that “the many messianic promises to the Jews of old necessitated an understanding that God would yet honor those promises” (*The Book of Romans: Righteousness in Christ*, Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series [Chattanooga, TN: AMG P, 2002], 153.

...This parable was based on an historical incident that had taken place not many years before, and with which the people generally would be familiar. When King Herod died, that is, the Herod who lived when our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and who decreed that all babies in Bethlehem should be put to death, he decreed in his will that Archelaus should succeed him on the throne. But the Jews hated this man and did not want him to reign over them, and so he went over the sea to Rome to confer with Augustus Caesar, and to secure his approval regarding the kingdom. Before going away he entrusted large sums of money to many of his friends and gave instructions as to how this money was to be used in his absence, in order to make other friends who would forward his interests and be ready to acknowledge his claims. But the Jews who hated him sent an embassy after him and said to Caesar, "We do not want this man to reign over us. He is cruel; we hate every member of his house." Archelaus conferred with the Emperor, secured his approval and eventually returned to Jerusalem to be proclaimed king over Judaea. He then sent for the servants to whom he had entrusted the money and had inquired as to the use they had made of it, rewarding them according to their faithfulness to his interests. After that he summoned his enemies who had been determined that he should not be recognized as king, and put many of them to death.

All of this was fresh in the minds of the people.... He [Jesus] based His parable upon that incident, because there was a certain likeness in what took place then and what will take place in connection with His present rejection and future return.²⁵

²⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke*, reprint ed. (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1955), 576-77. The progressive dispensationalist Darrell L. Bock makes the same historical connection in this passage (*Luke: The NIV Applicational Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 485) as does the nondispensationalist William Barclay (*The Gospel of Luke*, Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox P, 1975], 236).

Thus, Jesus, in this parable, uses a recent historical event to compare his own situation relative to the Jewish leaders at that time.

Several elements of the parable need to be mentioned. First, it almost goes without saying, that the nobleman represents Jesus. The citizens or subjects who hated him and did not want him to reign over them (v. 14) are the enemies that are destroyed on his return (v. 27). In the context they must allude to the Jews who will soon (within a week?) call for Jesus' crucifixion. The larger picture is that those Jews who rejected him at that time will not stand to enter the kingdom when Jesus returns. It is not a stretch to see the application that all those who reject Jesus as ruler over them will share the same fate.

Of special interest for purposes here is the identification of the servants whom Jesus leaves behind with an assignment. The assignment is portrayed in the form of giving each one ten minas.²⁶ Jesus tells them to "put the money to work... until I come back" (v. 13, NIV). The amount given to the servants is not the key point. What each servant does with what is given to him is crucial. Upon the return of the Lord there is the granting of rewards based upon how well the servants performed. The servant who earned ten minas with his lot *reigns* over ten cities in the coming kingdom (v. 17). The one who earned five minas *reigns* over five cities (v. 19). The one who fails to earn any additional minas through lack of effort and a wrong view of Jesus gets to reign over nothing (v. 24).²⁷ Notice that the rewards are described in terms

²⁶ A mina is the equivalent of about four month's salary at that time. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1533.

²⁷ The issue of millennial exclusionism is beyond the scope of this paper. This author's view is that the one who gets nothing is a false professor who is lost and unable to enter the kingdom. The idea that this is a true believer who will miss the millennium but be part of the eternal state does not fit the teaching of Scripture. An author who appears to reject millennial exclusionism but holds that the worthless slave in Luke

of administrative ruling. There is a reigning with Christ in His coming kingdom.

The question that now must be addressed is if the parable teaching actually encompasses church saints. After all, the church did not yet exist when Jesus spoke these words. But the anticipatory nature of what Chafer called an intercalation²⁸ and other dispensationalists have called a parenthesis²⁹ envisions much more than potential Jewish believers who would have been part of the audience of Jesus when this parable was given. Luke's gospel ends with the call for the gospel witness to go to "all nations" (24:47). The parallel with the parable of talents in Matthew (25:14–30) has an even clearer context of a biblical theology of a book that shows the development of and shift to the

19 is a true believer is Paul N. Benware, *The Believer's Payday* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG P, 2002), 169–79. Overall, this resource is excellent in its exposition and theological integration. Benware does not appear to address millennial exclusion directly.

²⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:41. Chafer believed the word *intercalation* was a better term to describe the church age than *parenthesis* because it showed that there was no relationship to what went before (law dispensation) or what is to follow (kingdom). In this wording, Chafer voiced absolute distinction between the church and any activity related to Israel. Other traditional dispensationalists have favored the apparently milder term *parenthesis*.

²⁹ H. A. Ironside, *The Great Parenthesis* (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 1943). Ironside correlates the interval between Daniel's 69th Week and the 70th Week from the prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27 to the church age. The term he gives to it is *parenthesis*. This term has been overstated by covenant theologians who view dispensationalists as turning the church into a "mere" parenthesis as if the church is not important to dispensationalists (e.g., G. I. Williamson, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 340). The use of the term, however, only suggests that the church age is an interval in God's overall plan with national Israel. It does not suggest the church is a "backup" plan that escaped God's sovereign look. The church has a glorious future in God's overall plan in the world. National Israel is not the only place for serious divine action.

Gentile mission. This anticipates the church age. The implication is that the words of Jesus in the Lukan 19 parable about servants receiving administrative rewards in God's coming kingdom would indeed include church age saints.

At this point, we have noted that there is the nation of Israel whose saints rule during the coming kingdom in the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. But through the parable of the minas we see the door opened for the church saints simultaneously ruling, but presumably they would rule somewhere on the earth other than the land promised to Abraham. In this light, not only do Israel and the church share the same God, individual redemption, and elements of purpose, they share location and station within God's coming earthly kingdom.

IMPLICATIONS OF SHARING: A CASE STUDY OF THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The sharing of Israel and the church in various ways has some implications that traditional dispensationalists should review. In particular, the sharing of the kingdom by the two institutions influences how the argument for the pre-tribulational rapture may be engaged. A standard argument for the pre-trib rapture is that the distinction between Israel and the church compels the conclusion that the church will avoid the tribulational wrath of God. Typically the argument is stated this way: (1) the tribulation period of seven years is noted as a time of Jacob's trouble (Jer 30:7), (2) therefore, that time is designed for Israel and not for the church, (3) hence, the church has no part in the tribulation, (4) the next step is to state how this requires a pre-trib rapture.³⁰

³⁰ The summary given here is also stated at the author's blog: Our Hope, "Distinction between Israel and the Church as an Argument for the Pre-Trib Rapture," August 12, 2015. See www.our-hope.org.

Modern dispensationalists of all time periods have made the above argument in some form. Gaebelien comments,

All passages which have to do with the great tribulation prove that it is Israel's time of sorrow (Jer. xxx; Mark xiii: 14–22; Rev. vii:1–14; Dan. xii:1; Matt. xxiv). "Jacob's trouble," not the Church's trouble. Christ saved us from wrath to come and will deliver us from that hour of trial that shall try them that dwell on the earth. When this takes place the Church will be far above the storm (John iii:36; 1 Thess v:9; Rev iii:10).³¹

A few decades later, the venerable Pentecost uses the same argument although he does a better job of demonstrating that this particular argument is used within a cumulative case approach to proving the pre-tribulational rapture:

It should be borne in mind that it is not claimed that all of the arguments have the same importance or weight. The pre-tribulational doctrine is not based on these arguments singly, but rather they are considered as cumulative evidence that the church will be delivered by rapture before the inception of Daniel's seventieth week.³²

Nonetheless, Pentecost follows the same template on the particular argument from the distinction between Israel and the Church. While correctly beginning with the need of literal interpretation, Pentecost notes that there are two purposes for

³¹ Arno C. Gaebelien, "The True Church: Its Translation Before the End," *Our Hope* 38 (September 1931): 184. See also Michael Stallard, *Gaebelien*, 238–39. Observe particularly note 180.

³² Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 218. It is also true that Gaebelien in the note above also had other arguments, but he generally presented them more as "proof" arguments that stood alone, although sometimes it is hard to tell in some authors.

the tribulation. First, it is a time of God's wrath upon the whole world (including those outside of Israel).³³ The second major purpose of the tribulation according to Pentecost is the preparation of Israel for her King (and kingdom).³⁴ In both of these assessments Pentecost is accurate.

However, one must note that Pentecost is somewhat dismissive of the issue which concerns this author, namely, the reasoning for automatically excluding the church from those within the category of the world. It is true that the earth-dwellers in the book of Revelation are unbelievers who rebel against God and would not characterize the church. However, the many passages throughout the Bible speaking of the day of the Lord wrath upon the world need to be weighed more keenly. In the end, Pentecost argues from the distinction between Israel and the church and between the church and the earth-dwellers to argue for the pre-trib rapture within a cumulative case approach.

A more recent use of the argument from distinction comes from dispensationalist Rydelnik. He contends, "Seeing a distinction between Israel and the church inexorably leads to a belief that the rapture of the church will take place before the tribulation, when God refocuses His attention on Israel."³⁵ Much of his article is given over to the fact that Israel and the church are distinct and the tribulation period is designed with Israel in mind. Thus, the distinction serves virtually as a stand-alone argument demonstrating a pre-trib rapture.

It is the conviction of this author that most dispensationalists who argue this way really do not use the distinction as a stand-alone argument for the pre-trib rapture. Many times other truths

³³ Ibid., 197.

³⁴ Ibid., 197-98.

³⁵ Michael A. Rydelnik, "Israel: Why the Church Must Be Raptured Before the Tribulation" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* ed. John F. Hart (Chicago: Moody, 2015).

such as exegetical and theological arguments in familiar texts like 1 Thessalonians 4–5 and Revelation 3:10 are often assumed but not stated. When this happens, exegetical grounding is thus implicit in the given arguments. The question that this presentation wants to consider in light of this state of affairs is simply this: “if the distinction between Israel and the church were the only argument for the pre-trib rapture, would that argument carry the day?” It is not obvious to this author that it would.

Opponents of the pre-trib rapture could argue that, if dispensationalists include the earth-dwellers of the whole world in the tribulation with Jacob’s children, such dispensationalists may be overstating the significance of Jeremiah 30:7 and its time of Jacob’s trouble. While in some passages like Revelation 3:10, an exegetical case can be made to separate the church saints from the earth-dwellers, such a conclusion from the book of Revelation should not be read into the multitude of OT texts where the entire planet is the focus of God’s wrath (e.g., Isa 13:11). In light of the previous discussion about sharing between Israel and the church, opponents might ask to pursue this issue further. The sharing of Israel and the church in the millennium is a case in point. If the nature of the nation of Israel is qualitatively different from the nature of the church so that they cannot share the tribulation, why then do they share the kingdom?

CONCLUSION

This presentation may be causing some consternation. To alleviate concern, the moderator of the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics is not abandoning the distinction between Israel and the church or its place at the heart of the essence of dispensationalism. The goal here is greater precision in how the argument from distinction is used in overall theological method so that dispensationalists avoid weakened statements. The issue of sharing between Israel and the church has been used to frame the necessity for this greater precision.

Two points must be made to direct the proper desire for precision. First, an anecdote from the past illustrates the heart of the problem. Progressive dispensationalist (PD) Darrell Bock once told this reviewer during a phone conversation back in the 1990s that traditional dispensationalists were not giving exegetical responses to PD positions. Instead, they were arguing from within their system—that is, making theological arguments that assumed their entire system in place using things like the distinction between Israel and the church. I have found this to be true in some measure. I told Darrell to go look at George Gunn’s article on Psalm 110 at the Shasta Bible College website for an exegetical response. Darrell emailed me shortly to let me know I was right. Gunn’s article was an exegetical response. Traditional dispensationalists have gotten better at exegetical work in response to progressive dispensationalists in the opinion of this author. But we must always be on guard. Covenant theology uses the covenant of grace as a theological switch by which to read the entire Bible. Progressive dispensationalism has developed enough over time that many of its adherents are now arguing from within their system using the doctrinal conclusion of complementary hermeneutics or already-not-yet as a grid by which to interpret everything in the word. Traditional dispensationalists must not follow suit. We must continue to be the champions for inductive Bible study and interpretation. Among other things, this means that we do not use the distinction between Israel and the church as an interpretive switch by which to read all in the sacred text.

Coming back to the pre-trib rapture issue, we must continue to note the distinction between Israel and the church in the debate. However, it is a correlation argument, not a logical “proof” that stands alone. At the level of theological integration, our dispensational worldview must make sense as a whole. The distinction serves to assist us in this endeavor. The distinction between Israel and the church fits nicely into the pre-trib rapture teaching without being a “proof doctrine” compelling the

conclusion. It should ride the coat-tails of exegetical arguments from 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Revelation 3:10. In other words, dispensationalists should do more exegetical arguing instead of theological pronouncements in the way that we voice our doctrinal formulations. We also must distinguish correlation arguments from logical “proof” arguments along the way.

Pretrib dispensationalists know that God has chosen to keep the church out of the tribulation. But the question comes easily to mind: “Could God have chosen for Israel and the church to share the tribulation wrath of God?” Yes, God could have done so if that was his plan. After all, He has sovereignly designed for both to share the coming kingdom. The simple fact is that God has simply decided that the church is not to take part in the day of the Lord wrath. He has told us so in various passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4, and Revelation 3:10. It is those exegetical arguments that ground our belief. Other theological arguments are supportive. If we follow this way of thinking, we will not overstate by either intensifying doctrines to maintain the distinction in unwarranted ways or by elevating correlation arguments to the level of exegetical arguments. After all, Israel and the church share many things in God’s sovereign plan of history. This is a truth we should not hide.

The Descent and Ascent of Christ in Ephesians 4:8-10

Dr. Gary Gromacki
Professor of Bible and Homiletics
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians focuses on the spiritual warfare between Christ and his followers with Satan and his demons.¹ In *Ephesians: Power and Magic*² Clinton Arnold views Ephesians as a pastoral letter that shows the power of God over the evil spiritual powers of the cult of Artemis in Ephesus. Paul emphasizes the superiority of the power of God who brings all things under the sovereignty of Christ.

Paul blessed God for giving believers every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3). Some of those blessings include election, predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness of sins, and abounding grace (Eph 1:4-8). The goal of redemptive history is the total exaltation of Jesus Christ through his supreme rule over all in the dispensation of the fullness of times (the millennial kingdom of Christ) (Eph 1:9-10). Paul prayed that the Ephesians would come to know God's power (Eph 1:15-18). God the Father demonstrated his power by raising Christ from the dead, seating Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places, placing all things under his feet, and giving him as authoritative head of all things

¹ This paper was presented at the Northeast Evangelical Theological Society meeting at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on March 19, 2016.

² Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1989).

to the church (Eph 1:19–23).³ God the Father worked his same power in regenerating spiritually dead sinners (Eph. 2:1–10). Jesus Christ broke down the dividing wall of the law that separated Jews and Gentiles and created one new man (the church) by providing reconciliation through his death on the cross (Eph 2:11–17). The church is now a new temple built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:19–22) The apostle Paul revealed the mystery that saved Jews and saved Gentiles are of the same body (the body of Christ) and are partakers of the promise in Christ (the Spirit) through the gospel (Eph 3:1–13). Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened in their inner man through the Spirit and Christ would be at home in their hearts with the result that they would experience the love of Christ (Eph 3:14–19). Paul ends the first half of Ephesians with praise for God’s incredible power that works in believers and ascribes glory to God in the church and by Christ Jesus (Eph 3:20–21).

Paul begins the second half of his epistle to the Ephesians by challenging them to walk worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1–16). Christians need to display Christ-like character and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:1–3). Paul then gives the doctrinal basis for that unity (Eph 4:4–6).

Paul explains that the ascended Christ has given to each Christian a grace gift: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). Christ has given believers grace for salvation (Eph 2:8–9). Here in Ephesians 4:7 Paul emphasizes that Christ has given believers grace for service. The grace of God is manifested in various gifts of service in the body of Christ (Rom 12:6; Eph 4:7; 1 Pet 4:10). The ascended Christ distributes the grace gifts.

Paul alludes to Psalm 68 to show that the victorious Christ has the authority to distribute grace gifts: “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but

³ Gary Gromacki, “The Plan and Power of God the Father in Ephesians,” *JMAT* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 9–52.

that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Eph 4:8–10).

Richard Taylor explains how Psalm 68 relates to Ephesians 4:

Psalm 68 is a communal thanksgiving psalm, and as such it celebrates the victory that Yahweh had provided for His oppressed people. But the psalm is also a historical hymn that traces both Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from bondage by means of the Exodus and His subsequent provision for the people throughout the difficult days of the wilderness wandering. The overarching message of the psalm is that God is to be praised as the One whose past acts of deliverance and provision for His people give confidence of His continuing care for His people. The message of verse 18 in particular is that in the person of the victorious king God ascended Zion in triumph over his enemies, receiving from submissive peoples congratulatory gifts of honor.⁴

Psalm 68 was written by David to celebrate God’s conquest of Jerusalem and the triumphal ascent of God up to Mt. Zion when David brought the ark up to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam.6; 1 Chron 13) after he had conquered the city (2 Sam 5:6–8). The LXX translates the Masoretic text of Psalm 68:18 with “he received gifts from men.” But Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:8, “He gave gifts to men.” Why did Paul change the words of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8? The Aramaic Targums and Syriac version have “gave gifts to men.” It could be that there was an ancient Hebrew text that had “gave gifts to men” instead of “received gifts from men.” Paul referenced the first part of Psalm 68:18 to show that Jesus as the Divine Warrior ascended to heaven and has the authority to give gifts because he won the victory.

⁴ Richard Taylor, “The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of Ancient Versions,” *BSac* 148 (July-September 1991): 321–22.

THE DESCENT OF JESUS (Ephesians 4:9)

⁹ τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς;

NIV: "What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?"

NKJV: "Now this, '*He ascended*'—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?"

ESV: "In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?"

Where did Jesus descend? There are four major views: (1) the incarnation view: Jesus descended to earth (specifically the womb of Mary) at his incarnation; (2) the grave view: Jesus descended into the grave after his death on the cross; (3) the Hades view: Jesus descended into Hades (paradise side) after his death on the cross and before his resurrection; and (4) the Pentecost view: Jesus descended to earth spiritually in the person of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The Incarnation View

The incarnation view says that Christ descended to earth at his incarnation. The words "of the earth" (τῆς γῆς) are seen as a genitive of apposition to the "lower parts" (τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη]). This view would say that Christ "descended into the lower parts, that is, the earth." This is the view of the editors of the English Standard Version of the Bible (see translation above).

Daniel Wallace argues for the incarnation view:

"Of the earth" is popularly taken to be a partitive genitive. However, it may well be a genitive of apposition, thus, "he descended into the lower parts [of the universe], that is, the earth." At first glance this second option seems awkward because the noun to which the singular genitive is related is *plural*. However, it is a common idiom for a singular genitive of apposition to be related to μέρη (plural)–

cf. Isa 9:1 (LXX); Matt 2:22. In such constructions it seems that there is a *partitive* genitive that needs to be supplied from the context (as seems to be the case in Eph 4:9). For example, in Matt 2:22 we read ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας. The translation might either be “he departed from the regions [of Israel], namely, Galilee” or, “he departed for the regions that constitute Galilee.” Thus since the genitive of apposition occurs in the singular related to the plural μέρη as a *geographical* term, there is sufficient grammatical evidence to see it used in Eph 4:9. (For other examples of this phenomenon, cf. Matt 15:21; 16:13; Mark 8:10; Acts 2:10).

The difference between the partitive genitive and the genitive of apposition in this text is no less than the difference between a descent at the Lord’s *death* into Hades and a descent at his *incarnation* to the earth. Grammar certainly will not solve this problem, but it at least opens up the interpretive possibilities.⁵

Peter O’Brien gives the view that the descent of Jesus at his incarnation also includes his death on the cross:

The one who ascended and now fills the universe (and who gives different gifts to us) is the same person who first descended in his incarnation and death for us on the cross (cf. Eph. 2:14–17).... This is the same perspective as that of the descending and ascending of the Redeemer of John’s gospel (3:12; 6:62; 6:33, 38, 50–51; 20:17) and as the humiliation and subsequent exaltation of Christ in Philippians 2:6–11.⁶

The major problem with the incarnation view is that Paul did not write that Christ descended to the earth. Paul wrote that he descended to the lower parts of the earth. It is a big assumption to believe that Paul implied lower parts of the universe = the

⁵ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Syntax, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 99–100. Wallace points out that the genitive of apposition is a mark of the author’s style in Ephesians, occurring over a dozen times.

⁶ Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar NT Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 295.

earth. How is the earth the lower parts of the universe? The earth is suspended in space.

The Grave View

The grave view says that Christ descended into the lower parts which belong to the earth. This means that Christ died and was buried in the grave. The words “of the earth” (τῆς γῆς) is a partitive or possessive genitive to the “lower parts” (τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη]). The lower parts of the earth would equal the grave.

Hoehner argues for the grave view:

The support for this view is first, that it makes good sense of the comparative adjective κατώτερα signifying the earth’s lower part, namely, in the ground. Second, the preposition εἰς could be translated “into” stressing that Jesus went into the earth. Third, there is a parallel between this verse and 1:20 in that the death of Christ (1:20; 2:16; 5:2, 25) is connected with his resurrection (1:20–23; 2:5) and not with his incarnation or to a descent into Hades. Fourth, using the same construction, David refers to the depths of the earth with reference to the grave (Ps. 63:9; LXX 62:10).⁷

It is true that Jesus died and was buried in a grave (Matt 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42; 1 Cor 15:4). The focus of the grave view is on the body of Jesus. But the spirit of Jesus did not remain in the grave (as the view of soul sleep teaches). When Jesus died on the cross, he committed his spirit to the Father. Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Where did the spirit of Jesus go when he died on the cross? Jesus told the thief on the cross who believed in him that he would be with him in Paradise (Luke 23:43). When Jesus breathed his last on the cross, his spirit separated from his

⁷ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 535–36.

body and went to Paradise. The focus of the grave view is only on the body of Jesus.

The Hades View

The Hades view says that Jesus descended into Hades after his crucifixion to announce his victory over Satan and then to release the OT saints when he arose from the dead. The words “of the earth” (τῆς γῆς) is a partitive genitive to the “lower parts” (τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη]).

William Larkin takes “of the earth” as a partitive genitive and holds to the Hades view:

τῆς γῆς, Partitive genitive, not genitive of comparison (“lower regions than the earth”; contra Turner 1965, 171; Wallace, 112, says that syntactically such an understanding is not possible if μέρη is part of the original text). The whole expression is likely a euphemism for Hades. To take this as an exegetical genitive (Wallace, 99-100), “lower regions, i.e. the earth” and identify the descent as either the incarnation (Best, 386) or Pentecost (W. H. Harris) is not supported by the context.⁸

The belief in a *descensus ad inferos* was held by the early church fathers. Polycarp wrote, “To our Lord Jesus Christ, who on behalf of our sins suffered to the point of death, whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the pains of Hades.”⁹ Irenaeus made mention of Christ’s descent to Hades.¹⁰ Tertullian wrote, “Nor did he ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the earth (*in inferiora terrarum*), that he might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of himself.”¹¹

⁸ William Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2009), 76.

⁹ Polycarp, *Letter to the Philipppians*.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies*, 4.27.2; 5:31.1; 5:33.1.

¹¹ Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 55.

The Apostles' Creed (AD 390) asserts that Jesus descended into Hades between his death on the cross and his resurrection:

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord
 Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 Born of the virgin Mary
 Suffered under Pontius Pilate
 Was crucified, died and was buried;
 He descended into hell.
 On the third day he rose again;
 He ascended into heaven,
 He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 And will come to judge the living and the dead.¹²

Augustine believed that Christ literally descended into hell. In his Letter to Evodius he expresses his perplexity about the meaning of 1 Peter 3:19 which says that Jesus preached to those "spirits in prison." Martin Luther believed that Christ descended to hell.¹³ John Calvin believed that the descent of Jesus to hell was

¹² The Apostles' Creed was not written by the apostles of Jesus. There are several versions of the Apostles' Creed. The oldest version of the Apostles' Creed comes from Bishop Marcellus of Ancyra (AD 337), and it does not contain the clause about Jesus descending into hell. Scholars call this version "The Old Roman Form," the earliest creed of the Roman Catholic Church. Bird argues that Christ descended into Hades but not hellfire. Bird writes, "The Latin *inferus* means 'lower depths,' 'underworld,' or 'place of the dead,' while *infernus* means more properly 'hell' or 'perdition.'" The clause was also found in the writings of Rufinus of Aquileia who included it in his baptismal creed around AD 400. Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

¹³ In a sermon delivered at Torgau in 1533 Martin Luther stated, "After his burial the whole person of Christ, the God-man, descended into hell, conquered the devil and destroyed the power of hell and Satan" (see *Historical Introductions to the Lutheran Confessions*. XIX. Controversy on Christ's Descent into Hell. 218. Luther's Doctrine, trans. F. Bente <bookofconcord.org/historical-19.php> [accessed 17 March 2016]).

symbolic, pointing rather to Christ's sufferings at Gethsemane and on the cross.¹⁴

Clinton Arnold writes in his commentary on Ephesians:

The descent was to the underworld, where Christ proclaimed his victory over the hostile principalities and powers.... The most significant interpretational difficulty in this verse is in deciding what "the lower parts of the earth" refers to. The view of the early church fathers and the consensus view through the centuries has been that it refers to a descent of Christ to the underworld (or, Hades). Although a difficult issue, this view appears to have the greatest amount of evidence to support it. Many theologians refer to it as the *descensus ad infernos*.... The lower parts of the earth makes the most sense in its first-century religious context if it is interpreted as an expression of the underworld or Hades.¹⁵

MacArthur goes too far when he writes, "It should be noted that our Lord's descent went even beyond the womb, the earth, the grave, and death—to a descent into the very pit of the demons."¹⁶ Jesus did not descend into the abyss (the pit) where demons reside (cf. Rev 9:1, 2).

Jesus told the believing thief next to him on the cross, "Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). When Jesus died on the cross, his soul went to Paradise. Where is Paradise? Is Paradise located in the third heaven?¹⁷ Was Paradise located in Hades prior to the resurrection of Jesus?

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter XVI, Sections 8-12.

¹⁵ Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 254.

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MacArthur NT Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 139-40.

¹⁷ Grudem believes that Paradise is located in heaven. He writes, "Christ in his death experienced the same things believers in this present age experience when they die: His dead body remained on earth

Peter indicated in his sermon on the day of Pentecost that Jesus went to Hades after his death (Acts 2: 31). After quoting Psalm 16:10, Peter argued that David was a prophet as “he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31; προῖδὼν ἐλάλησεν περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅτι οὔτε ἐγκατελείφθη εἰς ᾄδην οὔτε ἡ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ εἶδεν διαφθοράν). This verse would seem to indicate that the soul of Jesus went to Hades (the place of departed spirits) when he died on the cross.¹⁸ Acts 2:31 does teach that the soul of Jesus was in Hades prior to his resurrection.

Hades had two compartments before the death and resurrection of Christ: torments and Abraham’s bosom (or Paradise). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said that the rich man was in torments in Hades and could see Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:23). There was a great gulf fixed so that the rich man could not come over to Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:26). Abraham’s bosom in Hades would have

and was buried (as ours will be) but his spirit (or soul) passed immediately into the presence of God in heaven (as ours will). Then on the first Easter morning Christ’s spirit was reunited with his body and he was raised from the dead, just as Christians who have died will (when Christ returns) be reunited to their bodies and raised in their perfect resurrection bodies to new life. That fact has pastoral encouragement for us. We need not fear death, not only because eternal life lies on the other side but also because we know that our Savior himself has gone through exactly the same experience we will go through. He has prepared (even sanctified) the way, and we follow him with confidence each step of the way. This is much greater comfort regarding death than could ever be given by any view of a descent into hell” (Wayne Grudem, “He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture Instead of the Apostles’ Creed,” *JETS* 34, no.1 [March 1991]:113).

¹⁸ The Greek word ᾄδης refers to “the nether world, *Hades* as place of the dead” (BDAG, 19). Some verses that refer to Hades in the NT are Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31. The gates of Hades will not prevail against the church (Matt 16:18). Christ has the keys to death and Hades (Rev 1:18).

been the place where the souls of OT saints were located and would be equivalent to Paradise. OT saints such as Adam, Eve, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jonah, Daniel, and even John the Baptist would have been in Abraham's bosom in Hades. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The Paradise in Hades view proposes that when Christ died, he descended into Hades not to suffer in the place of torments with unbelievers (like the rich man of Luke 16) but to be in Paradise (Abraham's bosom) until his resurrection. Jesus already suffered for the sins of the world on the cross. Before Jesus died on the cross, he said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus did not have to suffer in Hades to pay the penalty for our sins. He suffered for our sins on the cross. Jesus did not go to Hades to suffer for our sins.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he took the OT saints with him to heaven at his ascension. In this sense he led those in captivity (to Satan) captive. After the ascension of Jesus, Paradise was relocated to the third heaven. An evidence of this would be 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 where Paul describes what most scholars would see as a possible out-of-body experience when he went up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2) which he identifies as "paradise" (2 Cor 12:3). When a Christian dies today, he goes to be "with Christ" in the third heaven (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:1-8). Today when a Christian dies, he or she does not descend to Hades as Jesus did when he died.

Today Hades has only one compartment (torments), and it is the place where the souls of all unbelievers currently reside until the resurrection of the lost at the end of the millennial kingdom (Rev 20:11-13). Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire which is the second death and the ultimate destiny of all lost people (Rev 20:14).

Andrew Lincoln gives an argument against the Hades view:

But the contrast in these verses appears to be between an ascent to heaven and a descent from heaven, while the descent involved in the traditional view of a descent into Hades is not so much from heaven but from earth to the underworld or the realm of the dead.

Besides, if the writer had had three levels in mind and meant that Christ descended to the deepest level just as he ascended to the greatest height, he would have been more likely to have used a superlative than a comparative.... A three story cosmology does not fit the worldview we encounter elsewhere in Ephesians, where the cosmos is seen as simply having two main parts—heaven and earth.”¹⁹

But Paul does reference a three-story cosmology in Philippians. He writes, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (Phil 2:10). Who are those under the earth? There must be a place under the earth where unbelievers and demons dwell. Even unbelievers and demons will bow the knee to Jesus in the future.

The Pentecost View

The Pentecost view proposes that Christ descended when he sent the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and gave gifts to Christians. Jesus ascended after his death and resurrection and gave gifts to men. The phrase “he descended” refers to Christ sending his “Spirit” on the day of Pentecost.²⁰ Just as Moses gave the law on Mt. Sinai and started a new dispensation (the dispensation of law), so Christ gave the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and started a new dispensation (the dispensation of grace). The Spirit

¹⁹ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 245.

²⁰ Hall Harris III, “The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9–10,” *BSac* 151, no. 602 (1994): 198–214. Harris argues that Paul shapes the Midrash in Eph 4:9–10 to correspond to the movement of Moses in Targum Psalms 68. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai to get the law from God and then descends the mountain to give the law to Israel. Harris says that in the same way Jesus ascended to heaven and then descended as his Spirit empowered the church with spiritual gifts.

empowered the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers so they could equip the saints by their teaching of the word (Eph 4:11).

The main problem with this view is that Paul equates the person who ascended with the person who descended. Ephesians 4:10 says, “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” Christ and the Spirit are distinguished in Ephesians. Ephesians 2:18 says, “For through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” In the temple analogy, Christ is the chief cornerstone and believers are viewed as being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:21). In the prayer of Paul for the Ephesians, Paul distinguishes His Spirit and Christ as he mentions their both indwelling the inner man and the heart (Eph 3:16-17).

THE ASCENT OF JESUS (Ephesians 4:8–10)

⁸ διὸ λέγει· Ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ⁹ τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς; ¹⁰ ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.

NIV: “This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’ What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.”

NKJV: “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.”

ESV: “Therefore it says: ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.”

The Ascension of Jesus to a Place Above All the Heavens

He who descended (Jesus Christ) is the same one “who ascended far above all the heavens” (ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν) (Eph 4:10).

Acts 1:9–11 describes the bodily ascension of the risen Jesus into heaven. The risen Jesus left earth from the Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem (Acts 1:12). The bodily ascension of Jesus happened forty days after his resurrection from the dead. The ascension of Jesus was gradual and visual. The disciples watched Jesus leave earth and go up in a cloud.

Where did the risen Jesus ascend to? Paul identified the place. The risen Jesus ascended far above all the heavens (Eph 4:10). He ascended through the atmosphere (first heaven). He ascended through outer space (second heaven). He ascended to the highest place above all the heavens. He then sat down at the right hand of the Father (Eph 1:20–21).

Why did Jesus ascend? Jesus ascended in order to fill all things (Eph 4:10). There are two main views on this phrase: (1) Lenski holds the ubiquity of Christ view which says that now as God–man, Christ fills all things with his presence.²¹ (2) Hoehner writes, “The object of Christ’s ascension was to allow him to enter into a sovereign relationship with the whole world, and in that position he has the right to bestow gifts as he wills.”²² Ephesians

²¹ R. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1937), 524–25.

²² Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 537.

1:23 identifies the church “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fill all in all.” Christ is head over his body, the church. The church is the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. The word “fill” refers to Christ empowering his church. He has given his church spiritual gifts and spiritually gifted leaders to equip the saints to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:7, 11-12).

The Identity of the Captives Taken by Jesus to Heaven (Ephesians 4:8)

When Jesus ascended into heaven he led captivity captive. Who are the captives? There are several different views on the identity of the captives: (1) spiritual enemies (demons) view, (2) all believers in Christ view, (3) spiritual leaders view, and (4) released OT saints view.

Spiritual Enemies (Demons) View

The captives in Ephesians 4:8 could refer to spiritual enemies that Christ defeated at the cross. Christ defeated the principalities and powers (demons) at the cross. Colossians 2:15 says that Christ “disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them.” Colossians 2:15 alludes to a historical Roman triumphal march. After winning an important battle, a Roman general would lead his victorious Roman army through the streets of Rome. At the end of the procession would be the defeated enemy in chains. Colossians 2:15 teaches that Christ did defeat and disarm principalities (demonic powers) at the cross.

Clinton Arnold argues for the captives being demonic powers:

Just as the Divine Warrior led his vanquished foes in procession, so also Christ has “captured a host of captives.” The best explanation for the identity of these hostile warriors that Christ has defeated is the principalities, power and authorities. They hold a prominent place in Ephesians as the enemies of Christ and the people of God.

They are the foes that Paul names as defeated and put into subjection by his resurrection in 1:20-22. In Colossians 2:15, Paul specifically says that by the cross and resurrection, Christ stripped them of their power and authority, publicly exposed them and led them in a triumphal procession.²³

Harold Hoehner defends this view as well:

Who then are the captives? From Psalm 68 it is clear that they were the enemies of Israel who were defeated when Jerusalem was captured. In Ephesians some have interpreted the captives: (1) as the enemies of Christ, namely Satan, sin, and death; or (2) as the people who have been the captives of Satan, sin and death, and who are now taken captive by Christ in redemption. The first interpretation seems to be more fitting. Christ had victory over Satan, sin, and death, and gives gifts of the Spirit to those who have been identified with him.²⁴

Klyne Snodgrass writes, “The ‘captives in his train,’ his victory parade, can be either believers (2 Cor 2:14), or principalities and powers (Col 2:15). In light of Ephesians 1:20–23 on the Lord’s exaltation over spiritual forces, evil powers are probably in view.”²⁵

The problem with this view is that the book of Ephesians teaches that demons are not captives, but they are engaged in spiritual warfare with believers today. Ephesians 6:10-20 challenges believers to put on the armor of God to stand against Satan’s attacks. Christians are involved in wrestling against demonic powers “in the heavenly places.” These demonic powers

²³ Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, 251. Others who hold to this view are Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 242; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 179.

²⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 529–30.

²⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 201.

are not captives but are loose and fight against Christians today (Eph 6:12).

All Believers in Christ View

A second view would interpret the captives as being all believers in Christ. They had been the captives of Satan, sin and death, but they were set free through Christ's death on the cross.²⁶ The freed captives then would refer to all believers, those who were once dead in trespasses and sins and who walked under the power of Satan (Eph 2:1–10). Second Corinthians 2:14 says, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Christians have experienced redemption in that they were once enslaved to sin and Satan but now have been set free (Eph 1:7).

The main problem with this view is that Christians on earth were not taken to heaven as "captives" when Jesus ascended. Christians continue to live on the earth and they are engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan and his demons (Eph 6:12).

Spiritual Leaders View

A third view says that the captives refer to the spiritual leaders. Gary Smith writes, "The captives are the gifts. Captives are taken and gifts are given, but both the captives and the gifts are the Levites."²⁷ Smith believes that the psalmist was thinking of Numbers 8 when he wrote Psalm 68. The Levites were taken from among the sons of Israel (Num 8:6), they were separated from among the sons of Israel (Num 8:4), for "the Levites shall be mine" (Num 3:45; 8:14). The purpose for which the Levites were

²⁶ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 138.

²⁷ Gary Smith, "Paul's Use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8," *JETS* 18, no. 3 (1975): 186.

taken captive by the Lord was so “that they might be able to perform the service of the Lord” (Num 8:11), and “to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel” (Num 8:19). In the same way Christ has taken Christian leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers) captive to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:8, 11–12).

Harold Hoehner argues for this view in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: “The essence of the psalm is that a military victor has the right to give gifts to those who are identified with him. Christ, having captivated sinful people by redeeming them, is Victor and gives them as gifts to the church. Whereas Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 speak of gifts given to believers, Ephesians 4:7 speaks more of gifted believers given to the church (cf. v.11).”²⁸

The major problem with this view is that nowhere are the Levites viewed as captives in Numbers 8. They were taken from the nation of Israel to serve Israel, but they were not taken as captives. In the same way, it seems strange to refer to spiritual leaders in the church as captives in Ephesians 4:8.

Old Testament Saints View

A fourth view says that the captives refer to released OT saints. This view says that the captives refer to the released souls of OT saints who were held captive by Satan in Hades before Christ’s death and resurrection. The risen Christ set the captives (OT saints) free and led them (their spirits) to heaven in his ascension to glory. Paradise, which was once located as a compartment in Hades, is now located in heaven (Luke 16; Ps 16:6–11; Acts 2:29–36). OT saints will experience their bodily resurrection from the dead at the second coming of Christ to the

²⁸ Harold Hoehner, “Ephesians,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 634.

earth at the end of the tribulation period and before the establishment of the millennial kingdom (Dan 12:13).

John MacArthur argues for the captives being OT saints:

Early church dogma taught that the righteous dead of the Old Testament could not be taken into the fullness of God's presence until Christ had purchased their redemption on the cross, and that they had waited in this place for His victory on that day. Figuratively speaking, the early church fathers said that after announcing His triumph over demons in one part of Sheol, He then opened the doors of another part of Sheol to release those godly captives. Like the victorious kings of old, He recaptured the captives and liberated them and henceforth they would live in heaven as eternally free sons of God.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Ephesians 4:7-10 is probably the most difficult text to interpret in the book of Ephesians. Scholars give various arguments for their different interpretations in their commentaries and journal articles.

Paul emphasizes that after Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth, he ascended above all the heavens to fill all things. Paul quotes from Psalm 68 to show that a conquering king has the power (authority) to give gifts to his followers.

Scholars differ on the place of Christ's descent in Ephesians 4:9. Peter O'Brien and Daniel Wallace believe that Christ descended to earth at his incarnation. Harold Hoehner says that Christ descended into the grave after his death on the cross. Hall Harris III and Andrew Lincoln believe that Christ descended in the person of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Clinton Arnold, John MacArthur, and I believe that Christ descended into Hades after his death on the cross. Greek grammar can be used to argue for this view ("of the earth" would be viewed as a partitive genitive). Rather than saying that Jesus descended to the earth Paul wrote that he descended into the lower parts of the earth. The early

²⁹ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 140.

church fathers (Polycarp, Irenaeus, Tertullian) as well as Augustine and Luther held to the view that Jesus descended into Hades. The Apostles' Creed states that Jesus descended into hell (Hades). I believe that Christ descended into Hades (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:31) after his death on the cross. He did not go there to preach the gospel and give a second chance to unbelievers. Rather Christ went to the Paradise side (Abraham's bosom) of Hades between his death on the cross and his resurrection. There Jesus waited for his resurrection day and announced his victory over Satan to the demons imprisoned from the time of Noah.³⁰

Paul refers to Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8. Psalm 68 celebrates the victory of God over the enemies of Israel when Jerusalem was captured by David. When Jesus ascended, he led captivity captive. Scholars differ on the identity of the captives that Jesus took when he ascended into heaven. Arnold, Hoehner and Snodgrass believe that the captives refer to the spiritual enemies of God: the principalities and powers defeated by Jesus at the cross. The ascended Christ has been given a position over every principality and power and might and dominion (Eph 1:20–21). But Ephesians emphasizes that these principalities and powers (demons) are not captives but are fighting against Christians today (cf. Eph 6:10–12). Snodgrass says that the captives could refer to believers in Christ. Smith says that the captives are spiritual leaders (Levites in the OT and the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers in the NT) who are captives to do the ministry of God.

³⁰ When Jesus descended to Hades, he preached to the spirits in prison (1 Pet 3:18–20). These “spirits in prison” could be a reference to the fallen angels called the sons of God in Genesis 6 who disobeyed in the time of Noah by taking wives. Jude refers to these fallen angels in Jude vv. 6–7: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

I agree with the early church fathers that the captives were OT saints that were once held captive by Satan in Hades but then set free to follow Christ to the highest heaven at his ascension. The context of Ephesians 4:7–10 is the ascension of Jesus to heaven. Whom did Jesus take with him when he ascended? The risen Jesus took the souls of OT saints who once were captives in Hades (paradise side).

Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades because he lived, died, and rose again from the grave (Rev1:18). After his resurrection Jesus used those keys to open Hades and the souls of the OT saints went with Jesus to heaven at his ascension. Today Paradise is located in the third heaven (cf. 2 Cor 12:1–4). Today when a Christian dies, the soul of that Christian separates from the body and goes to be with Jesus in the third heaven (Phil 1:21–23; 2 Cor 5:1–8).

TIME OR PLACE OF CHRIST'S DESCENT IN EPHESIANS 4:9

Incarnation View: Wallace

Grave View: Hoehner

Hades View: Arnold, Gromacki, MacArthur

Pentecost View: Harris, Lincoln

IDENTITY OF CAPTIVES IN EPHESIANS 4:8

Demons: Arnold, Lincoln

Spiritual Leaders: Gary Smith, Hoehner

All Believers: MacArthur

Old Testament Saints: Early Church Fathers, Gromacki

Evaluation of Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views

***Dr. Joseph Parle
Academic Dean
College of Biblical Studies
Houston, Texas***

INTRODUCTION

Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views, edited by Chad O. Brand, provides four common positions in evangelical Christianity on the relationship of Israel and the church: the covenantal position, the traditional dispensational position, the progressive dispensational position, and the progressive covenantal view.¹ This book features excellent scholars who are committed to their positions and can biblically defend their positions. The tone is irenic and the format of allowing each writer to defend his position and the other writers to respond to the specific statements provides a helpful perspective to the reader. This review will focus on the ways in which traditional dispensationalism was misunderstood or misrepresented in the book.² The authors who presented views outside of

¹ This article is based upon a paper presented at the eighth annual Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 16-17, 2015, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA. The conversational tone of the original has been maintained.

² Dr. Robert Thomas did an exceptional job defending traditional dispensationalism and pointing out the deficiencies of the other systems. Since I have no significant area of disagreement with him, I will allow readers to read his portions of the book to form their own opinion. The areas I am pointing to did not seem to be addressed in as much detail, but that was probably not due to a deficiency in Dr. Thomas's treatment but instead a likely result of space limitation that he had to work with.

dispensationalism seemed to misunderstand several key aspects of dispensationalism. The key areas of misunderstanding among the non-dispensational writers that will be reviewed in this paper are the doxological purpose of God, a traditional dispensational soteriology, a traditional dispensational understanding of true Israel,³ and a literal hermeneutic. A better understanding of these areas will address some of the concerns raised by the advocates of other positions.

THE DOXOLOGICAL PURPOSE OF GOD

Brand makes a statement that indicates that he does not fully understand a traditional dispensational view of the doxological purpose of God when he writes, “As to the other principle, the glory of God, covenant theology is every bit as committed to the principle as dispensationalism is, as is readily obvious in any standard work of covenant theology.”⁴ Ryrie contrasts a traditional dispensational view with the covenantal perspective when he writes,

The covenant theologian, in practice, believes the purpose to be salvation (although covenant theologians strongly emphasize the glory of God in their theology), and the dispensationalist says the purpose is broader than that, namely *the glory of God* [emphasis his].... To the normative dispensationalist, the soteriological, or

³ Time and space will permit only a discussion of the biblical data on this topic and not an historical analysis. For an historical analysis of the development of the distinctions between the church and Israel in dispensational and covenant theology, see Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London: Cambridge UP, 1969) as well as William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2015), and Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004).

⁴ Chad O. Brand, “Introduction,” in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 9.

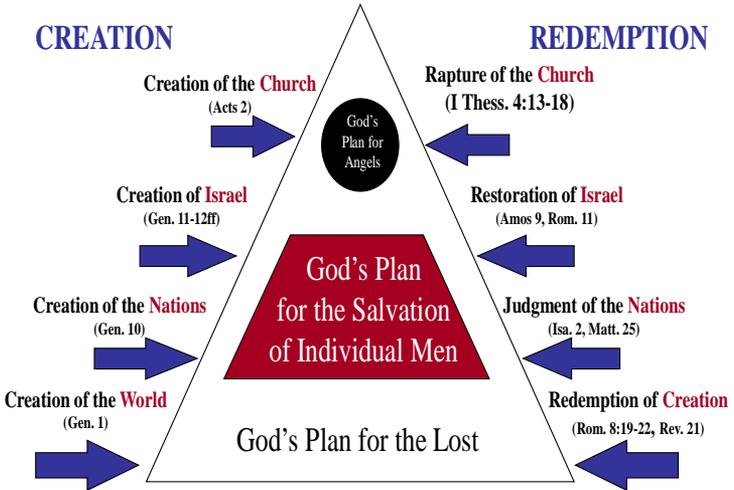
saving, program of God is not the only program but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself. Scripture is not man-centered as though salvation were the main theme, but it is God-centered because His glory is at the center. The Bible itself clearly teaches that salvation, important and wonderful as it is, is not an end in itself but is rather a means to the end of glorifying God (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).⁵

This quotation by Ryrie demonstrates that God's overall purpose is his glory; salvation is one, but not the only means, by which his glory is accomplished. While Brand is very accurate in pointing out that covenant theology also focuses greatly on the glory of God, he misses the greater point that Ryrie makes that dispensationalism does not put soteriology at the center of its system as covenant theologians often do or Christology as progressive dispensationalists and progressive covenantalists often do. Instead, dispensationalists put primary emphasis on bibliology (especially the biblical covenants and hermeneutics) as well as theology proper by focusing on how God is glorified by achieving his stated purposes for everything he creates. The following chart⁶ by Dr. Mike Stallard is very helpful for illustrating Ryrie's third point:

⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and expanded ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1995), 40.

⁶ Mike Stallard, "The Focus of the Glory of God in Dispensationalism" (unpublished course notes in TH1: Advanced Issues in Theological Method, Baptist Bible Seminary, Fall 2004), 1.

THE FOCUS ON THE GLORY OF GOD IN DISPENSATIONALISM



Dr. Mike Stallard, Baptist Bible
Seminary

As Stallard's chart shows, God receives glory from fulfilling his original created purpose for everything he creates. God's plan is more than just the salvation of individual men, but he has a plan for the world, the nations, Israel, the church, humans, and even angels.

If the nation of Israel was created for God's glory (cf. Isa 44:23; 49:3, et. al.), then God is greatly glorified when he ultimately fulfills his created purpose for Israel. God created Israel to be a great nation that is wise and understanding, close to God, living in the promised land, obedient to his law, and a source of blessing to the nations (Gen 18:18; Deut 4:6-8; 26:5); Israel has not yet fulfilled that created purpose. For this reason Paul proclaims in Romans 11:28-29, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of

God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."⁷ Just as covenant theologians assert that God will ultimately fulfill his electing purposes in individual Christians, so also God will fulfill his electing purposes in the nation of Israel; for his calling of the nation of Israel is irrevocable.

Perhaps this is why God so clearly stated his permanent commitment to Israel as a nation in Jeremiah 31:33–40:

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Thus says the LORD,
 Who gives the sun for light by day
 And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
 Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
 The LORD of hosts is His name:
 "If this fixed order departs
 From before Me," declares the LORD,
 "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
 From being a nation before Me forever."
 Thus says the LORD,
 "If the heavens above can be measured,
 And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
 Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
 For all that they have done," declares the LORD.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all English Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

For a dispensationalist, this passage is likely as critical to supporting the distinction between the church and Israel as Galatians 6:16 is for covenant theology. Surprisingly, even though multiple authors openly discussed the new covenant, none of the non-dispensationalist authors addressed this important passage. This passage clearly states that the new covenant is made with the house of Israel, and that Jerusalem will never be overthrown again. To demonstrate his commitment to Israel, God promises that the fixed order of the sun for the day and the moon for night will end before the offspring (note the physical concept of offspring) of Israel will be cast off. This level of commitment was stated in a book that predicted the Babylonian captivity for Israelite disobedience. To argue that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan is to deny the clear meaning of this text.

God reiterates this commitment to the nation of Israel in Ezekiel 36:20–36:

"When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and

you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. "I am not doing this for your sake," declares the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!" Thus says the Lord GOD, 'On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

First, this passage cannot be referring to the church as a spiritual replacement of Israel because they did not "come out of His land" as Ezekiel 36:20 requires. Additionally, the church has not been cleansed of all of its idolatry and filthiness as described Ezekiel 36:20. Ezekiel 36:28 also promises a time when Israel will be restored to the land promised to their forefathers, a promise the church cannot fulfil. Each of these descriptions of the new covenant in the OT promise not only spiritual transformation (despite Israel's present rebellion) but also future restoration to the promised land without fear of being conquered in that land again. Most notably for the purpose of understanding the doxological purpose of God, note God's motivation for preserving Israel and delivering Israel. Ezekiel 36:22 clearly indicates that God intends to deliver and cleanse Israel for the sake of the glory of his holy name despite all of their acts to profane it (which once again does not likely refer to the church). Advocates of the non-dispensational perspective must address how God's stated

purpose of glorifying himself by fulfilling his purpose to the nation of Israel is accomplished by replacing Israel with the church.

In contrast to other positions that advocate a partial or complete fulfillment of the new covenant by the church, the traditional dispensationalist awaits a future fulfillment by Israel in the promised land. An illustration might help in defining what that fulfillment might look like. Imagine a wedding taking place between Joshua and Rebekah. In that marriage ceremony, Joshua makes a covenantal vow to her to love Rebekah “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, to love and to cherish until death do us part.” When can it be determined that the covenant has been fulfilled? The vows are clear. This covenant cannot be fulfilled until death. If Joshua loves Rebekah for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health for fifteen years, but then divorces her in the sixteenth year, would a fifteen-year track record fulfill his covenantal obligation? Clearly not. If Joshua loves Rebekah for better or worse and richer or poorer but fails to care for her any time she is sick, has Jacob fulfilled the requirements of the covenant? Clearly not.

In the same way, an eternal or perpetual covenant, can be fulfilled only in eternity when all aspects (and in the case of the new covenant the land aspects as well) are completed.⁸ As opposed to the partial fulfillment that progressive dispensationalists advocate, there may be times when Joshua’s covenantal commitments are observed or realized. If Joshua does take care of Rebekah when she is sick or their love stays strong during poverty, that reflects his efforts to comply with his covenantal obligation but it does not fulfill his covenantal obligation because of the time requirement of commitment until death.

⁸ For a broader, more in-depth discussion of traditional dispensationalist views of the new covenant, please see Michael Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* (Arlington Heights, IL: Regular Baptist P, 2012).

In the same way, as a result of Joshua's marriage to Rebekah, Joshua is brought into a new family. Since they got married, Rebekah's sister Lydia (both are daughters of their father Abraham) has grown increasingly ill and they have had to provide much care for her in her sickness. Is Joshua obligated by the covenant to care for Rebekah's sister? Nothing in the covenantal vow he made to Rebekah requires him to do so. However, because of his deep love for Rebekah and his love for her sister as a result of Lydia's relationship with his wife Rebekah, as her husband Joshua makes great effort to care for her sister. Now, if Joshua divorced Rebekah but continued to care for her sister Lydia when she is sick, has he fulfilled his covenantal obligations? Clearly not. The blessings and benefits Rebekah's sister receives result from a relationship of the covenant, but these blessings and benefits do not fulfill the covenant.⁹ Imagine if Rebekah decides she wants to leave Joshua and have an affair with another man. Joshua has done everything possible to bring his wife back to him but she refuses.¹⁰ Yet, even though she is

⁹ Some may argue that the illustration is faulty because the church is the bride of Christ. However, in the OT Israel was the wife of Yahweh, the Father (Isa 54:5; Hos 2:16-19; etc.). Thus Israel is the wife of the Father/Yahweh and the church is the bride of the Son/Christ. For more information see Mark H. Soto, "The Identity of the Eschatological $\nu\mu\phi\eta$ in Revelation 21:9" (Th.M. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1993).

¹⁰ Some might argue here that at this point Joshua should divorce Rebekah due to her unfaithfulness. In fact, some covenant theologians argue this is exactly what God did with Israel. For instance, Gentry argues that the Revelation's main focus is that God will soon judge the first-century Jews for rejecting and crucifying his Son the Messiah (Matt 27:22, 25; John 19:1-16). He equates this act of judgment to God's signing a divorce decree, which opened up the opportunity for the new Jerusalem (the church). He believes that the great prostitute of Babylon is Jerusalem. Gentry argues, "In Jeremiah 3:1-2 God charges Judah with acting as a prostitute.... God warns Old Testament Judah on the basis of Israel's experience: 'He gave faithless Israel a certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.'... The fate of Revelation's harlotrous Jerusalem will be the same (Rev 17:6, 19:2)." See Kenneth L.

unfaithful to him, Joshua continues to care for Rebekah's sister Lydia out of faithful love for Lydia and Rebekah (taking care of Lydia does not fulfill his covenant to Rebekah). He also resolves that he will not forsake his vow to Rebekah even though she has become unfaithful (since he vowed to love her for better and for worse). Lydia maintains contact with Rebekah and encourages her to return to Joshua but she refuses. Soon Rebekah's heart is broken by the man with whom she is having an affair. As she looks at how faithful Jacob has been to her sister Lydia, she becomes jealous and longs to return to her husband Joshua. She comes to Joshua, repents of her sin of adultery, and he lovingly welcomes her back into his home to love her for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others until death do them part. Rebekah once again benefits from the covenant.

Similarly, to Lydia (Rebekah's sister), the church today benefits from the Abrahamic and new covenants as a result of its relationship to Abraham through the bridegroom Christ. However, whatever benefits the church experiences now do not fulfill the eternal and complete requirements of the new covenant or the Abrahamic covenant. Fulfillment of the new covenant and Abrahamic covenant awaits the fulfillment of the covenantal promises to ethnic Israel when they come as a nation to saving faith in the true Messiah Jesus Christ after repenting of their idolatry as promised in Romans 11:25-27:

Gentry, Jr., "A Preterist View of Revelation," *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 75. It is interesting that Gentry leaves out the portion of Jeremiah 3:12 which says, "Return faithless Israel," declares the Lord; "I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious," declares the Lord; 'I will not be angry forever.'" To interpret the metaphorical language of divorce as a literal permanent divorce is to deny the intent of the passage. Even if one might believe that Joshua has a biblical right to divorce based on adultery, the key distinction between the Abrahamic covenant and new covenant, is that they are royal grant covenants that are based on the faithfulness of God and not the faithfulness of Israel. Obedience is not a condition of participating in the covenant, only receiving of the blessings.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”

Of particular note in this passage is the promise that all of Israel will be saved (σωθήσεται) in the future. This could not describe the church because they are experiencing God’s salvation in the present. Like the previous illustration, Rebekah/Israel will return and experience the blessings of the covenant. Additionally, if the church is spiritual Israel, then who are the saved Gentiles mentioned in Romans 11:11–13? Thomas notes that replacement theology often defines Israel as ethnic Israel when the NT speaks negatively of Israel but when the NT is speaking positively about Israel, it must be referring to the church.¹¹ Dispensationalism resolves this inconsistency in the use of the term *Israel* by consistently identifying Israel as the nation made up of physical descendants of Abraham.¹²

¹¹ Robert L. Thomas, “The Traditional Dispensationalist View,” in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 136.

¹² Saucy addresses the common argument that covenant theologians make that the existence of one tree requires the church and Israel to be the same. As Saucy points out, Israel is grafted into its own olive tree in Romans 11:24, “For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?” See Robert L. Saucy, “The Progressive Dispensationalist View,” in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 184. It is somewhat ironic that covenant theologians argue based on the image of the tree while ignoring the clear statement by Paul in Romans 11:1 that he was an Israelite who was a physical descendent of Abraham and Benjamin. Similarly, Reymond argues for God’s replacing Israel based on the parable of the wicked farmers (see Reymond’s argument

MISUNDERSTANDING OF TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL SOTERIOLOGY¹³

In contrast to the doxological purpose of God at the center of the traditional dispensational system, each of the other positions argued for salvation being the key overall purpose of God. For instance, Raymond writes,

Using the grammatical/historical canons of hermeneutics, the Swiss reformers ... returned to the Bible's root idea of God's glory both in creation and particularly in salvation. It was natural, then, that they would develop the biblical covenants as the successive historical instruments whereby God determined to bring glory to himself by the salvation of the elect through the mediatorial work of his Son and the ministrations of His Spirit and his spoken and written word.¹⁴

Brand and Pratt write, "Our proposal is that the entire debate over the significance of Israel and the church in

on 47–49 and 72–74 for excellent defense of the traditional dispensational view by Thomas) and discounts the literal view of the thousand year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20 because Revelation "is distinguished by other New Testament books by its plethora of symbols" (214). If that be the case, is not the illustration of the olive tree highly symbolic as well as the parable of the wicked tenants? Using his own hermeneutic, one would think Raymond would give more heed to Paul's clear statement in Romans 11:1 instead of negating it with a symbol. Later in this paper, I will clarify that true Israel consists of those who share the physical descendancy and faith of Abraham.

¹³ The free grace vs. Lordship salvation debate will not be addressed in this section since traditional dispensationalists disagree on issues related to that debate.

¹⁴ Robert L. Raymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 18.

eschatological perspective is bound up in the *history of salvation* [emphasis theirs] as it is revealed in the metanarrative of Scripture.”¹⁵ Saucy also states,

Progressive dispensationalism sees God’s present activity in and through the church as the *already* [emphasis theirs] of an already not yet working out of messianic kingdom salvation. The *not yet* [emphasis his] of messianic salvation will come only with the return of Christ and his righteous reign on earth, when his salvation will encompass all structures in human society and the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁶

Saucy later qualifies his use of term *salvation* to refer to more than justification when he writes, “Biblical salvation is more than the gift of eternal life and the deliverance of the individual from the effects of sin. It is the holistic salvation of history—a salvation that restores the order of creation.”¹⁷ This definition of salvation comes closer to the traditional dispensational view of the doxological purpose of God but Saucy’s use of salvation as opposed to glory supports, in his mind, the already-not-yet hermeneutic.

The overemphasis on soteriology in covenant theology causes misunderstandings on the need for the intermediate kingdom. If God’s primary role is justification of sinners, the thousand year reign of Christ appears to be an unnecessary step in the path from earth to heaven. However, if God’s ultimate purpose is to be glorified by fulfilling his original created purpose, then the millennial reign is very necessary. If God’s original purpose was for man to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen

¹⁵ Chad O. Brand and Tom Pratt Jr., “The Progressive–Covenantal View,” *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 235.

¹⁶ Saucy, “Progressive Dispensational View,” 155.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

1:26) and Adam did not fulfill that purpose because he submitted to the devil disguised as a serpent, then one should not be surprised that God will fulfill his purpose in the millennium on earth when believers will be “priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Rev 20:6) as well as in the eschaton when believers will “will reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). God will also judge Satan and his demonic angels at the end of the millennium in Revelation 20:10, Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8, as well as unbelievers in Revelation 20:11–15. Jesus Christ rules on the Davidic throne on earth during the millennium and throughout the eschaton. Israel receives the land promised to Abraham in the millennium and the church participates in the marriage supper of the Lamb in the millennium. Isaiah 65 predicts a time when children will live very long lives (although death is possible as indicated in Isa 65:20 so this must refer to the millennium and not the eschaton), creation will be at peace as the wolf and the lamb lie together (Isa 65:20), and Jerusalem will be a place of rejoicing instead of mourning.

Perhaps the focus on soteriology also causes the advocates of other positions to misunderstand traditional dispensational arguments regarding how exactly Jews are saved. For instance, Brand and Pratt write, “The strange idea that somehow the final ‘conversion’ of Israel will happen at the *parousia* is almost an offensive concept, for it implies that there will be a generation of ‘believers’ who will be allowed to pass the ‘offense of the cross’ in favor of a ‘sign from heaven’ (see Matt 12:38–41).”¹⁸ It appears as though they do not understand how traditional dispensationalists interpret Romans 11. Most traditional dispensationalists argue that after the rapture of the church prior to the tribulation, God once again sets his attention on the national conversion of Israel as described in Romans 11:26–27. He begins by raising up two witnesses (Rev 11) as well as 144,000 Jews who are sealed at the beginning of the tribulation (Rev 7:3–8) and will witness to unbelieving Israel and the world throughout the tribulation (Rev 14:1 suggests that the 144,000 Jews survive the entire tribulation). During the first three and a

¹⁸ Brand and Pratt, “Progressive–Covenantal View,” 242.

half years of the tribulation, the Israelites will enter into a peace treaty with the antichrist but halfway through the tribulation he will cease all offerings on the restored temple and declare himself to be God (Dan 9:27, 2 Thess 2:3–4). Around the same time, the two witnesses will perform many miracles but the antichrist will eventually kill them (Rev 11:7). They will rise again from the dead (Rev 11:11–12) and those who remain in Jerusalem will be converted (Rev 11:13). After recognizing that the antichrist is not the Messiah, Zechariah 12:10 states that the Jewish nation will look upon the Messiah (Jesus Christ) whom they have pierced and mourn. According to Zechariah 13, a national repentance will take place in Israel. The Jews will be persecuted greatly by the antichrist, and in the final battle at Megiddo, they will be surrounded but Jesus Christ will return to deliver and save their lives (Rev 16 and 19). Hence, the nation will not only be justified by this time, but they will also be delivered by their great Messiah (salvation here is used more like how Saucy used it as quoted earlier in the paper, without the complementary hermeneutic). Brand and Pratt seem to misunderstand how this will occur.

Another misunderstanding emerges as the non-dispensational advocates argue that dispensationalism requires multiple ways to heaven. For instance, Reymond writes, “This means, although traditional dispensationalists may wish to deny it, that Scripture endorses different ‘plans of salvation,’ depending on the dispensation in which the Old Testament saint found himself.”¹⁹ He then adds, “The elect of God were saved, are saved, and will be saved only by grace through faith in either the anticipated (OT) or accomplished (NT) work of the Messiah.”²⁰ Traditional dispensationalists argue that the means of salvation has always been the same: by grace through faith; however, the content of faith was further clarified through the progress of revelation. If a change in content is a different plan of salvation, it is hard to understand how Reymond fails to see the same problem within his definition of how the elect are saved

¹⁹ Reymond, “Traditional Covenantal View,” 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

(anticipated and accomplished work are two different things). Acts 4:12 indicates that one must believe in the name of Jesus to be saved (an OT saint would not have believed that) and 1 Corinthians 15:4 includes the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an essential aspect of the gospel (which once again no OT believer would have likely believed).²¹

Similarly, Brand and Pratt argue, “The dispensational approach virtually requires multiple pathways to this salvation.”²² Brand also refers to the note on Genesis 12:1 found in the *Scofield Reference Bible* for further evidence.²³ While some statements by Scofield and Chafer are used to point to multiple ways to salvation, most, if not all, traditional dispensationalists hold to salvation by grace through faith throughout the Old Testament. Distinctions in dispensations do not necessitate multiple ways to salvation. Chafer himself said, “Nor is the situation relieved for those who claim that the Law has ceased as a means of justification; for it was never that, nor could it be (Gal

²¹ Saucy does a good job of addressing the question of addressing Reymond’s arguments (especially whether OT saints had enough revelation to fully comprehend the death of the anticipated Messiah) on pages 76-78.

²² Brand and Pratt, “Progressive–Covenantal View,” 236. It seems unusual that they would make such a strong statement against dispensational soteriology while not making nearly as strong of a statement about the New Perspective on Paul: “We do not mean to imply here that there is a clearly delineated single perspective, since the literature has burgeoned into many nuanced perspectives. We also recognize that the New Perspective itself is not acceptable in all of its claims, but we do affirm that the debate has helped to clarify some issues that had previously remained somewhat murky.” (Ibid., 234). It would seem that greater consideration should have been given to the multiplicity of dispensational authors and views as opposed to citing one statement by Scofield for dispensationalists as a whole.

²³ Brand, “Introduction,” 10.

3:11).”²⁴ The law was never a means to justify anyone. Genesis 15:6 makes it clear that Abraham was justified by faith. If anything, the law was the means of fellowship by which the Israelite grew in conformity and maturity to God’s will and character.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONAL DEFINITION OF TRUE ISRAEL

Another area of misunderstanding in the book is how traditional dispensationalists define true Israel. For instance, Reymond refers to Pastor John Hagee, who according to Reymond,

does not believe that Jews must trust Christ to go to heaven.... This *radically* [emphasis his] dispensational statement is heretical in its denial that faith is *universally* [emphasis his] essential for salvation. Hagee does not seem to understand that salvation for everyone is a matter of grace, *not* [emphasis his] race.²⁵

Of course, Pastor Hagee is not a widely accepted dispensational scholar and few dispensationalists would espouse his theology (especially on this alleged matter). It appears to be more guilt by association which would be like judging covenant theology on the basis of how the PC USA views gay marriage or inerrancy.

Unfortunately, accusations like this are common. For instance, Knox Seminary’s “An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel” lodged a similar complaint against dispensationalists:

²⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” *BSac* 93, no. 372 (October–December 1936): 415.

²⁵ Reymond, “Traditional Covenantal View,” 35.

1. The Gospel offers eternal life in heaven to Jews and Gentiles alike as a free gift in Jesus Christ. Eternal life in heaven is not earned or deserved, nor is it based upon ethnic descent or natural birth.

2. All human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are sinners, and, as such, they are under God's judgment of death. Because God's standard is perfect obedience and all are sinners, it is impossible for anyone to gain temporal peace or eternal life by his own efforts. Moreover, apart from Christ, there is no special divine favor upon any member of any ethnic group; nor, apart from Christ, is there any divine promise of an earthly land or a heavenly inheritance to anyone, whether Jew or Gentile. To teach or imply otherwise is nothing less than to compromise the Gospel itself....

6. The inheritance promises that God gave to Abraham were made effective through Christ, Abraham's True Seed. These promises were not and cannot be made effective through sinful man's keeping of God's law. Rather, the promise of an inheritance is made to those only who have faith in Jesus, the True Heir of Abraham. All spiritual benefits are derived from Jesus, and apart from him there is no participation in the promises. Since Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the Abrahamic Covenant, all who bless him and his people will be blessed of God, and all who curse him and his people will be cursed of God. These promises do not apply to any particular ethnic group, but to the church of Jesus Christ, the true Israel. The people of God, whether the church of Israel in the wilderness in the Old Testament or the Israel of God among the Gentile Galatians in the New Testament, are one body who through Jesus will receive the promise of the heavenly city, the everlasting Zion. This heavenly inheritance has been the expectation of the people of God in all ages.... The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the "Holy Land" cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua.... No New Testament writer foresees a

regathering of ethnic Israel in the land, as did the prophets of the Old Testament after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.²⁶

Reymond alluded to this Open Letter for a better understanding of “the redemptive implications of this bad ‘land theology.’”²⁷ Dr. Mike Stallard has provided an excellent response to the letter,²⁸ but the consistent argument that traditional dispensationalists somehow believe that Jews are saved apart from Christ is troubling. As a result, a clarification is necessary.

When speaking of the land promises in the Abrahamic covenant, many traditional dispensationalists refer to the promise to Abraham described in Genesis 15:1b, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’” The promise gives the deed of the land from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates to Abraham and his physical descendants (when were later further clarified in Scripture to include the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Genesis 13:15 established that this right to the land was perpetual by God’s design. Hence, when Reymond appeals to Hebrews 11:8-10 on page 43 as proof that Abraham did not receive or expect to receive the specific land promised to him in his lifetime, the dispensationalist points out that Abraham’s descendants were promised the land. There was no expectation that he would possess it in his lifetime, but Hebrews 11 assures

²⁶ “An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel” <[http:// www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/wdoor.html](http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/wdoor.html)> (accessed 8 September 2015).

²⁷ Reymond, “Traditional Covenantal View,” 31.

²⁸ Dr. Mike Stallard, “A Dispensational Response to the Knox Seminary Open Letter to Evangelicals” <<http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/dispensational-response-to-knox-seminary-open-letter-evangelicals>> (accessed 8 September 2015).

readers that he and his descendants will possess it in the millennium and the eschaton.

Contrary to the Open Letter, the perpetual Abrahamic covenant was not fulfilled by Joshua. As previously mentioned in Ezekiel 36:20–36 and Jeremiah 31:33–40, the land is part of the fulfillment of the new covenant which occurs after the destruction of the temple by Babylon. According to the land covenant, the Israelites were unconditionally given the land, but the enjoyment of the land was subject to their obedience to God. It is no different than a parent who buys his teenager a car as a gift; the parent may even tell the teenager that the car is his, but if the teenager is disciplined he might still be grounded from enjoying his own car. Contrary to the Open Letter's statement, the Abrahamic covenant promised the specific land described in perpetuity. All of the land was not possessed in Joshua's time and the possession was not forever. The Abrahamic covenant did not guarantee uninterrupted possession of the land from when the covenant was made any more than the Davidic covenant guaranteed uninterrupted leadership of a descendent of David from the time of David until the eschaton. Enjoyment of those covenant blessings required obedience. Instead, the Abrahamic covenant did guarantee that there would be a time in the future (starting with the millennium and ultimately the eschaton) when the Israelites would possess the land promised to them without interruption in the same way that there would one day be a Davidic King who would reign on the Davidic throne on earth forever.

By asserting the above, traditional dispensationalists are not arguing that the current nation of Israel is obedient to God, or worthy of the blessings of the land. Traditional dispensationalists do not endorse every action of Israel any more than the OT prophets did when Israelite kings disobeyed God or acted unjustly. Traditional dispensationalists should speak out when Israel does things that are against God's commands. However, the disobedience of Israel does not negate the right to the land that the nation of Israel has as a result of the Abrahamic covenant in

perpetuity. God may remove them from the land for disobedience (even now), but they have not ceased to be his chosen people.

With respect to rights to the physical land promised to Abraham, traditional dispensationalists agree that the physical descendants were given the land but the enjoyment of the privilege of the land was conditional on obedience. Deuteronomy 1:8 and Numbers 33:53 affirm that God had already given the Israelites the land even before they were in possession of it. It is like a father who already bought his son a car and gave it to him as a gift with the stipulation that he cannot drive it until he is ready to possess it (in this case perhaps when he turns sixteen). The problem occurs when non-dispensationalists connect the land with a soteriological salvation and they argue that somehow by calling Jews God's chosen people that there were multiple ways to salvation. Clearly Moses was elect, but he did not possess the land in his physical lifetime due to his disobedience (Num 20:12). In the same way, some people who were not elect possessed land in the promised land. However, when the nation found itself without control of the promised land, they could assume based on Deuteronomy 30 that they needed to repent in order to possess the land again (which is the reason why both John the Baptist and Jesus urged repentance as a condition for entering the kingdom).

How then would a dispensationalist address Romans 9:6–7? Romans 9:6–7 reads,

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

What is often missed about this passage is that Paul is not comparing one person who was not a physical descendent with one who was. Both Isaac and Ishmael were physical descendants. However, only Isaac shared the faith of Abraham and was a son of the promise. According to Paul, physical descendency was not

enough to constitute true Israel. Jesus said the same in John 8:44 that the religious leaders were not sons of Abraham but sons of the devil (John the Baptist also discounts physical descendancy alone in Matt 3:9). According to Paul, in order to be a member of true Israel, one must not only share in the physical descendancy of Abraham but also the faith of Abraham. Paul emphasizes his physical descendancy as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin: "For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Rom 11:1). Since this use of the term introduces Romans 11, it should determine what "Israel" refers to throughout the chapter. Paul emphasizes the physical aspect of being an Israelite and in Romans 11:6 notes that being a true Israelite also requires salvation by grace, not works.

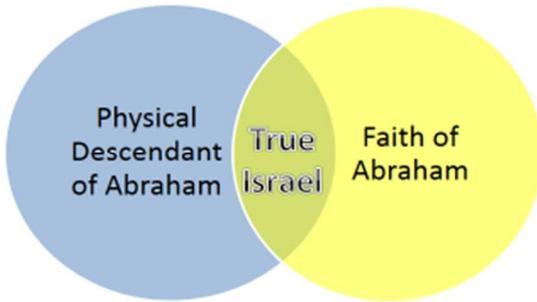
The church is comprised of spiritual descendants of Abraham based on their relationship with Christ according to Galatians 3 that emphasizes the spiritual blessings the Gentiles would receive as a result of the Abrahamic covenant. However, this spiritual descendancy does not make them true Israel. Paul clearly calls them Gentiles: "But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Rom 11:11). "Their" and "them" refers to the Jews, but the Gentiles are saved. If the church is referred to as spiritual Israel, who are the spiritual believing Gentiles referred to in this passage? This distinction is further supported when Paul writes in Romans 11:26-31,

And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

Paul says the same group that will be saved are currently enemies of the Gentile believers (and unbelievers in the gospel).

However, God has chosen the nation of Israel as God’s beloved with an irrevocable calling. The Israel in question, in contrast to the Gentile believers in the church, is presently disobedient but still is an object of God’s mercy. Based on these biblical distinctions, the figure below represents true Israel from a traditional dispensational perspective:

True Israel Shares the Faith of Abraham and Physical Descendancy



The religious leaders during Jesus’ time shared physical descendancy but were not true Israel but sons of the devil (John 8:44)

Gentiles in the church share the faith of Abraham and are consequently called Abraham’s descendants (Gal 3:25) but they are not true Israel as described by Paul in Romans 9:6

Consequently, from a soteriological perspective, the traditional dispensational distinction between the church and Israel does not establish a separate gospel because true Israel must share the physical descendancy of Abraham and the spiritual faith of Abraham. Ultimately, as mentioned before, the true permanent inheritance of the land promised to Abraham awaits the beginning of the millennium when all of the physical descendants of Israel will trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah.²⁹

²⁹ This section of the paper primarily addressed Rom 9:6–7. Thomas does an excellent job addressing Galatians 6:16 on pages 115–116 using similar arguments that the Israel of God refers to those who

MISUNDERSTANDING OF LITERAL HERMENEUTIC

Throughout the book, non-dispensationalists misunderstand the hermeneutic that guides traditional dispensationalists. The non-dispensationalists prioritize the NT interpretations of the OT and presume that the NT trumps the OT's original meaning. For instance, Reymond writes, "To understand Abraham's concept of God's land promise to him, we must give special heed to the insights of the writers of the New Testament."³⁰ Robert Saucy argues, "Because the Scripture is God's Word conveyed through a human author (2 Peter 1:21), a text may have a more limited meaning to the human author in his historical context than it does to the divine author."³¹ Traditional dispensationalists tend to distinguish between what E.D. Hirsch defines as meaning and significance. Hirsch argues that "meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent."³² He contrasts this with significance which "names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a

share both the physical descendancy and the faith of Abraham. Also see David Gunn, "Two Problem Passages on Israel and the Church for Traditional Dispensationalists" (paper presented at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Clarks Summit, PA, 17 September 2015), 1–33. For a refutation of the appeal to the parable of the wicked tenants see George Gunn, "Does the Church Qualify as the 'Nation' in Matthew 21:43?" (paper presented at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Clarks Summit, PA, 17 September 2015), 1–10.

³⁰ Reymond, "The Traditional Covenantal View," 43. Robert Thomas addressed this issue pretty well in his responses throughout the book so little space will be used in this paper to address this section.

³¹ Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensational View," 157.

³² E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University P, 1967), 8.

situation, or indeed anything imaginable.”³³ Thus, according to Hirsch, what changes for the author over time was the significance of the text and not the meaning. Thus he concludes that when critics argue for a change in meaning, they really mean a change in significance.

As an illustration, when I was a professor at the College of Biblical Studies, our Academic Dean at the time proposed a new vacation policy to limit faculty vacation requests to periods in between semesters when classes were not taking place. I was very concerned about this policy because when my wife was off for the summer from her work in the public schools I would still be working because we teach three semesters (fall, spring, and summer) as part of our contract. I and several other faculty members voiced our concern about this policy. The Academic Dean assured us that he would understand if we had special requests for vacation outside of the parameters of this policy. However, I continued to oppose the policy because I said, “Who knows whether the next Academic Dean will read the policy the same way you do? Policies should not be written with unwritten exceptions in mind because we do not know who the next Academic Dean is and how he will interpret them.” Little did I know that within a few years of that meeting, the Academic Dean would receive an offer to work in an Executive Pastor position at another church and I would become the next Academic Dean of the College of Biblical Studies. As I reflect on that situation, the meaning of my statements has not changed but I now have a greater appreciation for the significance of those statements that I did not have then. I had no idea at the time when I was referring to the next Academic Dean that I was actually referring to myself. Being the next Academic Dean of the College of Biblical Studies was not a goal of mine and I would have never guessed I would be in this position. I now see an irony in those statements that I did not see then (as an aside, one of my first acts as Academic Dean was to eliminate that policy). The point of this illustration is that it is impossible to know for sure if Moses understood that

³³ Ibid.

the seed mentioned in Gen 3:15 was the infinite God-man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who would die on a cross and conquer Satan once and for all. However, contrary to Saucy’s point, that information does not change the meaning of the original text; it just provides a greater significance that may not have been seen before.

Additionally, the priority of how the OT and NT are interpreted and the results are synthesized differs between dispensationalism and other systems. Mike Stallard, in his article titled “Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism,” provides an interesting contrast. According to Stallard, a traditional dispensationalist system usually utilizes the following theological method:

1	The recognition of one’s own pre-understanding
2	The formulation of a biblical theology from the Old Testament based upon literal interpretation (grammatical–historical method of interpretation) of the Old Testament text
3	The formulation of a biblical theology from the New Testament based upon literal interpretation (the grammatical-historical method of interpretation) of the New Testament text, which method includes the backgrounds arrived at via point 2 above
4	The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all inputs to theology including points 2 and 3 above ³⁴

³⁴ Mike Stallard, “Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism,” *JMAT* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 29.

In contrast, covenant theologians and progressive covenant theologians utilize the following approach:

1	The recognition of one's own pre-understanding
2	The formulation of a biblical theology of the New Testament based upon the literal interpretation (grammatical-historical interpretation) of the New Testament text
3	The formulation of a biblical theology of the Old Testament based upon the New Testament understanding of the Old Testament text
4	The production of a systematic theology by harmonizing all of the inputs above to theology including the results of points 2 and 3 above ³⁵

The distinction cited above is critical for understanding the distinction between dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist systems. The dispensationalist system best fits the progress of revelation and the way the original NT readers would have read the Bible (with the OT as background). The dispensationalist system preserves literal interpretation because it does not allow the NT to be a trump card that changes the intended meaning of the OT text (although it may lend greater significance to the OT). The dispensationalist system portrays God as faithful to literally fulfilling his OT and NT promises in the same way he already literally fulfilled OT promises about the coming Messiah.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I evaluated *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views* for potential areas of misunderstanding of the traditional

³⁵ Ibid., 31.

dispensationalist perspective. The key areas of misunderstanding among the non-dispensational writers that were reviewed in this paper were: the doxological purpose of God, a traditional dispensational soteriology, a traditional dispensational understanding of true Israel, and literal hermeneutic. Advocates of positions outside of dispensationalism fail to realize that dispensationalism argues for a doxological purpose that is greater than salvation of the elect. As a result, they often misinterpret statements about Israel being God's chosen people to imply that Jews are saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Instead, traditional dispensationalists argue that true Israel includes those who share the physical descendency from Abraham and the faith of Abraham. This distinction results from a literal hermeneutic that reads the OT literally to provide the background to understanding the NT prior to synthesizing the observations into a comprehensive theology.

THE CHURCH AND THE TRANSGENDER ISSUE

*Michael Dellaperute
Lead Pastor
Calvary Baptist Church
Tuckerton, New Jersey*

INTRODUCTION

Medical advancements, political pressure, and widespread acceptance have fueled a debate over gender identity between the culture and the church. In February of 2015, California Congressman Mike Honda posted the following tweet heard around the culture: “As the proud grandpa of a transgender grandchild, I hope she can feel safe at school without fear of being bullied.”¹ Above the statement that was destined for viral status, the Congressman included a picture of himself and his eight-year-old grandchild, Malisa “X.” Malisa, born Brody X, picked out a new name and alternate gender identity at the tender age of three. Now, with the help of supportive parents and a politically connected grandfather, Malisa’s family and community have embraced Malisa’s very public transition from male to female. Congressman Honda released this timely statement concerning his gender non-conforming grandchild less than one month after a historic State of the Union Address where, as Alexandra Jaffe of CNN reports, President Obama became the first president to

¹ Kate Snow, “Malisa’s Story: What It Means to Be a Trans-gendered child,” NBCNews.com <<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/transgender-kids/transgender-8-year-old-makes-grandpa-congressman-mike-honda-proud-n345731>> (accessed 15 July 2015). Malisa’s story was selected to represent a growing ethical issue in the culture after it aired on national television. Malisa’s last name was deliberately omitted from this text.

mention transgender individuals in any speech.”² The proclamations of Honda and Obama underscore the fact that transgenderism is a growing issue in the culture. However, their assertions have also left the church with more questions than answers. For example: What would cause such a young child to make a life-altering, gender-altering decision? And, how should the church respond?

The purpose of this article is to examine the church’s relationship to transgender individuals. First, this article will provide a concise evaluation of the transgender issue in contemporary culture. Next, the author will present a summary of the gender transition process. Then, the author will proceed to examine the morality of transgenderism from a biblical perspective. Although gender transition is immoral, transgender individuals are redeemable. The church can prepare to minister to transgender individuals in both the culture and the community of faith.

DEFINING TRANSGENDER

Malisa X’s condition goes by several emerging and hotly contested titles, none of which are universally agreed upon either by the church, the medical community, or the culture in general. The inherently negative designation of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) has recently ceded to Gender Dysphoria (GD). GD, which is also commonly referred to as transsexualism, ultimately results in transgender (TG) individuals.³ While all three terms are used

² Alexandra Jaffe, “Obama Makes Historic ‘Transgender’ Reference in SOTU,” CNN.com <<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/20/politics/obama-transgender-sotu/>> (accessed 17 August 2015).

³ B. Udeze, N. Abdelmawla., D. Khoosal, and T. Terry, “Psychological Functions in Male-to-Female Transsexual People Before and After Surgery,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 23, no. 2 (May 2008): 141. Udeze et al. state, “The term transsexualism is defined by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) as a desire to live as the opposite sex (WHO, 1992). The terms “gender dysphoria” and

interchangeably in both mainstream culture and the medical community, many TG advocates believe that the 2013 descriptive term Gender Dysphoria will likely prevail over GID and transsexualism in time because GD removes the negative stigma associated with “disorder” while still allowing medical professionals to prescribe treatment.⁴ Furthermore, the diagnosis of GD has afforded TGs the legal grounds to challenge insurance companies and government agencies to provide the necessary funding for both chemical and surgical treatments for their condition.⁵ Although labeling the condition that results in TG individuals presents various complexities for both the church and culture, the more pressing question remains: How is an individual diagnosed with GD?

“transsexualism” are often used inter-changeably” (p. 141). For the purpose of this paper, the condition will be respectfully referred to as GD and the individual as a transgender or TG. Popular culture frowns on adding an -ed suffix to describe a TG.

⁴ Katy Steinmetz, “The Transgender Tipping Point,” Time.com <<http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point>> (accessed 15 July 2015). Steinmetz notes the ongoing debate over terminology from within the TG community. Some TG advocates believe that the change from GID to GD “has helped remove the stigma of mental illness ... though some worry that removing ‘disorder’ may make it harder to access health care like hormone therapy.”

⁵ Lolita Baldor, “Pentagon Announces Plan Aimed at Lifting Transgender Ban,” AOL.com <http://www.aol.com/article/2015/07/13/pentagon-readying-plan-to-lift-transgender-ban/21208734/?icid=maing-grid7%7Chtmlws-main-bb%7Cdl6%7Csec1_ink3%26pLid%3D-1010312533> (accessed 15 July 2015). In her article, Baldor notes that “convicted national security leaker Chelsea Manning” has been granted his request “for hormone therapy and other treatment while ... in prison ... under pressure from a lawsuit.” Both the American and Canadian governments have already provided the funds to cover GD treatments.

Cultural Transgender Influences and Implications

GD has presented the culture, the medical community, and the church with a myriad of complicated and conflicting moral issues regarding the medical and social treatment of TG individuals. First, although Hartocollis states, “No proven biological markers” exist to allow the medical community to diagnose an individual with GD,⁶ Ahmad et al. report that the medical community still considers GD a physical ailment that can be corrected with therapy, medication, and surgery.⁷ The lack of biological markers makes GD a purely psychological condition that is classified by an array of social and psychological symptoms. Socially, Steinmetz reports that individuals with GD are “significantly more likely to be impoverished, unemployed, and suicidal than other Americans.”⁸ Psychologically, Udeze et al. describe the broad spectrum of GD symptoms as ranging from anxiety/depression, to feelings of rejection, to “a constant feeling of psychological discomfort related to their anatomical sex.”⁹ Finally, the TG issue is complicated even further by the fact that GD symptoms are presenting in very young children. In a recent interview, Jeanette Jennings, mother of celebrity TG teen advocate Jazz Jennings, claims to remember “two-year-old Jazz asking, ‘When is the good fairy going to come and change my

⁶ Anemona Hartocollis, “The New Girl in School: Transgender Surgery at 18,” NYTimes.com <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/nyregion/transgender-minors-gender-reassignment-surgery.html?_r=> (accessed 15 July 2015).

⁷ Sherez Ahmad et al., “Gender Dysphoria Services: A Guide for General Practitioners and Other Healthcare Staff,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 28, no. 3 (2013): 173.

⁸ Steinmetz, “Transgender Tipping Point.” Steinmetz later notes, “A staggering 41% (of individuals with GD) have attempted suicide, compared with 1.6% of the general population.”

⁹ Udeze et al., “Psychological Functions,” 141.

penis into a vagina?”¹⁰ While the answer to this question may be sooner than most realize, the implications of a child making permanently life-altering, gender-altering decisions are being overlooked by many within the culture.¹¹ For instance, if an individual begins to question his or her biological gender, should that individual be encouraged to alter gender or thinking?

With increased cultural awareness being given to TG issues, gender non-conforming children as young as Malisa X and Jazz Jennings are manifesting GD symptoms. Regarding this phenomenon, Hartocollis notes, “Studies suggest that most young children with gender dysphoria eventually lose any desire to change sex.”¹² Even Harvard Medical School professor and TG advocate Dr. Normal Spack concedes that “80 per cent of prepubescent children who identify as the opposite gender will change their minds, while 20 per cent will persist.”¹³ Yet in spite of this statistic, Dr. Spack, a pediatric endocrinologist at Boston’s Children’s Hospital, recalls how he was “salivating”¹⁴ like Dr. Seuss’s Sylvester McMonkey McBean over the prospect of administering previously FDA-banned puberty-blocking hormones to young Sneetches suspected of GD in the United States of America.

¹⁰ James Poniewozik, “Review: An Extraordinary, Ordinary Girlhood in TLC’s *I Am Jazz*,” Time.com <<http://time.com/3957689/review-i-am-jazz-tlc-transgender/>> (accessed 30 July 2015). The validity of Jennings’s testimonial has not been scrutinized.

¹¹ Hartocollis, “New Girl.” Hartocollis notes that while different states vary, patients as young as fifteen in Oregon do not need parental consent.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Quoted in Allison George, “Body Swap,” *New Scientist*, April 21, 2007, 42.

¹⁴ Hartocollis, “New Girl.”

The alarming rate of children who ultimately outgrow gender non-conformity, when coupled with GD's highly subjective diagnosis and highly invasive treatment, has fueled the ethical debate regarding the growing number of radical procedures parents pursue for gender non-conforming children. Hartocollis even notes the divided opinions among medical experts due to the fact that "it is impossible to predict which children will grow up to be transgender and which will not."¹⁵ According to TG expert Dr. Jack Drescher, these diagnostic variables have resulted in "clinics working by the seat of the pants"¹⁶ to identify and treat GD in children. Considering Drescher's experience with establishing GD criteria, his statement begs the question: What happens when life-altering, gender-altering decisions are made by the proverbial seat of the pants and reinforced by society?

With mounting attention and subsequent confusion being generated by both proponents and opponents of GD in the culture at large, individuals identifying as TG are beginning to face increased criticism, and even opposition, from former allies. Although the TG community once enjoyed a measure of solidarity from within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) coalition, GD's distinction from homosexuality and strong affinity for gender differences has caused a rift in the movement. Recent celebrity TG Caitlyn Jenner¹⁷ explains the difference between LGB and T as follows: "Sexuality (LGB) is who you personally are attracted to ... But gender identity (T) has to do with who you are

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. Drescher "is a New York City psychiatrist ... who helped develop the latest diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria."

¹⁷ Christina Kahrl, "Caitlyn's Courage Inspires Trans Community," Espn.go.com <http://espn.go.com/espys/2015/story/_/page/asheawardkahrl15/caitlyn-jenner-courage-inspires-trans-community-arthur-ashe-award (accessed 30 July 2015). Jenner was the 2015 award winning "ESPY" athlete for courage. The sole basis for the award was Jenner's public gender transition from biological male to TG female.

as a person and your soul, and who you identify with inside.”¹⁸ The result is a complicated dynamic of muddled sexual identity and expression. For example, it is not an uncommon scenario for some biological males with GD to transition to TG females while still being sexually attracted to females, thereby identifying as lesbians.¹⁹ Other male to female TGs like Jenner also remain attracted to biological females but insist on identifying sexually as heterosexuals while simultaneously maintaining that their gender is female.²⁰ Lenow summarizes the internal conflict from within the LGBT community as follows:

The unified LGBT agenda attempts to remove any distinction among genders, particularly for roles in relationships, ability in the workforce, and cultural stereotypes. There is a commitment to pure egalitarianism whereby no specific gender has a unique role or function. This is crucial especially for homosexuality because the nature of their relationships require no gender differences. When two women or two men enter into an intimate relationship, any gender roles they express must be socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Thus, one of the points of the LGBT

¹⁸ Quoted in Daniel D’Addario, “Bruce Jenner Comes Out as Transgender: ‘For All Intents and Purposes, I Am a Woman,’” *Time.com* <<http://time.com/3835205/bruce-jenner-diane-sawyer-transgender/>> (accessed 15 July 2015).

¹⁹ Hartocollis, “New Girl.” Hartocollis chronicles the surgical transition of Katherine Boone from biological male to TG female. In a post-surgical interview, Katherine states, “I identify as a lesbian.” This scenario of confused sexual identity and expression is also true for GD biological females who transition to TG males in order to identify as gay men. The relationship between sexual expression and gender identity is extremely complicated and varied.

²⁰ Mark Kathryn Burke, “Gender Identity Versus Attraction: ‘It’s Apples and Oranges’ Says Bruce Jenner,” *ABCNews.com* <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/gender-identity-versus-attraction-apples-oranges-bruce-jenner/story?id=30570293>> (accessed 18 August 2015).

narrative is that gender has no real impact on roles.... The often-forgotten quadrant of the LGBT movement is the “T”—transgender individuals who sometimes face the scorn and opposition of the more mainstream lesbians and gays.... Transgenderism undermines the public gender narrative that has been successfully promoted in the culture.²¹

Lenow argues that TG individuals deviate from the LGB party line of socially constructed gender roles by clearly affirming and pursuing gender distinctions. As a result, sexual preference and gender identity must be treated as two separate, distantly related, occasionally overlapping, but often conflicting issues. This article focuses on the issue of gender identity.

The exact cause of GD and the exact number of individuals struggling with GD are also the subjects of much debate and speculation. Allison George reports, “The incidence of adult transsexualism has been estimated at about 1 in 12,000 for male-to-females (MtF), and around in 1 in 30,000 for female-to-males (FtM).”²² However, Hartocollis notes, “But the number of teenagers going through gender reassignment has been growing amid wider acceptance of transgender identity.”²³ Regarding the cause of GD, Schwartzapfel quotes renowned psychologist Dr. Kenneth Zucker who asserts that GD symptoms in children are “likely the result of a childhood experience or trauma, or a manifestation of some underlying psychiatric or family problem. The situation will only be made worse ... if parents and teachers

²¹ Evan Lenow, “The Not-So-Unified Narrative of the LGBT Movement.” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 20, no. 1, (Spring 2015): 9.

²² George, “Body Swap,” 41–43. MtF is the term utilized within the TG community to designate biological males who have transitioned to TG females. FtM is the term implemented within the TG community to identify biological females who have transitioned to TG males.

²³ Hartocollis, “New Girl.”

encourage it.”²⁴ Nuttbrock et al. have also noted the correlation between involvement in sex industry and the manifestation of GD.²⁵ Dr. Zucker further attributes the rise in GD among children and teens to the internet’s accessibility and fashionable portrayal of the TG lifestyle.²⁶ Steimentz confirms Zucker’s suspicions: “The internet has been a revolutionary tool for the trans community.”²⁷ Hartocollis also supports Zucker’s premise regarding the media as the primary tool for TG recruitment. When documenting the pivotal point in teenager Katherine Boone’s transition from biological male to TG female, Hartocollis reports that it occurred “when she discovered the transgender world on the Internet.”²⁸ For children and teens struggling with gender identity, a wealth of GD and TG resources, coupled with a predominately positive portrayal of the TG transitioning process and ensuing lifestyle, are all literally at their fingertips.

GD has no shortage of contemporary faces in the culture presenting children, teens, and adults with the glamorous elements of the TG lifestyle through fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, television, movies, and online resources. These individuals range in age and celebrity status from senior citizens and former athletes like Caitlyn Jenner, to young adult television stars like Laverne Cox, to teenage authors and advocates like Jazz Jennings, and now to elementary school grandchildren of

²⁴ Beth Schwartzapfel, “Born This Way?” *American Prospect* 24, no. 2 (March/April 2013): 3.

²⁵ Larry A. Nuttbrock et al., “Gender Identity Affirmation Among Male-to-Female Transgender Persons: A Life Course Analysis Across Types of Relationships and Cultural/Lifestyle Factors,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 24, no 2 (May 2009): 111.

²⁶ Roberta Staley, “When Boys Would Rather Not Be Boys,” *MacLean’s*, August 22, 2011, 44–49.

²⁷ Steinmetz, “Transgender Tipping Point.”

²⁸ Hartocollis, “New Girl.”

politicians like Malisa X.²⁹ GD also has an abundance of advocates, agencies, and support groups like the National Center for TG equity, TG Advocacy Network (TAN), and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).³⁰ Finally, GD has garnered a tremendous amount of influence in the culture at large. *I Am Jazz*, a popular elementary school book co-authored by Jennings, playfully depicts Jazz's transition from male to female.³¹ Furthermore, several reality television documentaries including *Becoming Us* and a series featuring Jennings are also being introduced into the mainstream culture through the media.³²

The implementation of various media outlets to promote GD is an intentional element of TG recruitment. The *International Journal of Transgenderism* published by WPATH outlines four "identity events" that occur as a direct result of "direct media contact."³³ Peter Ringo, a FtM TG and TG advocate, identifies

²⁹ Daniel D'Addario, "Bruce Jenner Comes Out as Transgender: 'For All Intents and Purposes, I Am a Woman,'" Time.com <<http://time.com/3835205/bruce-jenner-diane-sawyer-transgender/>> (accessed 15 July 2015).

³⁰ These examples of organizations, advocacy groups, and support networks for GD and TG individuals are not nearly exhaustive. They are intended to be a representative sampling of the vast number of resources available online.

³¹ Margaret Cox, "Book Review: *I Am Jazz*," *Library Media Connection* 33, no. 3 (November/December 2014): 69.

³² James Poniewozik, "Review: An Extraordinary, Ordinary Girlhood in TLC's *I Am Jazz*," Time.com <<http://time.com/3957689/review-i-am-jazz-tlc-transgender/>> (accessed 30 July 2015).

³³ Peter Ringo, "Media Roles in Female-to-Male Transsexual and Transgender Identity Formation," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 6, no. 3 (2012): 1. Ringo attempts to distinguish between the media's ability to encourage the expression of alternate gender identity that is innate in the individual and the media's ability to

these progressive, media-induced events in the life of the TG as “pre-awakening, awakening, identification, and maturation.”³⁴ During pre-awakening, Ringo asserts that media depictions of various elements of the TG lifestyle elicit an emotional reaction from the subject. Ringo maintains that this emotional reaction directly contributes to the cognitive response of the awakening event, at which time the “respondent experience(s) an immediate change in his understanding of his gender as a result of media contact.”³⁵ Identification follows awakening when, as Ringo states, the “respondent adopt(s) an identity label as a result of media contact.”³⁶ Ringo defines the final, maturation phase of TG recruitment via media contact as occurring when the “respondent experience(s) support for his previously adopted gender identity as a result of media contact.”³⁷ Yet in spite of the documented influence of the media’s role on an individual’s understanding of gender identity from within the TG community, most TG advocates, including Ringo and Dr. Herb Schreier, continue to maintain that gender identity, like biological gender assignment, is inherent within the individual.³⁸

Due to the increasing amount of positively portrayed TG individuals in the media, the number of children being exposed to the TG lifestyle and experiencing the symptoms associated with GD resulting from direct media contact can be expected to grow exponentially in the coming years from both inside and

create a gender identity crisis. However, Ringo offers no data other than a testimonial of innate “transness” in the individuals surveyed.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. Ringo’s use of the masculine pronoun is intentional. All of Ringo’s subjects were FtM TGs.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Schwartzapfel, “Born This Way,” 3.

outside the church.³⁹ Parents of children with GD, like those of Malisa X and Jazz Jennings, are typically encouraged by medical professionals from within the culture to allow their children to identify with the gender of their choosing. Beth Schwartzapfel summarizes this ideology when commenting on the life of “Maggie,” a five-year-old biological female who identifies as a male:

Given how early dysphoria can emerge in kids like Maggie and how deeply it cuts to the core of who they are, a growing number of therapists, doctors, and parents are advocating an early gender transition: If Maggie says she’s a boy, then it’s our duty to believe him and treat him as such. Given the very real risks to transgender people who remain in the closet ... those in this camp say that to deny that Maggie is a boy is to set the child up for a lifetime of repression and pain.⁴⁰

As the TG population increases and as children like Maggie, Malisa, and Jazz make life-altering, gender-altering decision at ever younger ages, the church must prepare to minister both to individuals who struggle with GD and with those who elect to alter their gender only to experience regret later in life.⁴¹ In order to minister effectively to TGs, church leaders must possess a cursory understanding of the transitioning process.

³⁹ Mary Sobralske, “Primary Care Needs of Patients Who Have Undergone Gender Reassignment,” *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners* 17, no. 4 (April 2005): 133. Sobralske notes that current estimates suggest that less than 1% of the population suffers from GID.

⁴⁰ Schwartzapfel, “Born This Way,” 1. These comments are offered in response to Dr. Zucker, who counseled Maggie to alter her thinking about her gender rather than altering her body. Schwartzapfel chronicles the angst toward Dr. Zucker from the TG community.

⁴¹ Paul McHugh, “Surgical Sex,” *First Things*, November 2014, 36.

OVERVIEW OF THE GENDER TRANSITION PROCESS

Tebbe, Moradi, and Ege identify children who conform to their biological gender as “Cisgender,” while children who present symptoms of GD are identified as, “Gender non-conforming.”⁴² A gender non-conformist must transition through three successive phases in order to complete the TG process. The diagnosis of GD occurs at some point between initiating phase one and entering phase two. Each consecutive phase of gender transition involves an increased degree of time, cost, pain, risk, and commitment from the individual. Due to these and other variables, many TGs are never able to achieve a full transition.

The first phase requires the individual to transition socially from one gender to another. As documented by Ringo, direct media contact typically guides the TG through the stages of pre-awakening, awakening, identification, and maturation.⁴³ Once the social transition process has been established, the gender non-conformist can begin to identify as TG and actively pursue a GD diagnosis. After a diagnosis is achieved, the TG is able to proceed into phase two of the gender transitioning process, which involves the use of medically prescribed hormones. Hormone therapy marks the beginning of the chemical transition phase. The degree of hormone therapy will vary greatly depending on the age, health, and biological gender of the individual. Once the individual has successfully transitioned into phases one and two, the TG may pursue the surgical transitions that characterize phase three. All three phases of gender transition involve an ongoing process. As a result, each phase should be considered a spectrum rather than a specific point of transition. Furthermore, the transitioning process is different for children than it is for

⁴² Elliot A. Tebbe, Bonnie Moradi, and Engin Ege, “Revised and Abbreviated Forms of the Genderism and Transphobia Scale: Tools for Assessing Anti-trans Prejudice,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 61 no. 4 (October 2014): 582.

⁴³ Ringo, “Media Roles,” 1.

adults, and it is different for males transitioning to female (MtF) than it is for females transitioning to male (FtM).

Phase 1: Social Transition

For gender non-conforming children like Malisa X or Jazz Jennings, the gender reassignment process may begin at an early age with a social transition.⁴⁴ During this initial phase of gender transition, the individual begins to dress and behave publically like the preferred or “brain” gender.⁴⁵ Family members, teachers, and members of society are advised to refer to biological male gender non-conformists with female pronouns and biological female gender non-conformists with male pronouns in order to affirm and reinforce the child’s decision to conform to the non-biological gender.⁴⁶ TG children and adults alike are also granted the right to be universally accepted as their brain gender. Acceptance includes allowing the TGs to participate as their brain gender in sports or other activities and utilizing the restrooms designated for their brain gender.⁴⁷ During the social transition phase, Tebbe et al. have identified a general reluctance by society to accept gender non-conforming children.⁴⁸ As the TGs

⁴⁴ Ahmad et al., “Gender Dysphoria,” 173–75.

⁴⁵ James Poniewozik, “Review: An Extraordinary, Ordinary Girlhood.” Jazz is quoted in the book, *I Am Jazz*, as saying, “I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way!”

⁴⁶ Ahmad et al., “Gender Dysphoria,” 174. Ahmad et al. issue the following warning to health care providers: “Of all the things that could offend a trans person or lead them to feel misunderstood, excluded and distrustful, mistakes involving forms of gender-related speech are perhaps the most upsetting.”

⁴⁷ Nuttbrock et al., “Gender Identity Affirmation,” 108–111.

⁴⁸ Tebbe et al., “Genderism and Transphobia Scale,” 582–83. This social resistance has been labeled “transphobia,” or more recently “anti-trans prejudice” by TG advocates.

progresses through the transitional phases, their sensitivity to anti-trans prejudice becomes more pronounced. The final step of social transition involves an official name change.⁴⁹

A critical stage in the social transitioning process for the gender non-conformist is the selection and assignment of a new name. Steinmetz notes, “Every trans person has their own naming story—if choosing a new name was part of their transitioning process (*sic*).”⁵⁰ Steinmetz continues to emphasize the anti-trans prejudice of refusing to identify the gender non-conformist by the desired name:

The process of adopting a new name can be messy in one’s personal life, with less accepting people intentionally using an old name or well-meaning people simply forgetting and making mistakes.... Using the name someone asks to be called can make a big difference to the person making that request.... To not use the name can seem to be the opposite: a rejection of who a transgender person is saying they are, or an insinuation that they are not really who they say they are. Even when it’s done on accident, this act is sometimes called “dead naming” a transgender person.⁵¹

So crucial is the TG name change to the process and so powerful is the threat of transphobia for the “dead-naming” guilty party, that even large corporations like Apple have taken precautions to avoid an anti-trans prejudice label. Heigl reports that the popular intelligent assistant Siri “has begun correcting people who refer to Caitlyn Jenner as ‘Bruce.’ ... And if you ask

⁴⁹ Ahmad et al., “Gender Dysphoria,” 180–81. Ahmad et al. note, “Social gender role transition is usually considered to have started from the point that the individual makes an official name change.”

⁵⁰ Katy Steinmetz, “How Transgender People Choose Their New Names,” Time.com <<http://time.com/3904004/caitlyn-jenner-trans-name-vanity-fair/>> (accessed 15 July 2015).

⁵¹ Ibid.

Siri, 'What gender is Bruce Jenner?' Siri tells you, 'The answer is female.'⁵²

Although the TG individual will continue to transition socially into the new gender for the remainder of life, Dr. Gail Knudson notes that medical and psychological professionals generally require children and teens to complete two years of social transition prior to progressing to the next phase of the gender transitioning process. Most adults, on the other hand, are required to complete only one year of social transitioning before being eligible for additional procedures.⁵³ Since the initial social transition phase does not typically involve any medical or surgical procedures, an individual who identifies socially as a TG is capable of fully transitioning back to the biological/birth gender.

Phase 2: Chemical Transition

Once all necessary social transition requirements have been satisfied, the TG progresses into phase two in order to continue the gender transitioning process. Here, not only does the transition process for the gender non-conformist become more invasive and more permanent, but time and money also become major factors. As the TG child approaches puberty, the individual will require the aid of hormone therapy in order to stave off gender-specific body developments. Although all TGs who desire surgical procedures must pass through the chemical transition phase, only children have the unique opportunity to participate in puberty-blocking hormone therapy. Therefore, the hormone therapy phase for gender non-conforming children involves two stages, while it is restricted to one stage for adults seeking gender transition. The recent advent of this early stage of hormone

⁵² Alex Heigl, "Siri Has Started Correcting People Who Call Caitlyn Jenner 'Bruce,'" People.com <<http://www.people.com/article/siri-correcting-people-caitlyn-jenner-bruce>> (accessed 19 July 2015).

⁵³ Staley, "When Boys Would Rather Not," 45–47.

therapy for children is presently at the forefront of the medical, ethical, and legal debate over TG procedures.

The first stage of hormone therapy specific to children requires the administration of puberty blockers.⁵⁴ While most TG advocates claim that the effects of puberty blockers are safe and reversible, Geddes notes, “Although the effects of puberty-blockers are not permanent—natural puberty should resume if the drugs are stopped—few trials have explored the long-term effects of delaying puberty in this age group.”⁵⁵ The chemical transitioning phase for TG children begins when puberty hormone blockers are administered during prepubescence in order to postpone or prevent the development of secondary sexual features intrinsic to the TG’s biological gender. These characteristics include breasts and menses for biological females; and the growth of hair, muscle, and the lowering of the voice for biological males.⁵⁶ Gibson and Catlin note, “The primary goals of hormone use for those children who believe they need sex reassignment are twofold. The first is to eliminate, to the degree possible, the hormonally induced sex characteristics of the birth assigned gender, and secondly, to induce those of the desired

⁵⁴ George, “Body Swap,” 42. George explains that the brain releases gonadotrophin-releasing hormone (GnRH) at the onset of puberty. Dutch scientists have pioneered GnRH blockers to postpone the onset of puberty.

⁵⁵ Linda Geddes, “Puberty Blockers Recommended for Transsexual Teens,” *New Scientist*, December 2008, 8-9. The lack of study is due to the fact that these hormone blockers have been available only for the past 10–15 years. Puberty blockers were first administered in the Netherlands in the late 1990s. As a result, no long-term data exists on their side effects. Geddes estimates the cost of puberty blockers at \$800/month, while Geore estimates closer to \$1000/month. Smaller doses of GnRH blockers can be administered orally, while larger doses need to be injected.

⁵⁶ Sobralske, “Primary Care Needs,” 135.

gender.”⁵⁷ Although a lifetime of hormone therapy is required for the TG in order to maintain gender-reassignment, puberty blockers are effective only if administered to children and teens.⁵⁸

The second stage of hormone therapy involves the administration of estrogen to biological males transitioning to female and testosterone to biological females transitioning to male.⁵⁹ The administration of these hormones in children and adults alike marks the point of no return in the gender transition process where, unlike puberty blockers. Zucker states, “The effects ... are not reversible.”⁶⁰ The irreversible consequences of estrogen and testosterone usage range from infertility,⁶¹ to liver damage, to the development of secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite biological gender, to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.⁶² In order to complete phase two of the transitioning process, proceed to surgical options of phase three, and maintain the chemically induced gender transition features, TGs must continue to take the gender-appropriate hormone therapy for the remainder of their lives.⁶³ The individual TG is capable of fully transitioning back to the biological gender at any

⁵⁷ Bethany Gibson and Anita Caitlin, “Care of the Child with the Desire to Change Genders—Part I,” *Urologic Nursing* 31, no. 4 (2011): 225.

⁵⁸ Craig Kline, “What is Gender Reassignment Surgery? A Medical Assessment,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 37–38.

⁵⁹ Gibson and Catlin, “Care of the Child—Part I,” 225.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Staley, “When Boys Would Rather Not,” 47.

⁶¹ Hartocollis, “New Girl.”

⁶² Gibson and Catlin, “Care of the Child—Part I,” 225–26.

⁶³ Ahmad et al., “Gender Dysphoria,” 182.

point in phase two, but some side effects will persist depending upon the length and strength of hormone therapy.

Phase 3: Surgical Transition

The final phase of the gender transitioning process involves sexual reassignment surgery (SRS).⁶⁴ Medically, Gibson reports, “SRS is considered to be an irreversible treatment.”⁶⁵ SRS is not restricted to one surgery, but instead involves a series of surgeries during the third phase of the transition process. These SRS often occur throughout the remainder of the TG’s life. TG SRS can be broken down into four types of surgical procedures. The order and extent of the surgeries will vary depending on the gender, objectives, health, and financial resources of each individual TG. The first category addresses primary MtF SRS. The next category describes secondary MtF SRS. The third category contains the primary FtM SRS. And the final category involves secondary FtM SRS. MtF and FtM primary SRS are popularly referred to as “bottom” surgeries, while secondary MtF and FtM surgeries are generally deemed cosmetic or “top” surgeries.⁶⁶

MALE TO FEMALE SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

The primary gender reassignment surgical procedures required for a TG to transition MtF include an orchiectomy,⁶⁷ a

⁶⁴ Bethany Gibson and Anita Catlin, “Care of the Child with the Desire to Change Genders—Part III: Male-to-Female Transition,” *Urologic Nursing* 31, no. 4 (2011), 236–40.

⁶⁵ Bethany Gibson, “Care of the Child with the Desire to Change Genders—Part II: Female-to-Male Transition.” *Urologic Nursing* 31, no. 4 (2011): 231.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Kline, “Gender Reassignment Surgery,” 41. Removal of the testicles.

penectomy,⁶⁸ and genital reconstructive surgery.⁶⁹ During genital reconstruction, the erectile muscle is removed from the shaft of the penis. A functioning neo-vagina is then constructed on a biological male either by inverting the remaining skin of the penis into the TG's pelvic region or by removing a segment of the colon and transplanting it into the TG's body.⁷⁰ A portion of the glans preserved from the penectomy is used to construct an innervated clitoris, and plastic surgery creates the rest of the necessary neovulva.⁷¹ However, even with hormone and psychological therapy, the TG's biologically male body will continue to identify any reconstructed female neo-genitalia as wounds and naturally attempt to heal. As a result, a lifetime of post-operative care is required to maintain the physical MtF transition.⁷² This procedure is not reversible.

Secondary MtF SRS involves a wide variety of cosmetic surgical procedures that produce gender-specific, effeminate results on the TG. These SRS range from breast implants, to facial reconstruction, to chondrolaryngoplasty.⁷³ Secondary SRS can be sought before or after primary SRS. These "top" procedures, most

⁶⁸ Ibid. Removal of the penis.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁷⁰ Ibid. The procedure is termed "neovaginoplasty."

⁷¹ Ahmad et al. note that MtF is the most common transition ("Gender Dysphoria," 173).

⁷² Gibson and Catlin, "Care of the Child—Part III," 233–35. The regular insertion of a prosthetic device into the neo-vagina is required in order to keep the wound open. This is part of the life-long post-surgical care required for the MtF TG. FtM TGs face similar post-SRS obstacles, including the potential for gangrene on the neo-phallus.

⁷³ Kline, "Gender Reassignment Surgery," 39. Removal of the Adam's apple.

of which are not reversible, accent the arduous and costly physical transitioning process from one gender to another.

FEMALE TO MALE SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

The primary gender reassignment surgical procedures required for a TG to transition FtM include a hysterectomy,⁷⁴ a vaginectomy,⁷⁵ and genital reconstructive surgery. Prior to primary SRS, the FtM TG must choose between either a metoidioplasty⁷⁶ or a phalloplasty.⁷⁷ In both cases of metoidioplasty and phalloplasty, the ureter is elongated and the clitoris is surgically removed and reshaped to form a neo-phallus capable of urination. A metoidioplasty will result in a smaller neo-phallus with less possible post-SRS complications. A phalloplasty is neo-genital reconstruction that involves grafting forearm skin and transplanted body fat onto the pelvic region. While this SRS results in a larger neo-phallus, a phalloplasty also has much greater potential for post-SRS complications.⁷⁸ Like MtF bottom surgery, FtM bottom surgery requires a tremendous financial commitment, a lengthy hospital stay, and a lifetime of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 42. Removal of the uterus. This is generally accompanied by a salpingo-oophorectomy, or removal of the fallopian tubes and ovaries.

⁷⁵ Gibson, "Care of the Child"—Part II," 231-32. Removal of the vagina.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* A small neo-phallus is fashioned out of the clitoris and surrounding tissue. A metoidioplasty is incapable of erection, even with the aid of prosthetic erectile devices.

⁷⁷ Kline, "Gender Reassignment Surgery," 40. The construction of a larger, artificial phallus. A phalloplasty results in a neo-phallus that has the potential for erection with the aid of prosthetic erectile devices.

⁷⁸ Gibson, "Care of the Child—Part II," 234.

post-operative care in order to complete the transition. This procedure is not reversible.

Secondary FtM SRS also includes a wide array of cosmetic surgical procedures that produce gender-specific, masculine results on the TG. These secondary SRS range from a double mastectomy to a scrotoplasty⁷⁹ to rhinoplasty.⁸⁰ Like the MtF, secondary FtM SRS can be performed either before or after the primary SRS. These procedures, most of which are not reversible, also serve to accentuate the painful and expensive physical transition from one gender to another.

BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER TRANSITION

The combination of media exposure, psychological reinforcement, modern medicine, and surgical skill has afforded the culture the ability and opportunity to physically alter the appearance of a human being's biological birth gender. However, the process necessary to complete gender reassignment is long, painful, expensive, dangerous, and ultimately irreversible. This transformation process is currently being pursued and promoted by a growing number of young children, parents, and powerful TG advocates. Therefore, the church must be prepared to answer the question: Is biological gender a personal choice, or does God assign the gender of human beings at conception?

⁷⁹ Ibid., 231. Surgical creation of testicles. Although technically "bottom" surgery, I have elected to include it as a secondary SRS due to the fact that it serves a purely aesthetic function for the FtM TG.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 235. Facial reconstructive surgery particularly pertaining to the nose.

Gender Assignment in Genesis 1:27

In the biblical creation account, Scripture thrice employs the Hebrew verb בָּרָא (created)⁸¹ to emphasize that the Creator God was at work on the sixth day, deliberately fashioning the pinnacle of his creation with great precision and intention.⁸² During this particular section of the narrative the focus is on אָדָם (man). Clark notes here that “man” or, “Adam” is the Hebrew word for human or human being. Moreover, it can be translated ... the human race.”⁸³ Scripture proceeds to emphasize the distinction between the male and female genders at creation by implementing the substantive adjectives זָכָר (male) and נְקִיבָה (female) respectively. Matthews notes that the “Hebrew terms for ‘male’ and ‘female’ as opposed to man and woman, particularly express human sexuality.”⁸⁴ As a result, this clause carries the inflected nuance that can be paraphrased as: “God created the human race in His image.... He created a male human being, and He created a female human being.”⁸⁵ Strachen elaborates further on the intentionality of a divine gender distinction in the creation narrative by stating, “Our manhood or womanhood is not incidental; it has been given us by God as a

⁸¹ All citations from the English Bible, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the ESV.

⁸² Ross notes, “This verb ... is used in Scripture exclusively for the activity of God” (*Creation & Blessing*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 105-6).

⁸³ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 13.

⁸⁴ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC, Vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 173.

⁸⁵ Translation mine.

gift.”⁸⁶ This intentionality of the Creator was captured by the writers of the LXX when they translated the Hebrew text of Genesis with the Greek nouns ἄρσην (male) and θήλυ (female). The distinction between biological genders is a reflection of the glory of God at creation.⁸⁷ This biological gender distinction is maintained when God creates each subsequent life in the womb (Ps 139:13ff).

Gender Non-Conformity in Deuteronomy 22:5 & 1 Corinthians 11:3–16

Both the OT and NT maintain a clear distinction between the male and female birth genders by prohibiting human beings from altering their physical appearance to look like the opposite gender. Deuteronomy 22:5 forbids females to wear garments or don items that are culturally recognized as masculine, and likewise forbids males to dress in garments that are culturally recognized as feminine in order to clearly delineate between male and female. Block identifies the Deuteronomy 22:5 passage as “a prohibition against cross-dressing and transvestite practices” that functions to “preserve the order built into creation.”⁸⁸ Block proceeds to elaborate on this biblical injunction against gender non-conformity by stating, “For a person to wear anything associated with the opposite gender confuses one’s sexual identity and blurs established boundaries.”⁸⁹ Critics argue that this biblical prohibition is solely

⁸⁶ Owen Strachen, “Transgender Identity—Wishing Away God’s Design,” *Answersingenesis.org*, <<https://answersingenesis.org/family/gender/transgender-identity-wishing-away-gods-design/>> (accessed 15 July 2015).

⁸⁷ Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 112-13.

⁸⁸ Daniel Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 512.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

directed at the cultic functions of ANE temple prostitutes.⁹⁰ However, Davidson notes, “Although the cross-dressing of cult functionaries may have been the predominant background to this prohibition, the wording of the legislation goes beyond a cult setting to include any and all circumstances of men dressing like women and vice versa.”⁹¹ Merrill delineates the consequences of those who would act contrary to the Creator’s intention of gender distinction, stating, “Anyone who so blurs these divinely ordered distinctions is... ‘an abomination of the Lord,’ one who can expect most serious consequences for his deeds.”⁹² Davidson appeals to Kaiser when identifying the nuance of the gender-specific תּוֹעֵבָה (abomination) transgression as “violations of the created order”:

Along with its connections to homosexuality and the fertility cults, this legislation also (and primarily) serves for the “maintenance of the sanctity of the sexes” in opposition to “the tendency to obliterate all sexual distinctions” which “often leads to licentiousness and promotes an unnaturalness opposed to God’s created order.”⁹³

In conclusion, the Deuteronomy 22:5 passage provides a clear prohibition against any blurring of male and female gender distinctions that are ordained at creation and assigned at birth.

Paul maintains the importance of distinguishing between biological male and biological female genders by appealing to the created order in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16. The interpretation of this section centers on Paul’s use of κεφαλή (head). Although Arndt,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 171.

⁹² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 297–98.

⁹³ Ibid.

Danker, and Bauer limit the definition of κεφαλή to either a literal head or figurative authority,⁹⁴ this restriction has been challenged by contemporary egalitarian scholarship to include source as a third alternative. Grudem makes a strong case for Paul's use of κεφαλή as authority by drawing on both Scripture and the writings of Chrysostom.⁹⁵ Thistleton summarizes the lexical argument surrounding κεφαλή by declaring, "In whatever way we choose to translate κεφαλή ... Paul is setting up a complex and conscious dialectic between a gender distinctive creative order."⁹⁶

Throughout the 1 Corinthians 11:3ff passage, Paul maintains the distinction between biological male and female genders by forbidding men to participate in public worship with head-coverings while simultaneously commanding women to wear head coverings. Paul's injunction is reminiscent of Moses' gender specific prohibition in Deuteronomy 22:5. With regards to Paul's command against cross-dressing, Clark notes,

Even if it is impossible to completely determine the full cultural context of Paul's ruling, the context of the passage clearly indicates that Paul linked the practice of headcoverings with the order in men's and women's relationships ... for Paul and the Corinthian Christians, the rule about headcovering expressed the roles of men and women.⁹⁷

In order to emphasize the sinfulness of the offense, Paul thrice describes any gender non-conforming behavior by

⁹⁴ W. Arndt, F. W. Danker, and W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 2000), 541-42. Cited as BDAG.

⁹⁵ Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of κεφαλή (Head)," *JETS* 44, no. 1 (March 2001): 25-34.

⁹⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 811.

⁹⁷ Clark, *Man and Woman*, 170.

Corinthian believers as shameful by twice utilizing the verb *καταισχύνει* (dishonors) (1 Cor 11:4, 5) followed by the adjective *αἰσχρὸν* (disgraceful) (1 Cor 11:6). The result of gender non-conformity is behavior that shames both the creation and the Creator.

Paul proceeds to instruct the Corinthians to maintain biological gender distinctions by twice appealing to the created order. First, Paul references the distinct biological roles of each gender (1 Cor 11:8–9) that are explained in detail in the creation narrative (Gen 2:18–24). Then Paul concludes his argument with a rhetorical question regarding *ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ* (nature itself) (1 Cor 11:14). Paul's use of the pronoun *αὐτῆ* (itself) functions reflexively in order to emphasize *φύσις* (nature). Arndt, Danker and Bauer define *φύσις* as a "condition or circumstance as determined by birth, natural endowment/condition."⁹⁸ The nuance of Paul's statement can be paraphrased as follows: "The natural biological features of men and women at birth demonstrate a distinction between the genders that is evident from creation, do they not?"⁹⁹ In conclusion, Paul maintains a clear distinction between male and female genders based on biological gender assignment evident from creation and affirmed by Moses in the law. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each image-bearing human being to respond appropriately by acknowledging and accepting personal biological gender assignment from God.

Gender Dysphoria in Romans 1:24–32

In this passage, Paul elaborates on the consequences of the human race's rejection of the Creator God (Rom 1:20) and their subsequent mistreatment of both his image and his creation (Rom 1:24ff). Cranfield asserts that, by introducing this section with *Διὸ* (Therefore), Paul "indicates that what is related in this

⁹⁸ BDAG, 1069.

⁹⁹ Translation mine.

verse was God's response to the perverseness of men just described"¹⁰⁰ Since men reject God, Paul proceeds to thrice employ the aorist active verb παρέδωκεν (gave them up) (Rom 1:24, 26, 28) in order to indicate the comprehensive action of God in delivering the human race to destruction. Cranfield further notes, "The thrice repeated παρέδωκεν αὐτούς ὁ θεός is surely so emphatic as to suggest that a deliberate, positive act of God is meant."¹⁰¹ However, Davidson affirms that "Rom 1:24-27 contains strong intertextual echoes with the Genesis creation accounts, in particular with Gen 1:26-30."¹⁰² Here, the threefold repetitive action of God's judgment provides an antithesis to the threefold mention of God's creative act in Genesis 1:27.

Paul continues to allude to the Genesis creation narrative while pronouncing judgment on the human race throughout this section. Schreiner notes,

Paul selected the unusual words θῆλυς (female) and ἄρσεν (male) rather than γυνή (woman) and ἄνθρωπος (man) respectively. In doing so he drew on the creation account of Genesis, which uses the same words (Gen 1:27 LXX) These words emphasize the sexual distinctiveness of male and female.¹⁰³

Paul indicates that the judgment of God is evidenced among human beings whose actions are παρὰ φύσιν (against nature) (Rom 1:26). Schreiner affirms that Paul is again referring to sexual behavior that is "contrary to the created order."¹⁰⁴ Therefore Paul, once again, thrice denounces gender non-

¹⁰⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, vol. 1, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 120.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 637.

¹⁰³ Thomas R Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 95.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 96.

conforming behavior as dishonorable; first with the infinitive ἀτιμάζεσθαι (to the dishonoring) (Rom 1:24) followed by the synonymous nouns ἀτιμία (dishonorable) (Rom 1:26) and ἀσχημοσύνην (shameless) (Rom 1:27) respectively. Paul's pronouncement of judgment on behavior contrary to the created order is broad enough to encompass the entire LGBT spectrum. Cranfield further captures the nuance of παρὰ φύσιν by describing sexual behavior that is "contrary to the intention of the Creator."¹⁰⁵ The Creator's intention for human sexuality is stated in Genesis 1:27–28 as a permanent, monogamous, heterosexual marriage relationship that is defined according to the biological gender of human beings at their creation. As a result, Paul concludes this section with a strong pronouncement of judgment upon both the one who participates in behavior contrary to the intention of the Creator and created order and the one who approves of behavior contrary to the intention of the Creator and the created order (Rom 1:32). Since God's intention at creation was to maintain a distinction between biological male and female genders, Scripture reveals that any deviation from the created order is sin deserving of God's judgment.

Gender Dysphoria, Eunuchs, and Redemption

Although eunuchs are listed infrequently in Scripture, their presence offers a unique perspective to contemporary TG issues. Kedar-Kpofstein explains,

Eunuchs in the broad sense are men who are incapable of procreation as a result of a developmental defect or as a result of damage to the testicles from a surgical operation.... In the narrower sense, this refers to the voluntary castration of males, a phenomenon with cultural-historical as well as sociological implications.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, 125.

¹⁰⁶ B. Kedar-Kpofstein, "סְרִיט," *TDOT* 10:346–47.

Furthermore, Patterson asserts that the Hebrew term **קָרִיס** (eunuch) is applied to “castrated men in key positions in the various nations of the ancient near east.”¹⁰⁷ This term is used to describe Jezebel’s attendants-turned-executioners (2 Kgs 9:32). Because the law excludes castrated males from participating in the religious activities of Israel, Patterson maintains that Jezebel introduced the custom into the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and subsequent kings perpetuated the practice.¹⁰⁸ Deuteronomy 23:1 contains the direct prohibition against ancient sexual reassignment and eunuchs:

... No one whose testicles are crushed (**לֹא-יָבֵא פְצוּעֵ-דִבְכָּא**) or whose male organ is **cut off** (**וְיִכְרֹת שְׂפָכָה**) shall enter the assembly of the LORD.

Block notes the close connection between castration and paganism in the ANE, describing the ancient orchietomy and penectomy procedure as follows:

The male organs of procreation could have been mutilated either by crushing the testicles or surgically removing them ... The testicles of boys destined for “eunuchship” would be crushed shortly before they reached puberty.... Cutting off the penis involved more radical surgery than crushing of removing testicles, and seems to have been intended to change a person’s gender.¹⁰⁹

Kedar-Kpofstein concurs with Block, stating, “Emasculation as a religious act deserves mention, especially as practiced in certain religions in Asia Minor. Myths tell of gods who castrate themselves ... and some cults include eunuchs as priests.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ R. D. Patterson, “קָרִיס,” *TWOT*, 634–35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 534–35.

¹¹⁰ Kedar-Kpofstein, *TDOT* 10: 347.

Kalland qualifies the act described in Deuteronomy 23:1: “Eunuchs excluded from the assembly were those deliberately made eunuchs either by crushing or surgically removing their private parts.”¹¹¹ As a result, OT Scripture offers little hope for the eunuch to join the community of faith until Isaiah 56:3b–5:

... let not the **eunuch** say (וְאֵלֵי־יֹאמֵר הַפְּרִיִים), “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the LORD: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and ... a name **better** than sons and daughters (וְשֵׁם טוֹב מִבְּנִים) (וּמִבְּנוֹת); I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be **cut off** (לֹא יִכָּרֵת).” (emphasis added)

In this passage, Isaiah looks forward to the eunuch who chooses to follow the Lord after being surgically altered and then regrets his physical condition. Grogan explains the metaphor, “A dry tree bears no fruit; a eunuch begets no children.”¹¹² Yet God promises the redeemed eunuch something even better than the fruit of sons or daughters that would have been produced from natural sexual relations. Furthermore, the parallel use of *כָּרַת* (cut off) in Isaiah 56:5 and in Deuteronomy 23:1 is striking. In a none-too-politically-correct manner, God assures the eunuch that, unlike his genitals, once he receives the name of the LORD, it will never be cut off from him. Although the Isaiah passage does not condone sexual reassignment, it does offer the hope of redemption to eunuchs and individuals who have undergone surgical sexual reassignment.

There are two NT occurrences of εὐνοῦχος, a Greek noun either transliterated as “eunuch” or defined as “castrated

¹¹¹ Earl Kalland, *Deuteronomy, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1981), 3:140.

¹¹² Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 6:315.

person.”¹¹³ The first occurs in the context of marriage and divorce. After using the creation narrative of Genesis to teach his disciples that a divorced individual who remarries commits adultery (Matt 19:9), Jesus responds to his disciples’ statement, “It is better not to marry” (Matt 19:10) by declaring in Matthew 19:12:

For there are eunuchs (εὐνοῦχοι) who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs(εὐνοῦχοι) who have been made eunuchs (εὐνουχίσθησαν) by men, and there are eunuchs (εὐνοῦχοι) who have made themselves eunuchs (εὐνούχισαν) for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.

In this passage, Christ is not identifying the last group of individuals as those who have sexually reassigned themselves in order to serve God. Instead, as BDAG notes regarding the final two verbal forms of the word, “The context requires the figurative interpretation for the second occurrence, and the literal for the first.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, Christ is instructing his disciples that there are three types of individuals for whom it is better not to marry: Individuals born with defective genitalia, individuals who have undergone physical alterations to their genitalia, and individuals like Jeremiah (Jer 16:2) and Paul (1 Cor 7:7) who choose celibacy in order to serve the Lord.¹¹⁵ The focus of Christ’s statement to his disciples is on the third group of individuals. These individuals neither alter their gender nor mutilate their bodies, but instead sacrifice marriage for service to Christ.

The second significant NT occurrence of εὐνοῦχος (eunuch) occurs in Acts 8:26ff. In this passage, Philip encounters an Ethiopian εὐνοῦχος returning from Jerusalem. Luke’s use of εὐνοῦχος (eunuch) in place of προσήλυτος (proselyte) lends

¹¹³ BDAG, 409.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 9:419.

support to the view that this individual had been physically altered as a youth in order to work closely with Queen Candace (Acts 8:27).¹¹⁶ MacArthur captures the plight of the eunuch when he states,

He was likely an actual eunuch ... since Luke uses both eunuch and court official to describe him. If that were true, he would have been denied access to the temple (Deut 23:1) and therefore been unable to participate fully in the Jewish worship services. Further, he would not have been allowed to become a full proselyte to Judaism.¹¹⁷

Many expositors, like Pohill,¹¹⁸ concur with MacArthur, identifying the eunuch as a castrated male official. The first significant feature of this passage is that Philip is commanded by the Holy Spirit to approach the eunuch (Acts 8:29). Next, Philip engages the eunuch in spiritual conversation (Acts 8:30). Then Philip accepts the eunuch's invitation to sit with him and teach him the Scriptures (Acts 8:31–35). Finally, Philip baptizes the redeemed eunuch (Acts 8:36–39). Although nothing more is mentioned about the eunuch in Scripture, one can only imagine his rejoicing (Acts 8:39) as he continues reading Isaiah and reaches chapter 56. The glaring spiritual truth this passage reveals is that, just as Phillip ministered to the eunuch, Christians have a responsibility to share the gospel with TG individuals.

¹¹⁶ Richard Longnecker, *Acts, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 8:363.

¹¹⁷ John MacArthur, *Acts 1–12, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody 1994), 254.

¹¹⁸ John Pohill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures*, *The NIV New American Commentary*, eds. Linda Scott and Christopher Church, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 226.

Redemption for the TG in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 Paul affirms that individuals who participate in a LGBT lifestyle that is contrary to the intention of the Creator and created order can be redeemed. After listing a sampling of activities that would exclude an individual from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10), Paul reminds the Corinthian believers *καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε* (And such were some of you) (1 Cor 6:11). Robertson captures Paul’s emphasis with the phrase “And these things ... were (some of you).”¹¹⁹ Paul’s use of the imperfect active verb *εἰμί* (were) carries three implications. First, some of the believers in Corinth formerly practiced or identified with behaviors contrary to the intention of the Creator. Second, Paul’s intended audience had ceased practicing these behaviors. Third, based on the Romans 1:24ff passage, the individuals who once engaged in these behaviors are deserving of condemnation.

The 1 Corinthians 6:11 passage turns on this fulcrum point as Paul reminds the Corinthian believers who formerly behaved contrary to the intention of the Creator about the power of redemption in Jesus Christ. Rather than remaining in a hopeless state of judgment, Paul proceeds to thrice implement the strong adversative particle *ἀλλὰ* (but) (1 Cor 6:11). First, Paul uses *ἀλλὰ* to introduce the indirect middle¹²⁰ verb *ἀπελούσασθε* (You were washed). Then Paul twice employs *ἀλλὰ* to introduce the passive verbs *ἡγιάσθητε* (You were sanctified) and *ἐδικαιώθητε* (You were justified) respectively. By employing the indirect middle and passive voice, Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians did not alter their own standing with God, but rather they were washed ... sanctified ... justified ... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, even though the Corinthians once behaved contrary to

¹¹⁹ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1933), 4:120.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* Thiselton identifies this as a “middle of personal interest” (*First Epistle*, 453).

the Creator's intention prior to experiencing redemption, they were saved by faith in Christ.

Sanctification of the Redeemed TG in Romans 12:1–2

Paul teaches that the sanctification process of redeemed individuals involves both the σώματα (bodies) (Rom 12:1) and the νοῦς (mind) (Rom 12:2). Believers are commanded to have their minds renewed in order to accept God's will for their bodies. Paul emphasizes this fact by contrasting the negated passive imperative συσχηματίζεσθε (do not be conformed) and the passive imperative μεταμορφοῦσθε (be transformed) with the strong adversative particle ἀλλά (but) (Rom 12:2). This formula is reminiscent of Paul's contrast of the Corinthian behavior before and after salvation in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. Furthermore, Paul's use of συσχηματίζεσθε functions progressively carrying the force of "stop being fashioned."¹²¹ By utilizing the force of the passive voice, Paul commands his believing audience to cease allowing the influence of the αἰῶνι (world) to conform an individual to the thinking process of the present age.

Rather than be conformed to the thinking of the culture, Paul commands believers to μεταμορφοῦσθε. Regarding this command, Schreiner notes,

Paul ... is worried that their adaptation to this world will shape them in every dimension of their lives. It is instructive to note that he contrasts being conformed to "this age" ... with "the renewal of the mind." ... This suggests that conformity to this age embraces thinking patterns that are alien to the renewal of the mind The reference to αἰῶνι (age) is in accord with the Jewish view of the two ages; the present age is evil and the age to come is blessed.... Believers resist the pressures to conform to the present evil age by the renewal of their minds. The downward spiral of thinking traced in Rom 1:18–32 is reversed in those who are redeemed from sin.¹²²

¹²¹ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4:402.

¹²² Schreiner, *Romans*, 647.

The dramatic transformation process Paul describes begins by altering the thinking process of believers.¹²³ Paul describes the result of altered thinking in the life of the redeemed individual as characterized by the ability δοκιμάζειν (to discern) the will of God (Rom 12:2). In order to emphasize the superiority of God's will over the thinking of the world, Paul implements the three positive adjectives of ἀγαθὸν (good), εὐάρεστον (acceptable), καὶ τέλειον (perfect) (Rom 12:2). Furthermore, Cranfield notes, "That discernment of the will of God will be followed by obedient acceptance of it."¹²⁴ In conclusion, the Romans 12 passage teaches that the sanctification process of believers involves rejecting the teaching of the culture and instead accepting the will of God regarding the Creator's intention for the biological bodies of believers.

Sanctification and 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

Paul's instructions regarding the practice of circumcision after redemption also provides the church with valuable principles that can be applied to the redeemed TG's condition. Paul begins 1 Corinthians 7:17 with Εἰ μὴ, which is translated variously as "But" (NKJV) "Only" (ESV, NAS), and "Nevertheless" (NIV) and even omitted (NLT). The interpretative nuance of the passage is altered depending on whether or not Εἰ μὴ carries the force of "Nevertheless" or "Unless/except that." Robertson identifies Εἰ μὴ as an, "Elliptical condition ... except that,"¹²⁵ arguing that it both looks back on marriage and forward on circumcision, thereby restricting the application of license and liberty to these two areas of the life of a believer. Mare rightly disagrees with Robertson, stating, "It is best to translate ... as 'but/nevertheless,' meaning that Paul is expanding his thought of

¹²³ Ibid., 648.

¹²⁴ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, 2:609.

¹²⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4:139.

the Christian's call to other areas besides that of marital status."¹²⁶ Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:17–18,

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision (περιτετηγμένος τις ἐκλήθη, μὴ ἐπισπάσθω). Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

Here Paul addresses the issue of circumcision by contrasting the passive voice of the first two verbs with the middle voice of the imperative. Paul states that, if the removal of foreskin preceded an individual's call to Christ, then the individual is to remain in their current foreskin-less state (1 Cor 7:19). The same admonition is given to the one who is not circumcised; he is to remain uncircumcised. The principle of the passage that can be applied to the circumcised and the TG alike is that the condition of the genitals does not prohibit the sanctification process of the individual.

APPLICATION OF A BIBLICAL CONCLUSION TO A MORAL CRISIS

A survey of Scripture reveals that God ordained gender distinctions at creation. Nature bears witness to the intention of the Creator with the biological gender assignment of each human being. Since fallen human beings have rejected God, they will struggle to accept his will for the created order, including the gender differences God established at creation and maintained at conception. As a result, some individual human beings will experience a crisis of gender non-conformity. This crisis will be compounded by various philosophies in the culture, including direct media contact. These deceptions will seek to conform the individual's thinking process to the world. Therefore, when a

¹²⁶ Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians, Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:232–33.

conformed human being's mind and body gender appears to conflict, rather than altering the human mind to accept the will of the Creator, the TG will desire to alter the human body in opposition to the Creator's will. This act of defiance against the will of God is worthy of judgment. However, God offers hope to all human beings, including TG human beings, who can be redeemed through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church must be prepared to participate in the compassionate ministry of evangelism and discipleship in order to aid TGs in accepting the will of God for their lives (Rom 10:14). This will be a complicated process that will require the careful application of Scripture to a variety of situations that involve the relationship of the church to the TG before and after redemption.

How Should the Church Respond to Gender Non-conformists From Within?

Now concerning gender non-conformity from within, the church must prepare a fourfold action plan in order to minister to the anticipated increase in the number of gender non-conformists and individuals with GD in the near future. Children of redeemed parents whose minds have been influenced by direct TG media contact are of particular concern. Ideally the church will intervene early in phase one of the gender transitioning process, thereby averting the lasting consequences incurred by the TG in phases two and three. First, due to the fact that the TG movement has identified direct media contact as a primary means of recruitment, redeemed parents must be instructed by the church to guard their children against the intentionally deceptive philosophy of the world as portrayed in the media (Col 2:8). It is critical for the church to prevent cultural conformity through media-induced pre-awakening and awakening identity events. Second, the church must teach and model sound doctrine that includes a biblical understanding of masculine and feminine roles that are established at creation and defined by biological birth. Third, the church must neither dismiss nor ignore the TG issue in the culture at large. Instead,

the church should challenge the positive portrayal of TG role models that will influence its members. The church must accomplish this without resorting to insults or calling for violence. And finally, the church must provide counseling and support for individuals struggling with gender non-conformity. This support should intentionally and lovingly counsel the individual to accept the will of God concerning biological gender assignment.

How Should the Church Respond to Gender Non-conformists From Without?

Now concerning the church's relationship to the TG in the culture, the church must be ever mindful that the person with TG issues is the mission field, not the enemy (Eph 6:12). Regardless of the phase of transition, the individual with GD is still an image bearer of God capable of experiencing redemption in Christ. The washing, sanctification, and redemption of the TG must be the ultimate goal of the church as it relates to the entire LGBT community, including the TG (1 Cor 5:9-10). Depending on the age and current phase of transition at the time of contact, the church must also take into consideration the severe physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual, and financial trauma that the TG has suffered. In order to reach the TG with the gospel, the church must respond with the compassion of Christ.

How Can the Church Respond with Compassion to TG Visitors or Seekers?

Now concerning the community of faith's response to TG visitors or seekers, the church must adopt the attitude of Philip when he encountered the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Therefore, the church must be prepared to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and engage the TG in evangelistic conversation. The church must also be willing to invest the time and compassion necessary to teach Scriptural truths to wounded individuals. In the process of developing a redemption-orientated relationship with the TG,

the church must be mindful of four important factors. First, according to Zucker, the TG is a human being who has suffered both willingly and unwillingly at the hands of others in the culture. Second, according to Ringo, the TG has been thoroughly indoctrinated by the philosophy of the culture. Third, according to Genesis 1:27, the TG still bears the image of the Creator, albeit marred. And finally, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, every TG is capable of experiencing redemption in Christ. Furthermore, the church must be sensitive to the fact that each TG is in a constant state of gender transition, and no two TGs are alike in their transitioning process. As a result, the church must be mindful of the fact that individuals who identify as GD or TG may not have progressed through all three phases of gender transition. In order to help the individual experience redemption in Christ, the church must learn to avert its focus from the condition of the TG's genitals to the condition of the TG's soul.

How Should the Church Refer to the TG by Name and Gender?

Now concerning the touchy subject of the public identification of the visiting TG, the church should initially be careful to honor the TG's chosen name and thereby avoid dead-naming the individual.¹²⁷ The church can otherwise refer to the TG with gender neutrality, gentleness, and respect (1 Pet 3:15). The implementation of gender neutrality should continue until the individual indicates that he or she is ready to begin the social transition back to biological gender and birth name. The church must be mindful of the fact that the salvation of the TG begins with the gospel of Christ. The process of sanctification always follows redemption. Therefore, the church must be careful not to confuse the order of these two events, lest, in the process of winning a temporary argument, a soul will be forever lost. The

¹²⁷ Garret Kell, "What Would Jesus Say to Someone like Leelah Alcorn?" *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 14.

ultimate goal for the church is to see redeemed TGs accept both Christ's name and their birth names. It is unlikely that this goal will be immediately realized.

Once redeemed, the TG can begin the process of sanctification. This process must include a healthy understanding of biblical gender distinctions that will aid the TG in accepting the will of God and transitioning back to the biological/birth gender (Rom 12:1–2). Considering that God created human beings male and female and considering that God forms each human being in the womb, the TG must be taught by the church to accept and appreciate the fact that biological gender is a gift from God. Furthermore, just as the TG began the MtF or FtM process with a social transition, the redeemed TG needs to be directed to begin the sanctification process back to the biological gender with social transition. Considering the length of time invested in the gender transitioning process, this re-transitioning process will require patient endurance from mature believers. Any degree of the TG's transition toward accepting the true biological gender should be treated as a celebrated event rather than an "outing." Regardless of the spiritual condition of the TG, he or she should not be forced, coerced, or otherwise manipulated into yet another social transition.

Which Restroom Should the Church Require the Visiting or Redeemed TG to Use?

Now concerning the TG's use of church restroom facilities, the church finds itself in yet another quandary. Ideally, the church will have an individual or "family" restroom available that can be designated for the TG's use. Churches planning new construction or future additions would be wise to consider the benefits of this feature. However, if this situation does not exist, when the church becomes aware of the TG's presence, the church should gently and discreetly require the TG to use the restroom of the biological/birth gender for the protection of both the TG and the members of the church. As a private religious

organization, the church can exercise such rights within the culture with minor possibility of legal repercussions.¹²⁸ Therefore, like Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:37ff) or Jerusalem (Acts 22:25ff), the church can require the TG to respect their decision. However, the church must appreciate the fact that this is a sensitive issue and must instruct its members to conduct themselves with grace and without being rude or obnoxious toward the visiting or redeemed TG. Church leadership should guide and even assist the visiting TG without drawing unnecessary attention to the situation. Furthermore, the redeemed TG and the church should come to a mutual understanding regarding facility use early in the sanctification process.

Should the Church Allow the Redeemed TG to Observe the Ordinances?

Now concerning the ordinances, Philip permitted the redeemed Ethiopian eunuch to be baptized based on his faith in Christ (Acts 8:38). Furthermore, when Paul gives instructions regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 11:17ff, he makes no distinction for the groups listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; nor does he make any distinction for the groups of married, divorced, widowed, circumcised, or uncircumcised listed in 1 Corinthians 7:1ff. Therefore, the church should permit the TG to participate in both ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper as part of the sanctification process that occurs after redemption. These ordinances are a crucial part of the individual's new identity in Christ and new relationship to the church. The individual does not need to fully transition back to the biological gender in order to observe either ordinance. For TGs redeemed in phase three of

¹²⁸ Matt Branaugh, "Transgender Activities in Churches," Churchlawandtax.com <<http://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2013/march/transgender-activities-in-churches.html>> (accessed 30 November 2015).

transition, full re-transition may never be possible. However, the redeemed TG must begin the sanctification process prior to observing the ordinances and, like all other church members, the TG must be cautioned regarding the misconduct of believers when observing the ordinances according to 1 Corinthians 11:27ff. The church must be mindful of the fact that, like gender transition, sanctification is a process.

Should the Redeemed TG Be Permitted to Join the Church?

Now concerning church membership, when Paul addresses the Corinthians, he considers them all to be a part of the church, regardless of their past behaviors (1 Cor 1:2; 6:9-11). As a result, Isaiah 56:3ff and 1 Corinthians 7:17ff do allow for redeemed TGs to enter church membership based on their spiritual condition. Other arguments from logic can support this decision. For example, if a heterosexual male were to commit an act of adultery resulting in a subsequent divorce, then that man will carry the consequences of his actions with him for the rest of his life. And even if that man were to be redeemed after the fact, his condition may not be reversible, especially if his wife has remarried in the interim. Just as a permanently altered marital status should not preclude a redeemed heterosexual male from church membership, a permanently altered physical status should not preclude a redeemed TG from church membership. However, should the TG revert back to their sinful, gender non-conforming practices after being redeemed and joining the church, the church should discipline the individual according to the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15ff and 1 Corinthians 5:1ff.

Should the Church Allow the Redeemed TG to Serve in Leadership?

Now concerning the potential for church leadership, the exact role of church leadership and qualification or disqualification for the position will depend on the spiritual maturity of the

individual and phase of transition when that individual was redeemed. If the individual is redeemed during phase one or phase two of gender transition and, over time, meets the qualifications listed 1 Timothy 3:1ff, then the redeemed individual may be considered as a candidate for leadership. However, if the individual is redeemed after SRS of phase three, unfortunately, he or she would be disqualified from most church leadership offices (1 Cor 9:24–27). This is a matter of sin and consequences. Logically, a heroin addict who has contracted HIV through his use of contaminated needles and then comes to Christ after years of substance abuse will still test HIV-positive after redemption. Both the TG individual and the heroin addict will suffer the consequences of their actions in this life, but they will also experience the eternal hope of resurrection and glorification based on their faith in Christ (Gal 6:7–9). All redeemed TGs must have an opportunity to serve in some capacity and thereby utilize their spiritual gifts. The church must be prepared to use discernment in these matters.

Should the Church Permit the Redeemed TG to Marry?

Now concerning the prospect of marriage and the redeemed TG, the answer will vary based on the phase of gender transition at the time of the individual's calling. If the TG is redeemed during phase one or phase two of gender transition and fully transitions back to the biological gender, then there is no biblical basis that forbids the individual from marriage. Now concerning the TG who was redeemed after SRS, 1 Corinthians 7:18 instructs the individual to remain in the state in which he or she was called. Furthermore, Christ's teaching in Matthew 19:12 disqualifies a eunuch made by man from marriage. Instead, the TG individual should hold to the promise of Isaiah 56:3–5. In Christ, these individuals will be given an inheritance that is even greater than marriage and children.

Should the Church Require the Redeemed TG to Reverse the Surgical Procedure?

Now concerning reversal of gender transition for the redeemed TG, it must be emphasized that acceptance of one's biological gender and subsequent transition back to the gender of birth must be considered an integral part of the individual's sanctification process. However, for the TG who is redeemed after the SRS of phase three, this full re-transition is no longer a possibility. Although some top surgeries can be performed on the individual, most cosmetic attempts would only serve to further harm an already mutilated body. Therefore, the church should neither require nor prohibit the complete reversal procedure for redeemed individuals who have undergone SRS (1 Cor 7:17ff).

As the church instructs the redeemed TG to accept the biological/birth gender as part of the sanctification process, the church must guide the TG through social and chemical re-transition. In the process, the church must be mindful of the fact that MtF and FtM gender transition occurs in three phases: social, chemical, and surgical. Although only a limited number of MtF and FtM surgical reversal procedures have been documented, they are far more dangerous and far less successful than the initial SRS.¹²⁹ The risk, pain, and cost are all factors that must be considered prior to undergoing a surgery that will ultimately leave the TG individual in a mutilated and sterile condition.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Sobralske, "Primary Care Needs," 134. The initial MtF and FtM procedures are considered irreversible. However, Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital writes a fascinating article that documents (and laments) the lives of surgically altered boys born with cloacal exstrophy, a birth defect that severely affects the penis and bladder. The majority of these surgically altered boys attempted to reverse the procedure that was forced upon them by their parents at birth when they reached adulthood (p. 136).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 135. Sobralske estimates the cost of a sexual reassignment surgery in 2005 to be \$10,000–\$150,000 range. The cost of reversing

However, if an individual is insistent upon pursuing the reversal of the SRS procedures, the church should not forbid this for conscience's sake (1 Tim 1:5).

The church's ultimate goal should be to help the redeemed individuals grow in their faith in order to reach the point where they refer to themselves as their birth gender. However, the church must understand that this process will likely take copious amounts of time, patience, and love. Even though corrective surgical procedures should not be required for membership, the TG individual can still undergo social and chemical transition back to the biological gender. And, although the TG individual may permanently lack functioning male or female genitalia, he or she can be encouraged to dress, behave, and embrace the biological gender (Rom 12:1-2). Cessation of hormone therapy will likely cause biological traits to begin to reappear, even in adults.¹³¹ Throughout this process, the church, and especially church leadership, must be very sensitive to TG individuals as they are transformed by Christ.

CONCLUSION

In February of 2015, a California Congressman posted a picture of his TG grandchild on the Internet. Beneath this picture, the Congressman expressed his desire for his grandchild's safety and growth. Unfortunately, if the culture has its way with this young, impressionable human being, the child's body and mind will be tortured and mutilated beyond recognition in the years to come. The only hope for this child, and all others like him, has been entrusted to the church by the one who was tortured for our transgressions and mutilated for our iniquities. As complicated and confusing as the TG issue is for the church to address, the members of body of Christ must bear in mind that all people, like sheep, have gone astray. And such were some of us. But we, too,

the procedure is unknown. Furthermore, there is no sure phalloplasty technique; and erection, sexual activity, or even urination is impossible.

¹³¹ Kline, "Gender Reassignment Surgery," 38-39.

have experienced a redemption we did not deserve. And we were washed and transformed into a new creation in Christ Jesus. May this redemption be a reality one day for every gender non-conformist.

Implications for Pastoral Ministry Based on Paul's Prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

*Dr. Wayne Slusser
Assistant Dean
Associate Professor of New Testament
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania*

INTRODUCTION

Paul usually wrote his letters to instruct, encourage, and reprimand. He was concerned with the life situation of his readers.¹ He treated each situation as unique and important; therefore "Paul wrote to address specific, problematic situations that existed in particular churches. He sought through letters to extend his teaching in order to assure desired results, so that in every communication Paul always strives to build up the congregation addressed."² In sum, Paul's letters "serve as

¹ George Eldon Ladd discusses possible motivations for the Christian life. He also expresses Paul's attitude. Ladd states, "Paul did not pursue his own personal ends but sought the welfare of those to whom he ministered. 'I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage' (1 Cor 10:33)" (*A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 560).

² Marion L. Soards, "The Life and Writings of Paul," in *The New Testament Today*, ed. Mark Powell (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1999), 88. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. agree, "Epistles are also the most 'occasional.' In other words, the authors wrote the epistles for specific occasions to address individual audiences who were facing unique problems" (*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Nashville: Word, 1993], 352).

pastoral words to churches he established to ensure that they would stand [firm] in the faith. Paul did not conceive of his mission as successful if his converts initially believed his gospel and then lapsed. His work was in vain unless his converts persisted in the faith."³ It is under this premise that Paul's pastoral concerns in 1 Thessalonians are examined.

Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica to exhort the Thessalonians to Christian behavior during times of persecution and provide them stability of mind concerning the coming of the Lord. Paul reinforced that they must have correct Christian behavior. He provided them with the instruction to live rightly in light of the coming kingdom.

Paul expressed his concern for the Thessalonians in the final prayer found at the conclusion of chapter three. It is evident that Paul's pastoral interest overflows with a desire to minister to the Thessalonian Christians (3:9–11) and to admonish them to increase in their love toward one another and others (3:12). This is for the ultimate purpose of seeing them blameless before Christ at his coming (3:13). It is through Paul's thanksgiving, petition, and wish-prayer that he communicates to the Thessalonian Christians.⁴

³ Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 39.

⁴ Thomas Schreiner provides further explanation concerning Paul's intercessory prayers. He states, "Paul's thanksgivings and intercessory prayers often signal the major themes in the letter, and thus demand careful analysis. The thanksgiving sections reveal Paul's pastoral care for the Christian communities and secure their good will. They also have a didactic and parenetic purpose, instructing and exhorting the readers in the Christian life. Finally, a liturgical element is probably present as well, making the public reading of the letter appropriate for corporate worship" (*Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 29).

Gordon Wiles explains this Pauline prayer as a "wish-prayer." He states that 3:11–13 summarizes the central message of the letter, contains a parenetic purpose, and serves as a model for the church's own prayers. It is through these various functions that it can be stated

The purpose of this article is to examine Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians and explicate its implications for pastoral ministry today. This is accomplished through an examination of the structure of Paul's letter as a whole. An exegetical and syntactical analysis of the prayer provides validity to the cohesion of the book's structure, for elements and content of Paul's prayer are seen throughout the letter.

The pastoral implications provide today's church with a model of what to say and how to shape their own prayers. Paul not only models a desire to see the Thessalonians again but also intercedes on their behalf. His intercession includes the petition "that the Lord may make them increase and abound in love" in order that⁵ "their hearts may be established as blameless in holiness." This examination offers the reader an understanding of Paul's personal prayer life while providing an opportunity to learn how to conform morally to the character of God.

that the "wish-prayer" was given by Paul both to emphasize the well being of the Thessalonians in Christ and to strengthen their readiness for the parousia (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974], 22-71).

D. Michael Martin defines a "wish-prayer" as "an intercessory prayer that utilizes optative verbs to express the wish or desire the person praying is voicing to God" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995], 110).

⁵ The construction εἰς τὸ στήριξαι (εἰς τὸ + infinitive) denotes purpose or result (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 590-91). Here it indicates either the result of the Lord's action of making the Thessalonians abound in love ("with the result that your hearts may be established") or the purpose of the prayer for their increase in love ("for the purpose of that their hearts may be established"). In either case, Paul's desire is that they be established blameless in that eschatological moment.

EXAMINATION OF THE LETTER STRUCTURE OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul constructed his letters similar to that of Hellenistic letters. But the apostle, who had a sense of freedom in literary matters, was not tied to fixed models, and he often altered the structure and content of a typical letter for his own purposes.

Doty argues,

I argue ... that in his letters a genre or subgenre was created, and that our task is that of identifying the stages and steps in generic construction. Instead of arguing that there is one clearly identified Pauline form, I argue that there is a basic understanding of structure by which Paul wrote, but that this basic understanding could be modified on occasion, and that the basic understanding itself was something that came into being only gradually.⁶

The genre of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is similar to and follows the normal pattern of the Hellenistic letters of Paul's day.⁷

⁶ William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 21.

⁷ Some scholars, however, interpret 1 Thessalonians based on a rhetorical analysis. Probably the biggest proponent of this view is Charles A. Wanamaker (*The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 45–52); also see Karl P. Donfried, and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1993), 3–7. There are, however, some problems to interpreting 1 Thessalonians based on rhetorical analysis: (1) There seems to be somewhat of a problem in mixing the genre of speech and letter writing. Although both genres were readily used, they served two different purposes. First Thessalonians is not a speech to be read in the courts or to serve as a persuasion device. (2) Those who advocate a rhetorical approach assume Paul was learned in the ancient form of rhetoric of his day. This claim is not supported. There is no concrete evidence that Paul was trained in the rhetoric of his day. (3) The fathers of the early church, who had received rhetorical

The typical pattern of the Hellenistic letter contains a threefold division: an opening, the main body of the letter, and closing.⁸

training, did not interpret Paul's letters from the perspective of rhetorical theory. Further discussion on point 3 can be found in P. H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998), 167-203.

Points 1-3 and others can be read in further detail in the articles written by J. A. D. Weima, "What Does Aristotle have to do with Paul? An Evaluation of Rhetorical Criticism," *CTJ* 32 (1997): 458-68 and "The Function of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and the Use of Rhetorical Criticism: A Response to Otto Merk," in *The Thessalonians Debate: Methodological Discord or Methodological Synthesis?*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Johannes Beutler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 123-31.

Porter seems to reject the use of rhetorical devices in interpreting Paul. He gives more information pertaining to the discussion in the following articles: "The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature" in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Academic P, 1993), 100-122 and "Exegesis of the Pauline Letters, Including the Deutero-Pauline Letters," in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 541-44.

Peter T. O'Brien states, "Paul's letters, then, ought not to be interpreted 'through the grid of the ancient rhetorical rules', and the notion that 'this method better than any other holds the hermeneutical key that will unlock the true meaning of the apostle's writings' is seriously flawed.... It is more appropriate that attention be directed to the apostle's own internal method of argument" (*Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 79-80). Schreiner agrees by stating, "I remain unconvinced that the Pauline letters reflect a knowledge of or adherence to the Greek rhetorical handbooks, for they depart in too many respects from the forms prescribed in the handbooks" (*Paul: Apostle of God's Glory*, 40).

⁸ It is clear that Paul adopted the Hellenistic letter patterns of his day. The importance of the letter format provides two advantages for the interpreter: (1) The letter format provides clues to identify the structure so that the interpreter can locate the major letter sections

First Thessalonians has a typical opening (1:1) where the author, addressee, and greeting are found. It also contains a typical closing (5:23–28). The opening and closing of the letter help to reveal a Hellenistic pattern. The body is also present (4:13; 5:1–11).⁹ The unique characteristic of 1 Thessalonians is

(introduction or salutation, thanksgiving, body, ethical instruction, and conclusion). (2) It assists the interpreter to identify possible relationships between sections. For example, the thanksgiving section provides topics that the author will develop later in the letter.

However, as theologians or scholars study the Pauline letters, they will quickly see that Paul subtly altered the structure and content of a typical letter for his own purposes. These alterations reflect the peculiarly Christian character of Paul's letters. His focus was his audience and how he could best relate to them. For a primary discussion on the relationship between Hellenistic letter patterns and the patterns of Pauline writings, see Peter T. O'Brien, "Letters, Letter Forms," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 550–53. For supplemental reading concerning this relationship, see Ronald Russell, "Epistle as a Literary Form," in *The New Testament in Literary Criticism*, comp. and ed. Leland Ryken (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984), 75; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Diversity of Literary Genres in the New Testament," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 279–85; Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 23–31; Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 20–57; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 1973.

⁹ The body is often discussed to consist of the entire second half of the letter (4:1–5:22). However, due to the nature of the four paragraphs found in the second section of 1 Thessalonians, it is best to understand them to include both a body (4:13–18; 5:1–11) and an ethical instruction or section of encouragement (4:1–12; 5:12–22).

The body section does show considerable variety and it is here more than anywhere else that the letters reflect the different epistolary situations. Typically the body is where Paul addresses predominate concerns by including a discussion of doctrine. This section is often introduced by the formula οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν

that it possesses a lengthy thanksgiving (1:2-3:13).¹⁰

The thanksgiving section of the Roman letter is the most important. It is a formal element of most Pauline letters; according to Roetzel, "It terminates the letter opening, or

("but I do not wish you to be ignorant") or γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι ("but I want you to know"). The use of the cognitive verb is more apt to direct the attention of the reader to a discussion of doctrine. Also, there is typically a string of indicative verbs found in this section.

The ethical instruction, however, is a practical or ethical section that applies the information of the body. This is evident because of the moral and ethical content found in these sections. The typical formula that introduces these ethical instructions sections is the behavioral verb παρακαλέω ("I beseech"). This is Paul's intimate word for exhortation and encouragement. This section typically consists of imperative verbs.

Therefore, 1 Thessalonians is a letter similar to other Pauline letters; that is, the ethical instruction and body sections (4:1-5:22) follow the thanksgiving section.

¹⁰ It is common to place a major break at 2:1 to indicate the beginning of the body of the letter. For example, F. F. Bruce applies the Roman letter method in his commentary yet he makes the break at 2:1 (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC [Waco, TX: Word, 1982], 21). However, there are five reasons to substantiate the claim that the thanksgiving section continues to the end of chapter three: (1) The thanksgiving formula ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν ... ("we give thanks to God ...") is repeated at 2:13 demonstrating that the thanksgiving section is still present; (2) Chapters one, two, and three are narrative literature with cohesion to suggest that this is a single unit; (3) Paul's use of εἴσοδον in 1:9 and 2:1 suggests that he is continuing his thought from chapter one and there is no major break; (4) The use of a connecting γάρ at 2:1 also suggests that the thanksgiving section continues; and (5) There is no clear Roman letter formula at 2:1. The first letter formula occurs in 4:1. All five of these reasons work together, a conspiracy of text-based cues, in order to validate this approach. For further discussion see Jan Lambrecht, "Thanksgivings in 1 Thessalonians 1-3," in *The Thessalonians Debate: Methodological Discord or Methodological Synthesis?* ed. Karl P. Donfried and Johannes Beutler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 135-62.

salutation, signals the basic intent of the letter, and may serve as an outline of major topics to be treated in the body of the letter.”¹¹ Smetana says the thanksgiving section “is indeed a miniature letter itself. It acts as a table of contents, giving a summary of what is to come, and is in essence a digest of the whole letter.”¹²

The thanksgiving section is also where Paul expresses thanks for the current success of Christianity in the congregation addressed, and his supplication that the positive state of affairs will continue. Paul is grateful and forever praying for those to whom he is writing.

A formula that consistently introduces this section typically involves a verb form of εὐχαριστέω (“I give thanks”). In 1 Thessalonians 1:2 Paul states, “We give thanks to God always for all of you,” or in Philemon 4 he says, “Always when I remember you in my prayers.” When this type of phrase is located, it is assumed that the salutation has ended and the thanksgiving section has begun.

At this point, it should be noted that Paul did have a clear sense of the importance of structure as he wrote his letters. He was not, however, locked into that structure. He rearranged the sections of a Hellenistic letter so that they best complemented his message. Doty explains,

Reference to this probable outline does not mean that we assume that when Paul was writing or paused in his dictation, he thought, “Well, now, I’ve finished part 3.a—on to 3.b.” Nor are we to assume that Paul decided which itemized sections taken together

¹¹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, 6th ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2015), 75.

¹² David W. Smetana, “The Thanksgiving Sections’ Correlation with the Content of the Prison Epistles” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), Theological Research Exchange Network, 001–0316, microfiche, 5. See also Joseph H. Hellerman, *Philippians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 19.

should compromise a letter to a particular situation, and then set about meeting such criteria. Rather, as Robert W. Funk notes ... "It is simply the way Paul writes letters."¹³

Paul's subtle alteration to the structure and content of the Hellenistic letter provides a thanksgiving section.¹⁴ In 1 Thessalonians, the unusually long thanksgiving is an example of this alteration (1:2-3:13). In this section, four paragraphs are present: (1) 1:2-10, (2) 2:1-12, (3) 2:13-16, and (4) 2:17-3:13. In each of these paragraphs Paul's focus is different. In paragraphs 1 and 3 (1:2-10; 2:13-16), his focus is on the Thessalonians. Paul is reinforcing the fact that they are saved, and yet even though they will go through persecution, they will not have to go through the wrath of the Lord. Paul is providing them with a stability of mind by teaching them the coming of the Lord. In paragraphs 2 and 4 (2:1-12; 2:17-3:13), Paul is reinforcing that they must have correct Christian behavior. It is here that Paul is focusing on his ministry as an example for the Thessalonians. He is providing them with the motivation to live rightly in light of the coming kingdom.¹⁵

¹³ Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 44.

¹⁴ The thanksgiving section is often counted as part of the introduction of a typical Hellenistic letter. However, due to the information that is included in the thanksgiving sections within Pauline literature, it is best to see this section as separate from the introduction/salutation.

¹⁵ The thanksgiving section (1:2-3:13) executes the purpose of a typical thanksgiving by providing the main themes that are throughout the rest of the letter. The second part of 1 Thessalonians (4:1-5:22) provides further explanation of the themes discussed within the thanksgiving. This second part of the letter is where the ethical instruction (4:1-12; 5:12-22) sections correspond to paragraphs two and four of the thanksgiving section (2:1-12; 2:17-3:13). The ethical instruction sections are encouragement sections or motivation sections to live the Christian life so that others can see the love of Christ within them. These sections provide motivation to live properly in light of the coming kingdom. The body sections (4:13-18; 5:1-11)

In conclusion, the thanksgiving section in 1 Thessalonians is unique and worthy of attention. When one considers this section, it provides necessary information to better understand Paul's discussion in the second part of the letter.

An examination of the thanksgiving section of Paul's letter causes one to appreciate his pastoral attention toward the Thessalonians. Paul is thankful beyond measure for their acceptance of the gospel message and their turning from idols to follow the Lord. He also wants the Thessalonians to understand their position in Christ and their deliverance from wrath, thus validating Paul's intent to motivate the Thessalonians to live worthy of the Christian life and to provide stability of mind to endure times of persecution.

The focus is the final intercessory prayer (3:9–13) within the thanksgiving section (1:2–3:13). Here Paul demonstrates his love and concern for the Thessalonians. An exegetical and syntactical examination demonstrates the validity of the structural and pastoral implications.¹⁶

EXEGETICAL AND SYNTACTICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 THESSALONIANS 3:9–13

First Thessalonians 3:9–13 concludes the long thanksgiving section. In one sense it "sums up the mood and content of the

correspond to paragraphs one and three (1:2–10; 2:13–16) of the thanksgiving section. Paul's focus is to teach them to have a stable mind (body sections about the rapture and day of the Lord) so that when persecution comes they can endure it. The information in the paragraphs of the ethical instruction and body sections is parallel to the information found in the thanksgiving section. This is typical of Greco-Roman letters.

¹⁶ All English Scripture references will be taken from *The English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), and all Greek references will be taken from Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (United Bible Society, 1994).

preceding extended thanksgiving section, and brings to a close the first half of the letter (chaps. 1-3) ... while in another sense, the prayer provides a basis for the instruction and paraenesis to follow."¹⁷ This small paragraph, as proposed by O'Brien, contains three characteristics: a thanksgiving (v. 9), a petition (v. 10), and a wish-prayer (vv. 11-13).¹⁸ An exegetical analysis of these verses attempts to provide a correct interpretation. A syntactical examination validates the interpretation by looking at words and phrases that occur both in the preceding and following sections of 1 Thessalonians. A brief look at verses nine and ten will provide the context for 3:11-13.

Thanksgiving and Petition: 3:9-10

These two verses comprise one long rhetorical question. At this point Paul is encouraged by the Thessalonians' faithfulness and love (v. 7) and that their faithfulness and love continued to remain steadfast even through affliction, so much so that he could not thank God enough for them. Paul therefore asks τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι ("For what thanksgiving can we return to God"), a rhetorical question in which the implied answer is that an adequate thanksgiving is impossible.¹⁹

¹⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, NovTSup 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 156 and 161.

¹⁸ Ibid, 156. Most of the commentaries and reference sources use similar vocabulary in examining this paragraph. Although the vocabulary may be nuanced some, the general consensus includes these three characteristics.

¹⁹ The idea behind the verb ἀνταποδοῦναι is to repay, or return as like for like. Danker defines ἀνταποδίδωμι, the root of ἀνταποδοῦναι as "to practice reciprocity with respect to an obligation, repay, pay back, requite" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. based on the sixth edition of Walter Bauer's *Griechisch Deutsches Wörterbuch* [Chicago: Moody Press, 2000], 87).

Paul's final use of εὐχαριστίαν, although used in the noun form in verse nine, provides cohesion throughout the thanksgiving section. In each of the other two uses of εὐχαριστοῦμεν (1:2; 2:13), Paul is continually giving thanks to God for what he has done through the Thessalonians. The same is true of 3:9. Here Paul is also thankful but cannot express his thanks because of the overwhelming joy he has due to God's work in the Thessalonians' lives. Therefore, in each of the uses of εὐχαριστέω, it is evident that Paul is unceasingly thankful for what God has done.²⁰

After hearing of the good report from Timothy (v. 6), Paul experienced an overflowing joy. Green explains,

Paul and his coworkers received a great gift from God—the news that the Thessalonians stood firm in their faith—and now in response to that benefit they seek a way to repay the debt of thanks adequately. But how? The question implies that Paul and his companions could not find an adequate way to thank God, so great was their joy!²¹

The magnitude of the joy Paul is expressing ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ ἣν χαίρομεν (“for all the joy that we feel”) is a result of God's gracious work in and through the Thessalonians. Paul therefore expresses his joy, his abundance of joy, by using an expression τῇ χαρᾷ ἣν χαίρομεν that repeats the word for joy.

Gene Green states, “Thanksgiving was understood as a debt that one owed to one's benefactor. This principle was at the heart of Paul's thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonians” (*The Letters to the Thessalonians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 172).

²⁰ In each occasion, Paul is thankful for the Thessalonians' receiving the word and allowing it to change them so that they remained firm in the faith during times of affliction or persecution (cf. 1:6–8; 2:13–15; 3:7–9).

²¹ Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 172.

The fact that Paul is expressing this joy δι' ὑμᾶς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ("for your sake before our God") demonstrates that he is praying on the Thessalonians' behalf in the presence of God.²²

Paul moves from thanksgiving to a petition in verse ten. Paul demonstrates his concern for the Thessalonians through the expression νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ("night and day"), a continued attitude.²³ However, not only was his prayer/request continual, but it also was fervent ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι ("we pray most earnestly").²⁴ Paul went beyond the call of duty to express his gratitude and joy concerning the Thessalonians' faith. He interceded to God on their behalf and did it continually and intensely beyond measure.

Paul's petition is the immediate desire to see the Thessalonians again εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον ("that we might see you face to face," cf. 2:17).²⁵ This petition

²² Mike Stallard, *The Books of First and Second Thessalonians: Looking for Christ's Return*, Twenty-first Century Biblical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2009), 56.

²³ Wallace categorizes νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ("night and day") as a genitive of time. He states, "Paul is not suggesting here that he and his colleagues were working 24-hour shifts among the Thessalonians, but that they labored both in daytime and nighttime. The stress is not on the duration, but on the kind of time in which they worked" (*Greek Grammar*, 124).

²⁴ Danker states that it is to do something "quite beyond all measure" (BDAG, 1033). The idea behind the word δεόμενοι is to make a request. Rogers and Rogers state, "The word embodies a sense of personal need and is very common in petitions addressed to ruling sovereigns as distinguished from those addressed to magistrates" (*The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 477).

²⁵ The construction εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν, (εἰς τὸ + infinitive) denotes purpose (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 590-91). Here, it indicates the purpose of Paul's prayer, namely that he sees the Thessalonians again.

demonstrates the relationship between Paul's strong desire to see them again and his pastoral concern for their spiritual growth καὶ καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν ("and supply what is lacking in your faith").²⁶ Although Paul had received a good report from Timothy and by no means was the Thessalonians' faith defective, Paul felt that there were areas that needed further instruction, thereby showing the reader Paul's concern for his converts.²⁷

Paul's use of ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι ("pray most earnestly") in verse ten signifies regular intercession on behalf of the Thessalonians and also provides cohesion to the thanksgiving section. This use of ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι picks up the theme of the words μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν ("mentioning you in our prayers," 1:2), indicating continual prayer. In each of these occasions, Paul uses adverbial participles that introduce the final clause and the content of the intercessory prayer.²⁸

In conclusion, it is clear that Paul was exceedingly thankful for the Thessalonians' faith. His thankfulness becomes apparent

²⁶ The καί that joins the two infinitives εἶς τὸ ἰδεῖν ... καὶ καταρτίσαι demonstrates the purpose of Paul's prayer, namely, in order that he would see the Thessalonians again and in order that he would enhance, strengthen their faith.

²⁷ The idea behind the infinitive καταρτίσαι is to put in its proper condition or to make complete. The same verb is used in Mark 1:19 of the disciples mending their nets or making them usable (cf. Gal 6:1). Martin adds, "The word implies not providing something new but rather strengthening and or enhancing a faith already in existence" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 110).

This is in close relationship to Paul using τὰ ὑστερήματα, meaning deficiencies. Green states, "Because of the short time the apostolic team spent in the city, it appears that they had insufficient opportunity to impart all the Christian instruction the believers needed" (*Letters to the Thessalonians*, 174-75).

²⁸ O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 158.

when he struggles to find adequate words to thank God for what God has done in the Thessalonians' lives. This is demonstrated through the twofold purpose of Paul's petition, namely that he desired to see them face-to-face and strengthen their faith.

The opening verses, 3:9-10, point to the wish-prayer of 3:11-13 and indicate that the shortcomings or deficiencies the Thessalonians possessed may indeed be the content found in 3:12-13. This wish-prayer clarifies the context of what is lacking in their faith (cf. 3:10), which signals the content to come in the second half of the letter (4:1ff).²⁹

Wish-Prayer: 3:11-13

The wish-prayer of 3:11-13 concludes the preceding portion of the letter (1:2-3:13) while at the same time constituting a transition passage for the second half of the letter (4:1-5:22). The wish-prayer includes an appeal in which Paul expresses for both him (3:11, "direct our way to you") and for the Thessalonians (3:12, "make you increase and abound in love"). The use of the optative mood here demonstrates that Paul appeals to God's will in the form of an obtainable wish or prayer.³⁰

²⁹ The wish-prayer provides two themes that Paul explains in later sections of the letter. For example, the Thessalonians are to be found blameless in their character. Paul encourages the idea of "blamelessness in holiness" in both 4:1-12 (through their actions among one another and to those in the community) and 5:12-24 (through their admonition toward one another). He also develops the other theme that is mentioned in 3:13, which is the "coming of the Lord." Here Paul explains the coming of Christ as that eschatological moment where believers will be with the Lord (4:13-18) and this coming of Christ will also be "as a thief in the night" to those who are of darkness (5:1-11).

³⁰ See Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 29-44. See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 481.

In verse eleven Paul slips into a short prayer where he once again expresses his deep concern for the Thessalonians. The content of this verse is the desire to see them face to face (cf. 2:17; 3:10). Paul is asking for God to direct his way to the Thessalonians. Paul expresses this desire in the form of the optative verb *κατευθύναι*.³¹ It is clear through Paul's emphatic use of the personal pronoun *Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν* ("Now may our God and Father himself") that he desires through prayer that God would intervene on his behalf.³² Paul

³¹ *κατευθύνω* has the idea of leading or directing (see BDAG, 532). Rogers and Rogers state that the idea of "directing" could "refer to the leveling or removal of those obstacles which Satan has used to obscure the path" (*New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 477).

The use of the optative is to express an obtainable wish or a prayer. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 480–84. In this context, Paul is expressing a prayerful expectation by using the volitive optative. Young states that the optative "conveys the idea that the speaker regards what is expressed by the verb as a wish or as an uncertainty rather than as a fact" (*Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 140). This may be the reason why Paul uses an emphatic positioning of *Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεός*, thus assuming that only God himself can bring him to the Thessalonians.

³² The construction *Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεός καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς* ("Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus Christ,") is discussed and debated. Wallace provides several options as to what Paul means by a compound subject and singular verb. He writes: (1) At this early stage of the new faith ... a clear distinction between the Father and Son was not yet hammered out; (2) the optative is uniting the Father and Son in terms of purpose and, to some degree therefore, placing Jesus Christ on the same level as God; (3) as is common in the NT, when a compound subject is used with a singular verb, the first-named subject is the more important of the two" (*Greek Grammar*, 482).

It is probably best to understand Paul's use of the optative and the use of the compound subject with a singular verb to indicate that the Father and Son are in unity (see Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991],

sees the importance of God himself directing his path because Satan hindered him (2:18) from seeing the Thessalonians.³³

Verse twelve expresses the second part of Paul's wish-prayer ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ ("And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love") that also employs the optative. Here Paul's pastoral concern continues. Whatever happened to Paul and the others (cf. 2:17-18) ought not to deter the Thessalonians from sharing an abundant love. This is evident due to the construction of the adversative δὲ; and the emphatic ὑμᾶς ("and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love"). Paul already knew of their great love for one another (1:3; 4:9), but his desire is that the Lord would make their love increase and overflow. Here Paul uses two terms that are virtually synonymous: πλεονάσαι and περισσεύσαι.³⁴ The unique nature of this prayer illustrates

107; Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 176; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982], 71).

³³ Martin suggests, "Spiritual power is required to remove a spiritual hindrance. Therefore it only makes sense to ask in prayer that God might 'clear the way'" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 112). Wiles adds, "For as he moves to intercede on behalf of the converts, he [Paul] points away from the problems of the previous verses to invoke the august majesty and unique power of almighty God, the original creator and direct controller of events—Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς" (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 54).

³⁴ πλεονάσαι and περισσεύσαι come from the roots πλεονάζω and περισσεύω which mean "to cause to increase" and "to cause something to exist in abundance, cause to abound" respectively (see BDAG, 824, 805). Paul's use of these terms together emphasizes the great degree that he wanted the church's love to grow. They were not to simply increase their existing love, but they were to go beyond the limits, being exceedingly great and overflowing. Basically, together these words and the wish-prayer demonstrate the importance of spiritual growth on the part of the Thessalonians. Morris states the distinction of these words this way: "The latter is often used of the divine grace abounding. Paul looked for Christians to abound in love just as the

Paul's confidence that the increase of the Thessalonians' love is in the Lord's hands and not his, thus validating the reason for Paul's direct petition to the Lord.

Paul not only saw the importance of love through his direct address to the Lord, but also stated that the Thessalonians were to direct their love to one another and to all men εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας ("for one another, and for all"). Wiles states, "Love (ἀγάπη) was an essential and permanent theme in Paul's paraenesis; he saw it to be central for the continuing Christian life in any church fellowship."³⁵ Paul does not want the love to reside in the church community but also outside the church community. Bruce states that the Thessalonians' love "must overflow to others without restriction."³⁶

Finally, Paul provides an example of how the Thessalonians are to share their love to others by stating so καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς ("as we do for you"). It is not a mere accident that Paul prays that their love is to be like his (cf. 2:6–11, 17–20; 3:1–2, 9–11).

grace of God abounds in them" (*First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 109).

³⁵ Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 56. Martin also adds, "Paul thought that love was the cardinal Christian virtue (cf. Rom 13) from which all other Christian virtues grow. Love reflects the character of God revealed in Christ. The church was taught by God to love one another (see 4:9–10), and following the example of Christ requires loving even those who are unbelievers and opponents of the faith" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 112). Holmes nuances Paul's use of love as "a word that ... encompasses for Paul the full extent of proper Christian behavior" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 115).

³⁶ Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 72. Wiles adds, "Yet their love must reach beyond the Christian community 'to all men' – beyond the opponents to include even their persecutors, especially in a time of great stress" (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 57).

Wiles explains,

As his love for them enabled him to give himself to the utmost, so their own increasing and abounding love would enable them to conquer temptations of self-concern, and make them alert to help one another in crisis.... Furthermore, as he had reached out to them in a time of persecution while they were still pagans, so he prays that they might show love even to their persecutors.³⁷

Paul did not share his love for any personal gain. He was gentle to the Thessalonians, so much so that he treated them like parents would their children (2:7, 11). The Thessalonians did not need any proof of Paul's love because they were already exposed to it through his actions.

Verse thirteen contains the purpose of Paul's wish-prayer εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ("so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness").³⁸ Paul's concern for the Thessalonians comes to a climax in this verse. Here Paul makes it clear that he wants their hearts established in the faith so as not to fall,³⁹ but most importantly, that they would remain faithful at the appearing of the coming of the Lord. Morris states, "The prayer here is that God will so supply the needed buttress that the Thessalonians will remain firm and unmoved whatever the future may hold."⁴⁰

Paul not only wants the Thessalonians to be established in their faith, but also adds that their hearts would be "blameless in holiness." Paul here is providing a link between the wish of

³⁷ Ibid., 59.

³⁸ The typical construction denoting purpose is present εἰς τὸ + infinitive. This indicates the purpose of the prayer in verse 12.

³⁹ Here Paul is using the same verb he used in 3:2, στηρίζω, which means "to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, confirm, establish, strengthen" (See BDAG, 945).

⁴⁰ Morris, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 110.

verse twelve to the purpose in thirteen. Holmes explains, “That is, Paul prays that the Lord will cause the love of the Thessalonians to increase so that ‘at the coming of our Lord Jesus,’ when they find themselves ‘in the presence of our God,’ they may be ‘blameless in holiness,’ that is, fully acceptable to God.”⁴¹ Therefore, Paul is praying that in the final moment ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν (“before our God and Father,”) and ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ (“at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”), the Thessalonians will not be found guilty in any way. These two phrases are parallel and look to the parousia. Bruce states that “The parousia is not only the event at the end of time which brings the sanctification of believers: it should provide the Thessalonians, as it provided Paul himself, with an incentive to holy living and faithful service (cf. 4:1–12; 5:12–24).”⁴²

In conclusion, this wish–prayer finds Paul with a passionate desire and prayerful concern to see the Thessalonians. He recognizes that God himself is in control; hence he directs his prayer to God. He makes an appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ so that he would cause the Thessalonians to abound greatly in love. The Thessalonians were not just to concentrate their love toward each other but also toward those outside the church community. The purpose of his prayer is that the Lord would firmly establish their hearts blameless and in holiness. Paul sees

⁴¹ Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* NIV, 115–16. He goes on to explain that ἀμέμπτους “indicates a condition of blamelessness in which an individual is found to have done nothing deserving condemnation by God ... the second word ἁγιοσύνη indicates moral conformity to the very character of God” (116). Martin concludes, “Both words connote a relationship to the divine that also has ethical implications. God’s saints ... are those dedicated to him and his service. Thus their lives should reflect the values and character of the Father” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 113).

⁴² Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 73.

the importance of their character because of the coming parousia.⁴³

SYNTACTICAL EXAMINATION OF 1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13

First Thessalonians 3:11-13 not only provides an appeal on the Thessalonians' behalf, but it also possesses structural value. The appeal ("and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love") and the infinitive of purpose ("so that He may establish your hearts blameless") provide links to the preceding and following paragraphs. In verse eleven Paul's concern to see the Thessalonians again is also present in 2:17 and 3:1-2, 9. These links within the thanksgiving section provide cohesion to the structure. Paul's petition is to see the Thessalonians so that he might have the opportunity to complete what is lacking in their faith.

In verse twelve, Paul's appeal is that the Lord would cause them to increase and abound in love. The idea he is trying to convey is that their Christian conduct ought to increase more and more περισσεύσαι ("may provide in abundance"). Demonstrating proper Christian conduct in abundance is also found in 4:1. It is here that Paul is speaking of pleasing God through their conduct ἀρέσκειν θεῷ: ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον ("to please God ..., that you do so more and more"). It is also evident in 4:10 in which Paul encourages them to love all men more and more παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον ("But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more").⁴⁴

⁴³ O'Brien summarizes, "Paul's wish-prayer thus concerns the stability of the Thessalonians; it looks to a blamelessness in holiness before God that is set within the context of the ultimate event, Christ's parousia in all its glory" (*Introductory Thanksgivings*, 164).

⁴⁴ The prayer in 3:12 is that God will do the work in them, whereas in 4:1 and 10, the exhortation is for the Thessalonians to abound. Paul's pastoral concern for them gives him reason to pray for them,

Paul uses love as part of the Christian's conduct that is to abound more and more, τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας ("in love for one another, and for all," 3:12). Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to specifically love and do good to both believers and unbelievers. This same phrase is used in 4:9, 10 εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους.... ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ ("to love one another ... you are doing it to all brothers throughout Macedonia") to encourage them to continue loving as they have already been taught. Likewise, in 5:15, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to make every effort to do good/be kind to those who may persecute you, πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε καὶ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας ("but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone").

In verse thirteen of chapter four, there are also thematic links that provide cohesion to the letter. Here Paul's purpose for praying is that they might be firmly established in the faith, holy, and blameless at the coming of the Lord. Paul further develops these two themes: (1) living holy and (2) the coming of the Lord. He develops these themes by motivating the Thessalonians to please God in 4:1–12 and 5:12–24 and to see that they have stability of mind at the coming of the Lord 4:13–18 and 5:1–11. Therefore, 3:11–13 serves as an important bridge passage that sums up Paul's pastoral concern (1:2–3:13) and his apostolic concern for the Thessalonians (4:1–5:22).

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF 1 THESSALONIANS 3:9–13

Paul's prayer, petition, and wish-prayer offer two pastoral principles. First, Paul models pastoral character. He demonstrates a humble pastoral character through the following: his overflowing joy (3:9), his continual attitude of prayer (3:10a), his desire to encourage spiritual growth (3:10b),

but he also recognizes that they too must live godly. Therefore, Paul motivates them in the ethical instruction section (4:1–12) to live pleasing to God.

and his desire to love people unconditionally (3:12b). Second, Paul also models a proper prayer life. Paul's prayer included the following: a recognition that God is in control (3:11), a desire to see the Lord increase and abound the Thessalonians' love for people (3:12a), and a purpose to see the Thessalonians stable in their faith until the Lord's coming (3:13). It is through these two principles that a further discussion is offered.

Paul Models Pastoral Character⁴⁵

The ministry of Paul is in no way selfish or prideful.⁴⁶ Paul's goal was to see that people grew in the Lord so that they could be counted as walking worthy before God and others. God has done a work in the Thessalonians' lives, and for that Paul is overflowing with joy and thanksgiving (3:9). His attitude is one of gratitude. He acknowledges God's gracious hand upon the Christians' lives. And for that, he has difficulty finding the words or expression to say thanks.

The implication for pastors is they too should express gratitude for the working of God in people's lives, therefore providing the reason to be thankful. The pastoral ministry is not for self-satisfaction. The pastor is to humble himself in the sight of God through joy and thanksgiving because God's love and concern for Christians today is something to be shared with others. God is doing a work in the lives of believers. Is there any other reason to overflow with joy? Saying that the pastor or some other evangelistic gimmick or program is the reason for a

⁴⁵ Paul's pastoral character and ministry is especially defined in 2:1-12.

⁴⁶ Morris writes, "Paul's satisfaction is not in any way self-satisfaction; it is satisfaction at what God has wrought. He knew—none better—that it is not of human beings to do a spiritual work. That is done only by the grace of God" (*First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 104).

believer's spiritual growth has robbed God's rightful place in ministry.

Paul also models a proper pastoral character by demonstrating a proper attitude of prayer (3:10a). Paul often spoke from his heart. His prayers were not formal or announced, however, because of the content and to whom he was praying, there was a sense of concern and passionate yearning in Paul's prayers. They were continual in that they were unceasing and intercessory (1:3; 2:13; 3:10). The implication, therefore, is that as a pastor prays, the intention is to have the flock in continual remembrance.⁴⁷ So much so that his desire is to see his people again and again in order to help them with what they are lacking.

Third, Paul is passionately concerned for the spiritual condition of his people (3:10b), therefore, praying fervently and beyond measure. Morris claims, "As a true pastor he knew that there was much that had yet to be done for them.... It was his aim to play some part in seeing that they were set forward on the right road."⁴⁸ He saw a need for continued growth in godliness in the church, not a need to correct some fatal flaw. It seems today that the pastoral concern is more in line with numerical growth instead of spiritual growth. Today's church

⁴⁷ The content of Paul's prayer is discussed in the next section.

⁴⁸ Morris, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 106. O'Brien adds that Paul's concern was for their spiritual growth. He did rejoice over their steadfastness, but also recognized the importance of prayer on behalf of their *continued* growth (*Introductory Thanksgivings*, 158).

Green also emphasizes *continued* spiritual growth. He states, "The teacher had the responsibility of completing the instruction given to the student so that the pupil could live as an adult. In spite of the Timothy visit (3.2), the operation of the grace of God in their lives (3.9), and the intent to fill the gaps in their moral and theological training by means of this letter (4.1-5.22), Paul well knew that their personal training would be necessary to supply what is lacking in their faith" (*Letters to the Thessalonians*, 174).

growth movement has orphaned Paul's approach to ministry. It is clear from this passage that the implication for pastors is to possess a desire for spiritual growth and a longing to see his people face to face (2:17; 3:2, 9-10).

Lastly, Paul's motivation for ministry was rooted and grounded in love (3:12b).⁴⁹ He was able to invest so much of himself because he genuinely and deeply loved his people. Wiles explains,

His preaching and pastoral responsibility had been rooted in love, expressed love, and could not be separated from his affectionate feelings towards them. He had been totally committed to their welfare in lowly self-giving (2.9) and speaks of himself as 'ready to share ... our own selves, because you had become very dear to us' (2.8). His original assumption of responsibility for them under the most trying circumstances had been born of a loving concern.⁵⁰

Paul knows full well that no pastor can encourage his people to perform a Christian action that he himself is not also prepared to do. The implication for pastors is that they too must ground their ministries in love. It is not wise for pastors to direct attention toward themselves. Rather their message must carry the conviction that is first found in their own lives.

In conclusion, it is evident that Paul's ministry is an example that must be modeled by pastors. The clear representation of his love for people illustrates why he is overflowing with joy at what God has done and is doing in the lives of people. Because of this great love, Paul does not cease to pray for them and their spiritual growth.

⁴⁹ Green agrees, "His writings give clear evidence that his love was one of the key motivating factors in his ministry to the churches. So great and genuine was his and his associates' love that they could come before the Lord in prayer and ask that the Thessalonians have the same love that they had for the Thessalonians" (Ibid., 179).

⁵⁰ Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers*, 58.

Paul Models Pastoral Prayer

It is also important for pastors to follow the example of Paul's prayer life. Giving attention to the content of Paul's prayers provides pastors with an example to shape their own prayers. His prayers are centered on thanksgiving for and intercession on behalf of others. He first recognizes that God is in control (3:11), therefore "grounds his petitions in thanksgiving that amount to both praise and acknowledgment of God as the one ultimately responsible for the blessings and growth the Thessalonians have experienced."⁵¹ Paul consistently emphasizes God's grace and initiative, all the while ceaselessly encouraging Christians to live rightly.

Pastors must also recognize that God is in control. First and foremost pastors are to have an attitude that God is the initiator, and they need to encourage the flock that there is nothing that overrides the command of God. Satan may have hindered Paul from seeing the Thessalonians (2:17), but he did not deter the proclamation of the gospel (1:7-9; 2:13-14; 3:5-6).

Second, Paul desires for the Lord to cause the Thessalonians to increase and abound in love (3:12a). Paul prays that the love which the Thessalonians had already seen in Paul (2:7-11) and been taught (4:9) would increase and abound beyond measure. He qualifies his statement, however, to say that this love was not just for the believer, but also to those unbelievers that cause undeserving affliction (1:6; 2:14b-16; 3:7; 2 Thess 1:4-6). Therefore, it is love for people quite apart from their worthiness or otherwise that Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to manifest in their lives to all.⁵²

It is against the very nature of man to act and live the way Paul is encouraging. However, it is imperative for the pastor today to motivate and exhort his people to pray that love is demonstrated in their lives. After all, it is the foundation of

⁵¹ Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 117.

⁵² Morris, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 109.

Paul's ministry. It too must be the foundation for the church's proclamation of its truth.

Last, the purpose of Paul's prayer is to see the Thessalonians firm in the faith (3:13). He wants to see them delivered from any form of instability, especially at the coming of the Lord.⁵³ He prays that they would have a sure foundation in love in order to be delivered from this instability. Paul understood the parousia; today's culture must also understand. Therefore, pastors must have a purposeful intention to pray that their people are stable in the faith. Holmes explains the contemporary significance:

In a contemporary culture that is as overwhelmingly oriented to immediate gratification and results as ours is, to pray that others might live in light of eternity rather than the present is no small thing—especially since praying in this way on behalf of others inevitably reminds us of our need to do the same.⁵⁴

In sum, Paul provides the pastor with a prayer that he too can model in his ministry. Paul focuses on the initiative of God, the example of an increasing and abounding love in the believer's life and the stability of the believer's life at the coming of the Lord. Paul illustrates the importance of the growth of the believer through his prayer life. It is the firm stability of the believer's faith through an increased and overflowing love that prepares the believer for the coming of the Lord in the presence of God.

Paul acknowledges the faith and love of the Thessalonians while also encouraging them to continue as they had begun. He reminds them of his behavior in order to provide an example to follow in their Christian walk. These acknowledgments serve to

⁵³ Holmes states that Paul "knew that Jesus' coming would be a time not only of salvation but also of judgment ... and that even believers would at some point come before the God 'who tests our hearts' (1 Thess. 2:4) to give an account of their stewardship of life (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15)" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 121).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

express his overflowing joy and love for them. Paul's ministry is an example for pastoral ministry today.

CONCLUSION

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians expresses structural and pastoral importance. Paul's modification of the Hellenistic letter writing style of his day facilitates a proper understanding of the structure of Paul's thought. His unusual use of a lengthy thanksgiving section demonstrates both his concern and passionate joy for the Thessalonians. It is in this section of the letter that Paul's thanksgiving, petition, and wish-prayer is found (3:9-13).

This small paragraph concludes the lengthy thanksgiving and provides a basis for the second section of the letter. Paul's pastoral care is illustrated through an overflowing joy for what God has done in the Thessalonians' lives (3:9), thus demonstrating that an adequate way to thank God is impossible. Paul then offers a petition that consists of a desire to see the Thessalonians face to face and to strengthen their faith (3:10).

Paul continues his concern and love for the Thessalonians in the wish-prayer that follows (3:11-13). He begins this wish-prayer with the understanding that God himself has the ability to remove the spiritual hindrances from his path and bring him to the Thessalonians. Paul's strong desire is evident with the use of the optative mood, a prayerful wish or expectation. His love for them is demonstrated by praying that the Lord would cause their love to increase and go beyond measure (3:12). Paul validates his prayer by illustrating this same love to the Thessalonians, "as we do for you." Their love is to overflow without any hesitation. Paul concludes this wish-prayer with a purpose statement, namely that the Thessalonians are established and stand firm in the faith at the coming of the Lord (3:13).

It is evident that Paul's desire is pastoral in nature. His goal is to see people grow spiritually. Having a walk worthy of God's calling is an all-too-familiar statement left unchecked today. His

ministry is not for self-satisfaction or glorification. His praise and thanksgiving went to God. Because of a deep concern for the Thessalonians' growth, Paul never ceased to pray for them. Therefore, what thanks can Christians give to God? The desire must be to walk in fellowship with him so that at the Lord's coming their hearts are found blameless and holy.

Planting Missional Churches. 2nd edition. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im
Nashville, B & H Academic, 2016 416 pages. \$26.70

This newly released second edition comes out ten years after Stetzer's first edition of this classic text. Since then many things have changed in the landscape of church planting and multiplication. In this updated revised edition one will find much-needed new chapters on multi-site church planting, residencies, multi-ethnic ministry, church multiplication, theological education/training, spiritual warfare, the mission of God, and the differences between denominational and network church planting. Ed has added Daniel Im, his associate at newchurches.com as the co-author, and together they have changed over 50% of the content. The stories, content, and models are different in each chapter. In addition to completely reorganizing the book, they've integrated the research LifeWay conducted in the just released State of Church Planting study, a research partnership of over a dozen denominations on church planting in the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

Because the authors write to inform, clarify, encourage, and persuade evangelicals to embrace church planting, this book should be read by pastors as well as planters. They cite both scriptural (Paul's church planting) and historical evidence for the validity of continuous and aggressive church-planting. Sending and potential partner churches and leaders would greatly profit from this treatise.

Conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists should not be dissuaded from reading this book because of the addition of "missional" to church planting in the title. This buzz word is used differently by various authors. In some circles "missional" means "incarnational" and the focus is on a church being part of the culture that they're seeking to reach. "Missional" can also mean "mission-minded", or "doing" missions, especially internationally. Finally "missional" can mean actively ministering right where you are in your own Jerusalem. In *Planting Missional Churches*, Stetzer primarily uses the incarnational and local aspect of being missional. Ed explains, "Missional means adopting the posture of a missionary, joining Jesus on mission,

and learning and adapting to the culture around you while remaining biblically sound" (p. 22). In other words, missional churches today are those "on mission" with Jesus at all times and in every aspect of their ministry, seeking to bring the Gospel to the lost in their community. A church becomes truly missional only when it remains faithful to the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) while simultaneously seeking to engage the culture and contextualize the gospel (to the degree it can) so the gospel reaches the target community's hearers and ultimately transforms their worldview.

This may become the new standard in this decade for North American church planting with its 'nuts and bolts' approach. Stetzer and Im help planters think missiologically, theologically as well as practically about the entire process of starting a new work. Though some may see this book as too academic and theological at times, there is much practical advice, including things like selecting the right location, recruiting a launch team, finances, facilities, evangelism, worship, preaching and small group ministry among many other pertinent topics. Some topics are treated in a cursory manner, others in much more depth. There are insightful suggestions on reaching millennials, post-moderns and the younger generations. The book has helpful chapters on design models for church planting and a review of various types of church planters. They address the vital issue of "What Makes a Church Planter?" They discuss vital components for successful church starting such as assessment, training, and coaching. The authors have an excellent chapter evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of house ("simple") churches.

With several doctorates in missiology, actual field experience in church planting, and the assistance of LifeWay Research, Stetzer has become the leading church planting researcher for the Southern Baptist Convention and possibly for all evangelicals. For example, he confirms that the attendance of a new church with an involved mother church is higher than those without the participation of a sponsoring/mother church. The book gives lots of current web and book resources for planters. *If a church planter could buy only one book on church planting, this would be*

one of my top choices. I highly recommend this to all church planters and use it myself as a text here at BBS.

*Reviewed by Dr. Ken Davis
Director of Church Planting
Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania*

Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life.
Jeff Vanderstelt. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. 256 pages. \$19.99.

This book, by one who fruitfully and faithfully lives out what he teaches to others, presents a compelling picture of Jesus and the mission he's given his people. Vanderstelt, visionary leader of the Soma network of churches in the Northwest, inspires readers through his own life story and the story of Soma to live intentionally on mission with Jesus in the mundane events of everyday life.

Saturate presents a three-tiered strategy for discipleship: environments, identities, and rhythms. Environments are where discipleship happens, identities are who we are and who we are growing into, and rhythms are how we live out everyday life with gospel intentionality. Vanderstelt shows that discipleship is “an ongoing process of submitting all of life to Jesus, and seeing him saturate your entire life and world with his presence and power” (p. 85). The author seeks to help congregations understand that discipleship is not a passive activity and someone else's responsibility. Instead, it is their responsibility, and it is achievable. Vanderstelt's basic discipleship strategy consists of the three key environments for discipleship: life on life, life in community, and life on mission. In and through these environments, the goal is for believers to grow in their understanding of who they are in Christ. Out of this core identity believers do everything that they do. Because this is so important, everyone at Soma learns that they are part of the Father's family, servants of Christ, and missionaries filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In order to make mission normal and live everyday life with gospel intentionality, Vanderstelt and the leaders at Soma asked the question, “What are the everyday rhythms of life that everybody engages in everywhere?” (p. 170). With that list of rhythms, they then seek ways to train their people to engage in those rhythms, in light of the gospel, with the purpose of making disciples. They narrow those rhythms down to eat, listen, story, bless, celebrate, and recreate.

I recommend pastors and church planters use this book to train their small-group coaches and leaders. *Saturate* provides a framework to help group leaders deeply understand the gospel so that they will be fully saturated with Jesus. Group leaders will learn how to normalize mission for their group, taking it out of the “weird” category, integrating it into the rhythms of their group and the rhythms of their group members’ lives. Vanderstelt provides a roadmap to do this. Instead of starting with mission, the first step is to start with the gospel and help group members understand who they are in Christ (their identity). By starting with the gospel, believers develop the right foundation, which will be a springboard for everything else.

*Reviewed by Dr. Ken Davis
Director of Church Planting
Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania*