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Editorial: The Glory of Christ in Colossians

Stephen J. Wellum

It is our privilege to devote this issue of *SBJT* to Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison for the sake of the gospel (see Col 4:3, 10, 18), hence its categorization as one of Paul's captivity letters alongside Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon. For many reasons, throughout the ages, this letter has served the church well. Probably the most significant reason is due to its great and glorious subject matter: the Lord Jesus Christ. From the incredible Christological text or hymn of Colossians 1:15-20, and in every subsequent chapter, the person and work of God's own dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is unpacked and unveiled before our eyes. Colossians, like no other Pauline letter, from beginning to end, presents the glory, supremacy, preeminence, and sufficiency of Jesus, the incarnate Son, as Lord of creation, redemption, the church, and every principality and power, not only in this age but also in the age to come (see Col 1:15-20; 2:8-15).

Why should we pay careful attention to this letter today? First and broadly considered, we do so because Colossians is Scripture. Given that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and thus *God's* Word (2 Tim 3:16-17), it is imperative that we study, meditate upon, and obey this letter. Yet more specifically, there is a second reason why a study of Colossians will pay important dividends for the church today. Even though nearly 2,000 years separate us from the Colossian church, the challenges she faced and Paul's message to her is precisely what we need today given that we face similar difficulties. Let me develop this last observation a bit more.

To any astute observer of the contemporary scene, at least in the West but not limited to the western world, most acknowledge that the church is facing challenging times. Living in an increasingly pluralistic and postmodern society where truth and morality are up for grabs, the church is facing incredible pressure to com-

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promise in a whole host of areas including the theological and practical. However, for the most part, the kind of compromise we face is not an outright rejection of the truth of the gospel but a temptation to mix or blend biblical, orthodox Christianity with the current *Zeitgeist*, that is, the thought, mindset, and "spirit of the time." The result is a syncretism—in doctrine and practice—which attempts to extract truths from the Bible, divorced from the entire framework and context of Scripture, and then attempts to mix these truths with alien, contradictory viewpoints so that the end result is a compromised gospel and a muting of the Word of truth.

Where shall we turn to receive help to resist such compromise? How do we avoid becoming syncretistic in our thinking and thus unfaithful to the gospel in our day? It is important to remember that we are not the first ones to face such challenges. We often forget how similar the 1st century is to our 21st century context, at least in this regard. Specifically, this is true for the Colossian church. This church, founded by Epaphras and situated in the Lycus Valley, knew what it was like to live in a pluralistic and relativistic age. The Roman Empire harbored every ideology and religion imaginable, united in ultimate allegiance to the Roman Emperor. In such a situation, this church not only knew the pressure to compromise and the pull of syncretism but she had also experienced false teachers in her midst. From the letter, we know that Epaphras had visited Paul while he was in prison in Rome and informed him of the state of the church. Even though much of the report was encouraging (1:8; 2:5), he also reported the rise of false teaching within the church, which if not countered, would undermine the gospel and return the people to spiritual bondage and darkness. In fact, it is to counter such false, aberrant teaching that Paul's letter was probably written.

Scholars have debated the exact nature of "the Colossian heresy." Since Paul does not spell it out in detail, we do not know the precise nature of it. Yet, it is probably best to view it as a conglomeration of Jewish and Hellenistic beliefs mixed together with gospel truth. From the letter we know it focused on a false spirituality which fixated on areas of "wisdom and knowledge" (2:3), possibly even the demonic (2:8, 20), including Jewish tradition, rituals, foods, circumcision, the Sabbath, and other holy days (2:11-23). Regardless of what it exactly was, at its heart, as with all heresy, it had the primary effect of diminishing the supremacy and glory of Christ, and secondarily, robbing the church of her sufficiency and security in Christ.

What does Paul say to those who are in danger of compromise? What is his antidote to heresy, whether in the 1st or 21st century? It is this: the glory, wonder, and supremacy of Christ's person and work. In Colossians Paul reminds these early Christians, as he reminds us, of who the Son is as the "image of the invisible God," the agent of creation (1:15-16), who even as the incarnate one continually upholds and sustain the universe (1:17). Even more: Paul reminds us that Christ is not only Lord over all creation but he is also Lord in redemption, and that those who in in faith-union with him are now complete and sufficient in him. Nothing needs to be added to his work; he has done it all. In Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, all the blessings of heaven are ours—now and for all eternity.

As the church desperately needed to hear this message long ago, today we need to hear it again. In any age, we are always in the danger of compromise. Especially in our day when the pressure of syncretism is great, the antidote to it is the glory and supremacy of Christ. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will not only lead us to a greater knowledge of his Word but it will also lead us to a greater knowledge, confidence, and love for Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us learn from Colossians how to think deeply, find our rest in, and be led to worship, love, and praise of our great Triune God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Proclaiming Christ as Lord: Colossians 1:15–20

Larry R. Helyer

"Preach on great texts!" This advice to aspiring preachers has been severely compromised by our current obsession with "preaching where people itch." A sermonic diet of pop psychology, peppered with bible verses taken out of context, presupposes that first and foremost Jesus functions as a spiritual guru, someone "totally about" our existential angst. The result may well be, at least in North America, the most narcissistic generation of Christians ever to wend its way to heavenly Mount Zion. I want to plead for a return to sermons that elevate the level of theological discourse and awaken one's listeners to the necessity of ultimate truths. In short, pastors must rediscover the importance of preaching biblical theology. Such a menu serves as the most effective and enduring way to enable believers to be "mature in Christ" (Col 1:28) and "established in the faith" (Col 2:7). In so doing, it also provides reliable guidance for the pressing issues of postmodernity and beyond. Spirituality can never rise higher than its theological foundations.

I cannot think of a greater text on which to preach than Colossians 1:15-20. It is an awe-inspiring, mind-boggling portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. In high definition, the cosmic Christ confronts us in all his glory and majesty. When this reality grips us, we bow before him and proclaim the quintessential Christological affirmation, "Jesus is Lord" (Rom 10:9)! The Lordship of Christ is the key to Christian discipleship, the unerring reference point for charting a course in the midst of a bewildering and uncertain world. To this end, I offer some suggestions concerning how this text may serve as the basis for an edifying and inspiring sermon.

First, however, I want to discuss briefly some introductory, exegetical issues and suggestions for dealing with them. Preachers should, by all means, give careful attention to the background and context of this passage before constructing their sermon—good

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advice for preaching on any biblical text. Though it is not advisable to parade all the details of this intricate passage before the congregation—almost certainly a recipe for a boring message— the preacher needs to have a basic grasp of the issues before setting out the main points of the sermon.

BACKGROUND OF THE TEXT

Occasion

Paul writes this hortatory letter to the house church at Colossae because a disciple of his, Epaphras, needed his assistance.[1] In short, false teaching was threatening the congregation. Epaphras, probably the founder of the church (Col 1:4, 7–8; 4:12–13; Phm 23), sought Paul's counsel while the latter was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial before Nero Caesar.[2]

The precise nature of the false teaching has generated an enormous amount of secondary literature, but, unfortunately, nothing like a consensus has emerged. The primary problem is that Paul nowhere explicitly identifies either the false teacher(s) or provides a full description of the false teaching.[3] Consequently, the interpreter must resort to mirror reading, involving not a little subjectivity. Nonetheless, Paul's explicit criticisms of the aberrant teaching and his unequivocal antidote, coupled with judicious inferences, provide enough evidence to draw some tentative conclusions about the situation.

In my view, the false teaching centered on visionary experience and showcased an ascent to the heavenly throne room. The climax of this visionary rapture involved the initiate observing, and perhaps also participating in, angelic worship around the glorious throne of God (Col 2:18).[4] The troubling aspect of the teaching is that it pushes Christ to the periphery (2:19) and focuses instead on mystical experience as the touchstone of spirituality. In order to experience this visionary ascent, the teacher(s) prescribed a strict regimen of rules and regulations ("Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch," involving abstinence and self-abasement (2:16–18, 20–21).[5] It seems likely that some of the "boundary markers" of Judaism were also smuggled in through the back door.[6] Thus circumcision, dietary laws and Sabbath observance were tacked on to an already ascetic piety.[7] In short, visionary experience resulted in a diminution of the person and work of Christ; a performance-oriented spirituality skewed his cosmic centrality. Based on Paul's response to this sham spirituality, I infer that, while the teaching may not have explicitly diminished the role of Christ in the cosmos and church, its misguided, narcissistic spirituality resulted in the same distortion.

Literary Genre

In dealing with the text itself, the first issue concerns the literary genre of this celebrated passage. The elevated language and rare vocabulary, rhythmic cadence and intricate structure, as well as its apparent insertion into the flow of Paul's letter (note the shift from second person pronouns in the preceding and following contexts to strictly third person in the passage itself), suggest that we are dealing with an early Christological hymn or confession of faith. Assertions that it is a hymn have not convinced all; a consensus, however, acknowledges its confessional nature.[8]

An ancillary question arises: Did Paul insert a pre-existing hymn or creed of unknown (to us) composition and provenance or did he compose the entire passage himself? If the former, did Paul edit the hymn in order to emphasize omitted aspects of Christ's creative and redemptive work and thereby critique the false teaching at Colossae?[9] I have investigated this question in some detail and concluded that the most likely answer is also the simplest: Paul himself is responsible for the existing form and entire content of the passage.[10] Not all will agree with this assessment. Whichever view one holds, Paul employs the confession as a doctrinal platform from which to launch his counter attack against the false teaching. In so doing, Paul redirects the attention of his readers/listeners to apostolic tradition. One might say, "Back to the creed!"

Literary Structure

Another decision relates to the structure of the

hymn or confession. Are we dealing with a passage consisting of two or three stanzas or sections? Some have argued for a three strophe hymn in which vv. 17–18a serve as a short statement describing Christ's sustaining creation (cf. Heb 1:3).[11] In my view, it is more likely that the passage falls into two basic affirmations: Christ and Creation (vv. 15–17) and Christ and the Church (vv. 18–20). One may prefer to label the second stanza as Christ and the New Creation. Another way of outlining the passage might be Christ and the Beginning (vv. 15–17) and Christ and the New Beginning (vv. 18–20).[12] In any case, this two-fold division seems to follow naturally from the two parallel affirmations that serve as the basic framework for all the other statements in the passage:

1:15-17	**1:18-20**
hos estin eikōn tou theou … who is the image of God …	*hos estin archē tou sōmatou* who is the head of the body [the church]
prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs firstborn of [or over] all creation	*prōtotokos ek tōn nekrōn* firstborn from the dead
hoti en autō … *di' autou …* for in him … through him	*hoti en autō …* *di' autou …* For in him … through him …
kai eis auton and for him	*eis auton* for him

Establishing the basic outline of the passage leads to an obvious way of organizing one's sermon. The message becomes an exposition centering on the person and work of Christ in both the old and new creations. We may summarize the message in a thematic statement: Christ is the Lord of creation and the Lord of the church. We turn now to the supporting details of this awesome affirmation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

An effective way of introducing the text would be to invite the congregation to imagine they are present in an early Christian house church listening to this letter being read out loud (Col 4:16). Clearly, Paul wants to remind his listeners of something they received and were taught as part of their new faith in Christ (Col 2:6–7). Whether it was a hymn or an early creedal statement is not of first importance. What is important are the apostolically grounded affirmations—these must be confessed. Here is a suggestion: have the congregation recite the Nicene Creed together before the sermon. It would be helpful to remind them that Colossians 1:15–20 was one of the primary texts on which this creed was based. This prepares your audience to appreciate the creedal nature of the text to be expounded.

Paul essentially answers a question Jesus asked his twelve disciples some thirty years earlier at Caesarea Philippi: "But who do you say that I am?"(Matt 16:15). This question, asked at a decisive point in Jesus' ministry, requires a decisive answer. Jesus' contemporaries offered the following possibilities: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets (Matt 16:14), or "the prophet" (John 6:14; 7:40). Modern scholarship has attempted to answer the question by stripping off the assumed layers of tradition in the canonical Gospels (and sometimes supplementing with snippets of apocryphal gospels!) and recovering the "historical" Jesus.[13] Lay Christians are generally aware of the much ballyhooed results, given the media hype they typically receive, and so a brief survey is in order.[14]

The proposed, scholarly reconstructions span a surprising range and, in many instances, stand in stark contradiction to each other:

- Jesus was a Jewish magician, adept at sleight of hand tricks, who introduced his disciples to hallucinogenic drugs—what one scholar called "the sacred mushroom cult."[15]
- Jesus was essentially a terrorist, a member of the Palestinian national liberation party of the day called the Zealots.[16]

- Jesus was an itinerant, popular philosopher, perhaps akin to the Cynics.[17]
- Jesus was a simple Galilean sage who taught in memorable parables and one-liners.[18]
- Jesus was an apocalyptic, visionary prophet who expected the imminent end of the world and final judgment.[19]
- Jesus was a social reformer who identified with the poor and oppressed and passively resisted the powerful and wealthy.[20]
- The most off-the-wall reconstruction of the historical Jesus is that of Barbara Thiering. She identifies Jesus as an Essene who married Mary Magdalene, fathered three children, divorced her and was the Wicked Priest referred to in the Dead Sea Scrolls! It gets better. Pilate traveled down to Qumran to supervise Jesus' execution, but in fact Jesus didn't die; he revived in the coolness of the tomb and escaped. Later he traveled in the Mediterranean, consulting with Paul at Caesarea and Corinth. Finally, he ended up in Rome where he lived for many years and died an old man in about A.D. 64. Unbelievable![21]

While there is a modicum of truth in some of these reconstructions, they share a common denominator, namely a rejection of the portraits of Jesus that emerge from a face value reading of the canonical Gospels, in particular, Peter's divinely revealed response in Matthew's Gospel: "the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:15–17).[22] Needless to say, they also fall well short of the astounding affirmations found in this Pauline letter to believers in Colossae in the early 60's. Furthermore, whether Paul redacted a pre-existing hymn/creed or composed it entirely himself, the letter presupposes that the essential content of the confession was already part of received church tradition, at least in the Pauline churches. The implication of this observation is that a high Christology reaches back to at least to the 50's and probably even earlier.[23]

CHRIST THE LORD OF CREATION

So, according to the apostle Paul, who is Jesus of Nazareth? The first stanza of this confession is stunning: it celebrates Christ as the creator ("by Him everything was created," Col 1:16) and in the course of doing so, includes some equally amazing corollaries.

Relationship to God: Image of God

The first of these corollaries concerns his relationship to God. The predication "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) affirms the full deity of Christ. The expression implies a level of likeness going far beyond mere similarity.[24] Though strict identity goes too far, a shared likeness is at least required. This does not read into the text later Christian creedal theology because Paul subsequently explains what he means: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority" (Col 2:9–10).[25] To this extraordinary statement should be added a Pauline parallel from another Christological passage in the letter to the Philippians: "Who, though he was in the form (*morphē*) of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (Phil 2:6).[26]

Paul is not alone in this conviction; the apostle John also makes it crystal clear. "The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1). "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen the glory, the glory as of a father's only son … No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:14, 18). Jesus' reply to Philip's question, "Lord, show us the Father" (John 14:8) could not be more straightforward: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).[27] The anonymous author of Hebrews is on the same page (Heb 1:3, 5, 8, 10). These texts unequivocally affirm the preexistence of the Son, the one who is "before all things" (Col 1:17). The later formulations of Nicaea ("God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God") and Chalcedon ("truly God") restate Paul's affirmation that the beloved Son is the image of the invisible God. Perhaps the colloquial expres-

sion "spitting image" captures the idea. Peterson paraphrases Col 1:15a this way: "We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen."[28]

Relationship to the Cosmos: Creator

He is "the firstborn over all creation" (NIV).[29] This title emphasizes the preeminence and position of the Son as the one who exercises rule over his creation.[30] Since the Son shares equality with God (Phil 2:6), this title sits comfortably with the corollary notion that he is the mediator of creation. Everything that is, whether visible or invisible, came into being through the creative power of the Lord Jesus Christ. This mind-boggling affirmation could only be grasped by the post-resurrection Jesus movement after two indispensable prerequisites: the forty day post-resurrection period of instruction by the risen Lord and the descent of the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (John 14:26; cf. 12:16). Tutored by the risen Christ and illuminated by the Paraclete, the story of Jesus now becomes the sequel and fulfillment of the OT story of Israel. The God of Israel, Yahweh, the Lord, is now revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In the words of the apostle Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

The creator has entered his creation. This is something Jesus could not share with his disciples out in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Pedagogically, they were not yet ready— the paradox was simply too profound. Frequently, during Jesus' ministry, the disciples are flummoxed: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). They must first see with their eyes and touch with their hands the risen Lord (1 John 1:3), and then the Paraclete must lift the veil and reveal Christ in the Scriptures of Israel (2 Cor 4:3–6). The apostle Paul, like "one untimely born" (1 Cor 15:8), was no exception; he too encountered the risen Lord (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:15–17) and received divine instruction from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:11–16).[31] Once the equation is made that Jesus is Lord, the hermeneutical key lies close at hand to unlock the meaning of Israel's Scripture and the awesome God who stands behind those Scriptures. This explains the transparent assumption by NT authors that what Yahweh of the OT did, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus did. Simply stated, that is the taproot of the cosmic Christology so evident in the Colossian confession. Christ is the cosmic Lord because he is the cosmic creator.

Genesis of Cosmic Christology

Rudolf Bultmann posed a question that scholars adhering to strict historical critical methodology have long tried to answer: "The proclaimer became the proclaimed—but in what sense"?[32] I have suggested a way to understand how the apostle Paul could have arrived at his cosmic Christology, given the resources and traditions available to him.[33]

In the first place, the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus exercising unprecedented authority, something that scandalizes the religious leadership and amazes the crowds (Matt 7:28–29); indeed, he assumes prerogatives proper only to God. For example, he forgives sins (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21; 7:47–48), amends or even abolishes portions of the sacrosanct Torah (Mark 2:21–22; Matt 5: 21–48) and exercises divine control over demons, disease and nature (e.g., Mark 3:10–12, 22; Matt 14:19–36). Then, leading up to the last visit to Jerusalem, Peter, James and John witness Jesus' transfiguration, an unveiling of his divine nature (Mark 9:2–8 and pars.). The culminating event, however, that totally transforms the disciples' understanding of Jesus is the resurrection. Here is the grand demonstration that Jesus is Lord. The light comes on and in that light the apostles see the face of Jesus Christ, the image of God (Acts 9:3–9; 22:4–16; 26:9–18; 2 Cor 4:4–6).

But how did Paul bring all this together to create the unique, cosmic Christology exhibited in Colossians? In my view, a crucial component is the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism. Beginning in Proverbs 8:22–31, God's attribute of wisdom is personified. Lady Wisdom is described as preexistent and as the creator of the world. This personification is taken up and advanced by Ben Sira (Sir 24:1–34) and the author of Wisdom of Solomon (Wis 7:22–8:1). In

the latter work, we have a remarkable passage that "comes quite close to hypostatizing Wisdom—that is, ascribing material existence to an abstract idea."[34] What I suggest is that Paul took "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" by incarnating God's wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ, the beloved Son (Col 1:13; cf. Rom 1:3–4;9:5;1 Cor 8:6;1 Tim 2:5–6; 3:16).[35]

This giant leap was facilitated by employing a rabbinic exegetical principle called *gezera shawa* ("an equivalent regulation"), in which passages containing the same word or words interpret one another.[36] The link passages are Proverbs 8:22, where Wisdom is created "in the beginning" (*en archē* LXX), Genesis 1:1, where God initiates creation "in the beginning" (*en archē* LXX) and Genesis 1:26, in which God creates humankind as his "image" (*eikōn* LXX). *Archē* has several different nuances including, "firstborn," "head," "beginning," and "chief." Precisely these descriptors, in addition to the "image" predication, are applied to Christ in Colossians 1:15–20. Furthermore, even the different meanings of the preposition *en* such as "in," "by" and "for" each play a crucial role in shaping the Christological confession.[37] Paul's Pharisaic training thus uniquely qualified him to be "the first and greatest Christian theologian."[38] In short, the Colossians must reaffirm their commitment to the great confession: Jesus Christ is the Lord of creation.

Implications of Cosmic Christology

To affirm Christ as creator is no small matter. The scope of creation is beyond comprehension. Our galaxy alone, the Milky Way, has an estimated 135 billion stars and there are thought to be at least 100 billion other galaxies! Our infinitesimal speck of the universe teams with millions of species of organisms, with estimates as high as two billion for the number that have existed at some point in our 4.5 billion year old history. So much for the visible things. The invisible realm staggers imagination. Scientists are generally agreed that in order to make sense of the universe, one must assume that 70% of its vast expanse consists of "dark" energy and 23% of "dark matter." That is to say, what we can see with our most powerful space probe telescopes is but a mere 6% of what is out there! The Psalmist surely had it right: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

Not to be overlooked is Paul's singling out of one particular subset of the invisible order, namely the thrones, dominions, rulers and powers (1:16). These are various classes of angelic, spiritual beings, mentioned again in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:21) and perhaps related to the "elemental spirits of the universe" (2:8 cf. Gal 4:9). Their inclusion in both letters directed to house churches in the Roman province of Asia is probably not accidental but pastorally relevant. Such beings must not be venerated or feared since they, like everything else, stand under the authority of the sovereign Lord of creation.[39]

Christ the Glue of the Universe

Not only is Christ the creator, he is the one who holds it all together. "In him all things hold together" (Col 1:16). The writer of Hebrews concurs: "he sustains all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3). Once again, in trying to comprehend the meaning of this, we reach the limits of our intellectual capacity. Because he is God of very God, Christ's power and control extends to the edges of the universe and beyond.

If one tries to explain the existence and coherence of the universe without invoking the reality and active presence of God, the answer goes something like this. In the standard model of physics, there are four fundamental forces that account for all the known phenomena in the cosmos.

1. The first is called "the strong force." This is the most powerful force known in the universe and exists within the nucleus of an atom, something too small even to be seen with an electron microscope! But in the amazing world of subatomic particles, an astounding collection of par-

ticles exist, bearing exotic names like fermions, hadrons, leptons, quarks and bosons. One of these theoretical bosons, called the Higgs' boson, after the physicist who postulated its existence, has even been called "the God particle" because of its necessity to explain the behavior of other particles. Elementary particle physicists speak about "spin" (four of these) "flavors" (twelve of these) and even antimatter. The strong force binds together these mysterious particles that apparently are the building blocks of the universe.

2. The second force is only 1/100th as strong as the strong force. It confines the negatively charged electrons in their complex orbits around the positively charged nucleus. The orbital patterns of electrons determine most of the properties of matter that we see around us—hardness, color, chemical properties and so on. In short, the world of ordinary experience is shaped by electromagnetism.

3. The so-called "weak force" is only a trillionth as strong as electromagnetism. It modifies the behavior of the first two forces and causes radioactive decay.

4. The last force is the weakest of all, and yet, paradoxically, exerts the greatest influence. In terms of its relative strength, it is a trillion, trillion, trillion times weaker than the weak force and yet the universe is shaped largely by this force! We call it gravity. It is a force of nearly infinite range and, so far as anybody knows, is never cancelled out by anything else. It has rightly been called a kind of master field. One might say it creates the arena in which all the other forces "live and move and have [their] being" (Acts 17:28).

What is fascinating is that no one has really explained why these forces and particles act the way they do. The quest continues to discover a comprehensive master field theory. I am not optimistic such a goal is attainable. All that we have been able to accomplish up till now—and this has been a remarkable achievement—is to describe many things, though probably not most things, that happen in our universe. We have even been able to explain various levels of causation for these many things. But what we have not been able to do is offer a satisfactory account of final causation. For that, one must turn to theology grounded in special revelation, Holy Scripture. The ultimate explanation why there is anything at all and why it continues to exist stands before us in Colossians 1:17. Jesus Christ, the cosmic Lord, determines the functions and durations of all the cosmic forces and particles. Teleology is a function of theology. Beyond that we cannot go, for we are, after all, finite beings. But that is okay, because our cosmic Lord is in charge and he has promised that "all things are yours (the world, life, death, the present, the future) … all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (1 Cor 3:22).

CHRIST THE LORD OF THE CHURCH

The second stanza of our confession shifts from ontology (the nature of being) and cosmogony (theory of origins) to soteriology. Like the first stanza there are corollaries that carry immense theological freight. The primary theological term describing the saving work of the cosmic Lord is reconciliation (*apokatallasō*), a term requiring unpacking. But first we must examine the affirmations leading up to it.

CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

I have already suggested that Paul composes his portrait of the cosmic Christ on the basis of a sketch consisting of the various nuances of the word *archē*. On this understanding, one can appreciate the appropriateness of affirming Christ as the "head (*kephalē*) of the body, the church" (1:18). The expression affirms Christ as the "life principle and sovereign ruler" of his body, that is, the church.[40] Thus the church is bound to the cosmic Christ as both her source and authority. In the background we hear an echo of the Master who promised his beleaguered disciples near the shrine of Pan at Caesarea Philippi, reputed by the pagans to be a portal to Hades, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18b). It is also not without significance that in this letter Paul stresses the lordship of Christ over the thrones, dominions, rulers

and powers who inhabit the invisible realm (Col 1:18) and that Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [i.e., the cross]" (2:15). One hears a similar theme in the related epistle to the Ephesians (3:10; 6:12).

CHRIST THE BEGINNING AND THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

Whereas one might naturally connect the "beginning" in v. 18 with Paul's earlier cosmogonic Christology of the first stanza, the immediate link with the ensuing title points us in a different direction: Paul is speaking about the new creation initiated in the church.

These two titles are semantic neighbors, the latter explaining how it is that Christ became the *archē* of the church. The new beginning arises in the resurrection, implied in the title "firstborn from the dead." Whereas context required that "firstborn" in stanza one was not primarily temporal in perspective, the opposite is true here.[41] Christ is firstborn precisely because he is the first to come back from the realm of the dead and to hold its power in his hand. According to Paul, Christ functions as the "firstborn within a large family," each member of which is predestined to be conformed to his image [*eikōn*] (Rom 8:29; cf. Heb 12:22).This theological confession also undergirds the message of hope in the Apocalypse. There Jesus Christ is likewise "the firstborn of the dead," and "the living one [who] was dead…[but now] alive forever and ever; and holds "the keys of Death and of Hades" (Rev 1:5, 18). Paul can also depict this climactic saving deed in cultic terms when he emphatically reminds the Corinthians, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor 15:20, 23). The temporal aspect of "firstfruits" is clearly to the fore (cf. Lev 23:10–11, 17, 20). The same may be said with regard to "firstborn from the dead" without at all denying the notion of preeminence in the background.

There is the possibility that another important Pauline theme lurks behind this predication. It may be that Paul is alluding to the notion of Christ as the Second Adam.[42] Thus in 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul offers this crisp theological summary: "for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." This is spelled out more fully in the justly famous passage in Romans 5:12–21, where Paul asserts that "death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, *who is a type of the one who was to come*" (Rom 5:14 [italics mine]).

CHRIST THE FIRST PLACE IN EVERYTHING [PRŌTEUŌN]

The purpose clause at the end of v. 18, summarizes Paul's antidote to the poisonous teaching and exposes the nub of the problem at Colossae. The teachers who declared the Colossians disqualified, if they did not participate in angelic worship (2:18), were, in fact, the ones debarred: they were not "holding fast to the head" (2:19). For them visionary experience took pride of place in Christian experience. Paul's critique is unsparing: without Christ at the center, it is of no value whatsoever (2:23).

Note that Paul does not condemn visionary mysticism per se. How could he given his own ecstatic, visionary experiences (2 Cor 12:1–10 cf. Acts 22:17–21; 27:23)? Rather, what Paul finds disturbing about the false teaching is its focus on the periphery of the throne room, not the person who sits on the throne (cf. Rev 4–5). Paul's corrective consists of this nice piece of realized eschatology: "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1–3). The upshot is that the Colossian believers should not aspire to visionary ascents to the throne room because they are already there! In a profound, spiritual sense, they are already seated with Christ on his throne by virtue of being in Christ. Because this is so, Paul can confidently affirm: "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor

5:7; cf. Phil 1:23). To be sure, this spiritual reality is presently "hidden." But at the Parousia, that which is hidden gives way to a fully revealed glory (Col 3:4 cf. Rom 8:18).

CHRIST THE RECONCILER OF CHURCH AND COSMOS

We are now in position to examine the central theological affirmation of stanza two. In the term reconciliation we have a rich reservoir of ideas and concepts.[43] *Apokatallasō* conveys the notion of reestablishing "proper friendly interpersonal relations after these have been disrupted or broken."[44] It stands over against its opposite, namely, a state of estrangement and hostility (Col 1:21). In this context, estrangement exists between God and sinners as a result of trespasses and evil deeds that are duly recorded as if on a bill of indebtedness (Col 2:13–14). Such a state of estrangement and hostility requires an act of reconciliation, of peacemaking. Paul indicates that the initiative for such reconciliation lies entirely with God and that the Son was the agent through whom (*dia autou*) "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). This coheres with Paul's thought elsewhere on the atonement (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18–21).

But in what sense can it be said that Christ's cross reconciles "all things," especially those things that are in heaven? The "all things" of v. 16 must be parallel to the "all things" of v. 20, leading to the conclusion that Paul has in mind the entire cosmos, including the thrones, dominions, rulers and powers (Col 1:16).[45] At face value, Paul appears to say that reconciliation affects all things and is comprehensive in its effect. In short, we must raise the question whether, at the end of the day, Paul envisions a universal reconciliation.

If this text were all we had on the topic, there would be little choice but to acknowledge that Paul affirmed universalism. It does not, however, exist in solitary isolation. Indeed, the letter of Colossians itself provides a larger context within which to interpret his comments about the scope of reconciliation. Why would Paul even bother to "struggle" (Col 2:1) for the Colossians if all are reconciled to God, regardless of their personal response to God's initiative? Furthermore, Paul's warning to his readers implies that not all ends well if one shifts from the hope promised in the gospel (Col 1:23). It is unnecessary to prolong argument here. The Pauline corpus speaks unequivocally: reconciliation requires a response of faith, a faith that perseveres until the end (e.g., Rom 1:18, 32; 2:8–9, 12; 10:1; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 2 Thess 2:10). I conclude that Paul's sweeping language about reconciliation means that the basis for reconciliation in the cross of Christ makes salvation *available* to all but not *automatic* for all. A magic-like transformation, operating independently of human response to Christ's atoning death on the cross, is quite foreign to Paul's thought.[46]

But what about the hostile angelic and spirit beings? Later in his letter, Paul pulls back the curtain on the events at Golgotha and reveals that more was taking place behind the scenes, than meets the eye. "He [Christ] disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [i.e., the cross]" (Col 2:15). The Philippian confession anticipates the grand finale of redemptive history when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10–11). Apparently, then, not all spirit beings willingly submit; some must be forcefully subdued as in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. Thus reconciliation includes the idea of pacification.[47] This chimes in with the apostle Peter's depiction of Christ's triumph over "the spirits in prison," when the "angels, authorities, and powers [are] made subject to him" (1 Pet 3:22, cf. Eph 1:21–22).

Paul does not in Colossians elaborate on the destiny of inanimate things other than to include them within the sweeping scope of reconciliation. He does, however, mention their final disposition in Romans 8:18–23, where he declares: "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." In all likelihood then, Paul shared with Peter

and John a vision of "a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21–22). The reconciling work of the cosmic Christ prepares for "the renewal of all things" (Matt 19:28).

SUMMARY

Before Paul launches his attack on the false teaching (Col 2:8–23), he lays the foundation for his remarks by redirecting the attention of the readers/listeners to a creedal affirmation highlighting the person and work of Christ (Col 1:15–20). This confessional statement, reformulated in the later creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon, functions as an antidote to the Colossian poison. The passage confesses Christ as the center of Christian experience, indeed, of the entire universe. Like the "strong force" in the nucleus of an atom, Christ holds all things together. As the Lord of old and new creations, everything lies under his purview and sovereign rule. Even the angelic and astral beings who seem to have loomed so large in the estimation of the false teachers, fall under his jurisdiction; indeed, they are his handiwork. Based on this confession, Paul's parenesis in 2:8–3:4 demotes them to their proper, peripheral orbit around the cosmic Lord.

Viewed from a cosmic Christology perspective, the false teaching is exposed as shallow and a mere "shadow of what is to come," whereas the "substance belongs to Christ" (Col 1:17). Paul lifts the vision of the Colossians to "the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). And what a vision it is! The cosmic Christ in Colossians 1:15–20 explodes our puny notions about him. Like John on the isle of Patmos we need a fresh vision of his majesty (Rev 1:17–18). This is the remedy for the Colossian aberration and the self-absorbed myopia of our own day.

APPLICATION OF PAUL'S COSMIC CHRISTOLOGY

Paul's admonition is timeless in its application. Each era of Christianity has exhibited moments of imbalance, when Christ was displaced from the center and allowed to orbit around something of lesser importance. Whether asceticism, dogma, eccentric personalities, ecstasy, liturgy, ritual, tradition or visionary experience, each has the potential to displace Christ from his rightful place as Lord of all. These alternative focal points may "have indeed an appearance of wisdom," but when they supplant the all-sufficiency and centrality of Christ, they amount to mere "human commands and teachings" and are of "no value in checking self-indulgence" (Col 2:23).

Christian narcissism threatens us with a new Colossian heresy. Pastors need to address this crisis in a loving but firm manner (Gal 6:1; Eph 4:14–15; 1 Tim 1:3–7; 6:11). I am not encouraging open season on various and sundry forms of Christian spirituality and worship we find objectionable. Great charity, discernment and flexibility are required. My own generational preferences should not become the norm. On the other hand, constant vigilance must be maintained, whatever form of spiritual discipline and worship one practices, lest the centrality of Christ be subverted. The Dark Lord is a master of deception and deceit and pastors must constantly be vigilant to detect when the Lordship of Christ is being undermined (2 Cor 2:11; 11:3, 14; cf. 1 Pet 5:8–9). Such vigilance calls for discernment: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7, et al).

Authentic Christian life and worship must be christocentric because Christ is the center of the cosmos and the church. The mystery of Christ rests not on mere human tradition, but on the apostolic tradition concerning Christ (1:7, 26–28; 2:8). This requires being "rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, *just as you were taught*" (Col 2:8 [italics mine]). From this it follows that "discipleship is … a transformation of the mind, and only through such transformation can the will of God be discerned (Rom 12:2)."[48] The mind matters. "Think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received." (Phil 4:8). Modern Christians must not be hoodwinked by the idle notion that Christology is just theoretical speculation; in truth, it is the indispensable entry point into all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.[49]

How, then, as Christians, do we respond to this magnificent portrait of the Cosmic Christ? The short answer is: we confess him as Lord. This involves much more than mouthing a mantra. As our understanding of the person and work of Christ deepens, we discover the master key that unlocks the meaning of life: "Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2–3). Christ at the center creates a new center of consciousness and a new orientation:

1. Our hearts swell with joyful thanksgiving to our heavenly Father who "has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:12–13). We acknowledge with profound gratitude that this rescue and transfer operation was costly beyond measure. Through the beloved Son's death, in his fleshly body and by the blood of his cross, we are reconciled to God, and experience peace with God (Col 1:20, 22; Rom 5:1).

2. Our lives reflect hope. We do not live in a vast, impersonal universe of mysterious, unfathomable forces in which the ultimate outcome for everyone and everything is oblivion. On the contrary, this is our Father's world, a world created and preserved by the Lord Jesus (Col 1:16). But the best is yet to come: the Cosmic Christ promises to unveil a glorious, new creation, exceeding our wildest expectations, "the hope laid up for [us] in heaven" (Col 1:5; cf. 1:23; 3:4).

3. Closely related to hope is spiritual stability. Christ at the center maintains our emotional, intellectual and spiritual equilibrium in the midst of a cacophony of competing views, voices and values, all clamoring for our allegiance and threatening to tip us off balance. Being "steadfast in the faith without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel" (Col 1:23) is the guaranteed formula for becoming "mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). No ascetic or esoteric ritual, no gimmick or special regimen and no new philosophy, therapy or vision can really deliver the goods. "They are simply human commands and teachings" (Col 2:22). What matters is Christ in you the hope of glory. And having him we have all we need.

4. We willingly worship the Lord of all. Worship is no longer wearisome; wakened within us is a Spirit-prompted outpouring of adoration and praise. There is a renewed sense of the communion of the saints as we "let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in [our] hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Col 3:16). And this is not just on the Lord's day; for us, every day is the Lord's day since we "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17).

5. We give witness to our Cosmic Lord. Overwhelmed by the grace of God in Christ, we seek to fulfill Paul's admonition to the Colossians: "Conduct yourself wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone" (Col 4:5–6). The lost surely need a friend in Jesus, but they also desperately need a cosmic Lord and redeemer.[50]

SUGGESTION FOR THE CLOSING

I think a hymn celebrating the person and work of Christ would be a fitting way to conclude the sermon.[51] While many could be selected, I especially like "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" with its grand concluding line "and crown him Lord of all!" Paul would be pleased.

ENDNOTES

[1] Maria A. Pascuzzi weighs the arguments pro and con for the authenticity of Colossians and concludes that Pauline authorship is more plausible ("Reconsidering the Authorship of Colossians," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23.2 [2013]: 223–45). See also her discussion of the ratio of modern scholars advocating one side or the other (p. 223, n. 3).

[2] I still incline to the view that Paul wrote Colossians from Rome, although a good case can be made for Caesarea. See, e.g., E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 266–75. In my

view, despite its relative closeness to Colossae, Ephesus has less to commend it.

[3] For two relatively recent studies that survey the history of research, see Christian Stettler, "The Opponents of Paul at Colossae," in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed., Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 169–200, and Jerry L. Sumney, "Studying Paul's Opponents: Advances and Challenges," in ibid., 7–58, esp. 29–33.

[4] This view was articulated by Fred O. Francis ("Humility and Angelic Worship" in *Conflict at Colossae: A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Selected Modern Studies* [ed., Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks; rev. ed.; SBLSBS 4; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975], 163–95) and further developed by Andrew T. Lincoln (*Paradise Now and Not Yet* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 110–114) and Thomas J. Sappington, (*Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* [Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplements 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991], 154–60). Stettler argues that the opponents were Torah-observant, non-Christian Jews who sought mystical, visionary experiences (ibid.), while Sumney holds that they were professing Christians (ibid.). The other leading interpretation of the phrase *thrēskeia tōn angelōn* takes it as an objective genitive construction in which the devotees venerate or worship the angelic beings and "the elemental spirits of the universe." This is Frank Thielman's view (*Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 378). If, in fact, worship of spirit beings was part of the teaching, I find it hard to account for Paul's critique. Elsewhere in his letters, he is unsparing in his attack upon those who compromise monotheism (cf.1 Cor 8:5–6; 10:14–22; Gal 5:20; Rom 1:21–23;). It's not even clear from Paul's language in Colossians that he treats the perpetrator(s) of the false teaching as completely "beyond the pale." On this see Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 11.

[5] For many expositors, self-abasement (*tapeinophrosynē*) refers to rigorous fasting. Fasting was a regular feature of visionary experiences in paganism and Judaism. However, Heinz Giesen, "*tapeinophronsynē*," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 3:334 argues that "it appears more appropriate to take one's cue from the general usages of this term within the NT and to understand *tapeinophrosynē* here as *humility* … doubtless perverted whenever heretics take pleasure in it … [since it] only serves the indulgence of the flesh, i.e., religiously inspired egoism, which excludes humility."

[6] "Boundary markers" or "badges of Jewish identity" are expressions that various Pauline scholars have adopted to denote those practices of Judaism that distinguished them from Gentiles. See James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983): 95–122 and Scott Hafemann, "Paul and His Interpreters," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 666–79.

[7] N. T. Wright sees the same basic contours as the Judaizers Paul combated in Galatians (*The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 24–30). Visionary mysticism masked the Judaizing bent of the teaching.

[8] On the background of this passage, see Larry R. Helyer, "Colossians 1:15-20: Pre-Pauline or Pauline?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26.2 (June 1983): 167-179; idem, "Arius Revisited: The Firstborn over all Creation (Col. 1:15)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31.1 (March 1988): 59-67; idem, "Recent Research on Col 1:15-20 (1980-1990)," *Grace Theological Journal* 12.1 (1992): 51-67 and idem, "Cosmic Christology and Col. 1:15-20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37.2 (June 1994): 235-246. For more recent research see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Tradition and Redaction in Col 1:15–20," *Revue Biblique* 2 (1995): 231–41; Vincent A. Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith: An Authorial, Structural and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic Christology in Col 1:15–20* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 41; Leuven: Peeters, 2006); M. E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Murray J. Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon* (2d. ed.;Nashville: B&H, 2010) and David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

[9] In Murphy-O'Connor's view, "Paul transformed the hymn into a formidable weapon in his struggle to

ensure that the earthly activity of Christ was recognized" (ibid., 231).

[10] Helyer, "Pre-Pauline or Pauline"? In *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, Pizzuto argues that the author of the letter wrote Col 1:15–20, but holds that the author was a post-Pauline disciple (73–93, 117).

[11] The *Mittelstrophe* view typically entails the notion that Paul edited a pre-existing hymn in which the cosmos is referred to as a body. Paul edits the hymn by inserting the words "the church," thus changing the meaning of "body" from cosmos to church.

[12] Pizzuto argues for two foci but organized around a chiastic structure for the entire passage (*Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 203–205).

[13] I put "historical" in quotation marks because it signifies the reconstructed Jesus following the historical-critical method and the so-called "criteria for authenticity."

[14] The renewed, so-called "third quest" for the historical Jesus has, like its predecessors, failed to garner a consensus. See Scot McKnight, "Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Jesus Studies," in *Jesus Under Fire* (eds., Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 51–72. For a review of previous quests and their questionable results, see C. Brown, "Historical Jesus, Quest of," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1002), 326–41). Most of these attempts share a common denominator, namely, an approach "from below." That is, these researchers try to recover the historical Jesus from the encrustations of later faith now layered upon the earliest traditions. This enterprise necessarily brackets out the creeds of the early church and the doctrine of inspiration as a presupposition for understanding the historical Jesus. In their view, to adopt such presuppositions amounts to doing research "from above," disdained as unhistorical and therefore not accredited by the academy. Historical scholarship, so the argument goes, must be completely neutral with regard to faith commitments. The most candid admission about the shortcomings of historical Jesus research appears in Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[15] Championed by the eccentric Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993).

[16] S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner, 1967). Most recently, Reza Aslan, an Iranian-American, has championed this view with a controversial best seller, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013).

[17] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperOne, 1993).

[18] Argued by atheist Robert W. Funk the convener of the Jesus Seminar and spokesperson for its controversial results, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

[19] As developed in the magisterial work of the Roman Catholic New Testament scholar John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001) and essentially accepted by Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) and Allison, *Historical Christ*.

[20] Championed by Adolf Harnack of the early 20th century (*What is Christianity?* [trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders; New York: Putnam, 1908]) and modified by Marcus Borg (*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* [New York: HarperOne, 1995]). For a recent documentary advocating a similar approach, see *Who was Jesus?* (Discovery Channel 2009; DVD 2010).

[21] *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

[22] See my arguments in support of the view that Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God in Matthew goes well beyond being merely a synonym for Messiah (*The Life and Witness of Peter* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012], 40–43).

[23] Larry Hurtado demonstrates how a high Christology derives from the earliest, Aramaic-speaking church in Jerusalem (*Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,2003]). Gordon D. Fee says, "a higher Christology does not exist in the NT. Indeed, what is said here by Paul is also reflected in John and Hebrews; and since it is here asserted by Paul as something that the Colossians should also be in tune with, one has to assume that such a Christology existed in the church from a very early time" (*Pauline Christol-*

ogy [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007], 303).

[24] "All the emphasis is on the equality of the *eikōn* with the original…the being of Jesus as image is only another way of talking about His being as the Son" (Gerhard Kittel, "*eikōn*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 2:395)."There is no difference here between the image and the essence of the invisible God. In Christ we see God," (Otto Flender," Image," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976] 2:288). "Here *eikōn* means not so much resemblance as derivation and participation; it is not so much the likeness of a copy to its model, but the revelation and, as it were, emanation of the prototype. The image of something is its expression, the thing itself" (Ceslas Spicq, "*eikōn*," *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994]1:417–28).

[25] "It [*plērōma*] must mean deity, Godhead, entirety, the sum total of divine attributes" (Reinier Schippers, ["Fullness," *Dictionary of New Testament* Theology]1:740). Suzanne Watts Henderson argues that "fullness" reflects a mode of speaking about God's redeeming work through Christ in the cross and resurrection, something that can be shared by the church as well ("God's Fullness in Bodily Form: Christ and Church in Colossians" *Expository Times* 118.4 [2007]: 169–73). Her view is similar to that of James D. G. Dunn (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], p. 102). Both reflect attempts to scale down cosmic Christology from cosmological to soteriological dimensions.

[26] Gerald F. Hawthorne concludes that *morphē theou* means "the essential nature and character of God," (*Philippians* [Word Biblical Commentary 43; Waco: Word, 1983], 84).

[27] Dunn argues that the Gospel of John, at the end of the first century, is the first Christian document to affirm the preexistence and full deity of Christ. He attributes this to a remarkable intellectual break-through in Christian theology (*Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]). But what evidence is there for such an intellectual break-through and why is such a hypothesis even necessary, given the arguments for early high Christology? I suspect that scholarly predilection for developmental theories is at work. See Helyer," Cosmic Christology," 241–47 for a more in depth discussion.

[28] Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 425.

[29] This genitival construction is what Daniel B. Wallace calls a "genitive of subordination" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 103).

[30] Helyer, "Arius Revisited," 62–67.

[31] Leander Keck says that Paul's thought exemplified "a fundamental principle of Christian theology—that Christology makes event-based soteriology possible, and conversely, that event-based soteriology makes Christology necessary" ("Paul in New Testament Theology: Some Preliminary Remarks," in *The Nature of New Testament Theology* [ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006], 112).

[32] *The Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; New York: Scribner, 1955), 33.

[33] See Helyer, "Cosmic Christology," and idem, *Witness of Jesus, Paul and John*, 281–89.

[34] Donald A. Hagner, "Wisdom of Solomon," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 3:948.

[35] Readers will recognize the famous words of astronaut Neil Armstrong just before he stepped onto the surface of the moon on July 20, 1969. Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, says, "the hymnic author introduces a 'leap' in christological faith," (209). Gordon Fee adamantly opposes any notion of Paul being indebted to Second Temple Wisdom speculation (*Pauline Christology*, pp. 317–32, 595–630).This is not the place to enter into a lengthy rejoinder. Suffice it to say, in my judgment, the conceptual parallels are quite convincing." The keen mind of the apostle Paul almost certainly was steeped in this background. How could he have studied at Jerusalem and not known this work? Striking parallels between Wisdom of Solomon and Paul's letters exist beyond Col 1:15–20. Basically, Paul transferred to Jesus Christ the attributes and role of personified

Wisdom. The fundamental difference—making all the difference!—lies in the fact that Paul does not merely personify Christ as Wisdom; rather, he incarnates Christ as Wisdom" (Helyer, *Witness of Jesus, Paul and John*, p. 286). For a view similar to mine see Ben Witherington III, "Christology," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 105, and Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 379, n. 15. Daniel J. Ebert IV, *Wisdom Christology* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2011), takes essentially the same tack as Fee. See my review of Ebert's book in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55.3 (September 2012): 630–32.

[36] This was one of seven rules for interpreting Scripture formulated by Hillel the Elder. He was a predecessor, perhaps the grandfather, of Gamaliel, the teacher of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). Several passages from Paul's letters give evidence of this principle (cf. Rom 4:3–7).

[37] See further Helyer, *Witness of Jesus, Paul and John*, 277–81. The approach I am suggesting was first proposed by C. F. Burney, "Christ as the *ARXH* of Creation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1926): 160–77. Burney worked this out on the understanding that Paul used the Hebrew text. Perhaps he did. It works either way in Hebrew or Greek.

[38] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2.

[39] See further Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

[40] See Michael Lattke, "*kephalē*," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991): 2:286.

[41] I interpret the genitive as either partitive or genitive of source. That is, for a brief time, Christ experiences the realm of death, but then departs from this state or condition (note the preposition *ek*). One might even suggest a genitive (or ablative) of separation (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 107–109).

[42] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 78–86 argues for Second Adam Christology as a comprehensive explanation for the entire passage. I think his insight is helpful with regard to the second stanza, but inadequate for the first.

[43] Ralph P. Martin, saw in this term such a comprehensive view of Christ's saving work that he wrote a book suggesting it as the central organizing principle of NT theology (*Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989]).There is much to be said for this proposal. I offer this paper as a tribute to Dr. Martin who passed away on February 25, 2013. He was my doctoral mentor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a world-class scholar, fine preacher and Christian gentleman. Though he has gone on to be with Christ, which is far better (Phil 1:23), his deeds live on (Rev 14:13). *Zichrono livraka*!

[44] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, "Reconciliation, Forgiveness," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1: 502. See also Spicq, "*katallagē*," *Theological Lexicon*, 262–66.

[45] See Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 46. Pizzuto insists that "despite attempts to deny the cosmic dimension of the hymn by subordinating its cosmology to its soteriology…Christ can only be cosmic redeemer insofar as all thing do, in fact, cohere in him" (*Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 204).

[46]Colin Brown emphasizes that "reconciliation is incomplete until it is accepted by both sides" ("Reconciliation," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978] 3:170). Sumney agrees: "This passage does not advocate a universalism that entails the salvation of all" (*Colossians*, 76).

[47] So Spicq, *Theological Lexicon*, 266.

[48] David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon* (ed., Cinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 117.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Block-buster movies such as *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Batman* and *Spiderman* testify to the perennial yearning for someone bigger than life to intervene and rescue us from the forces of darkness and depravity.

[51] I realize that hymns have rather fallen out of many Christian worship services these days. Perhaps this could be an occasion in which to reintroduce the congregants to the rich hymnic heritage of our common faith. If this is out of the question, there is a contemporary, Christian song called "Jesus at the Center" by Israel & New Breed (Integrity/Columbia, 2012) based upon Col 1:15–20 that could serve to reinforce the message.

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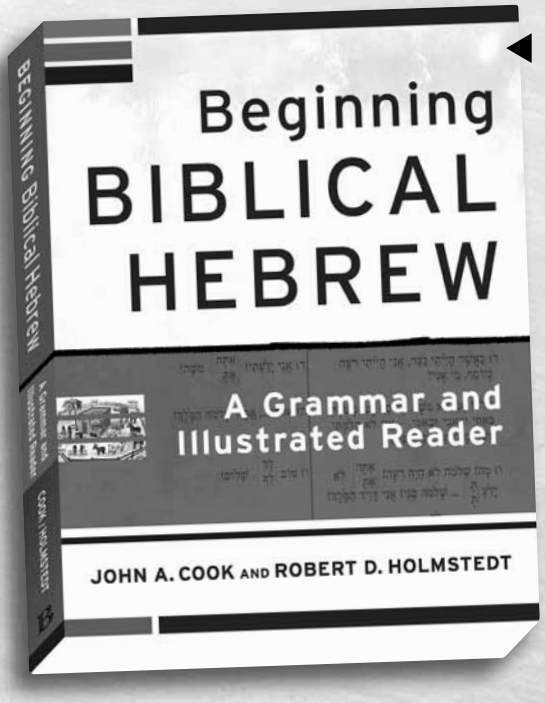

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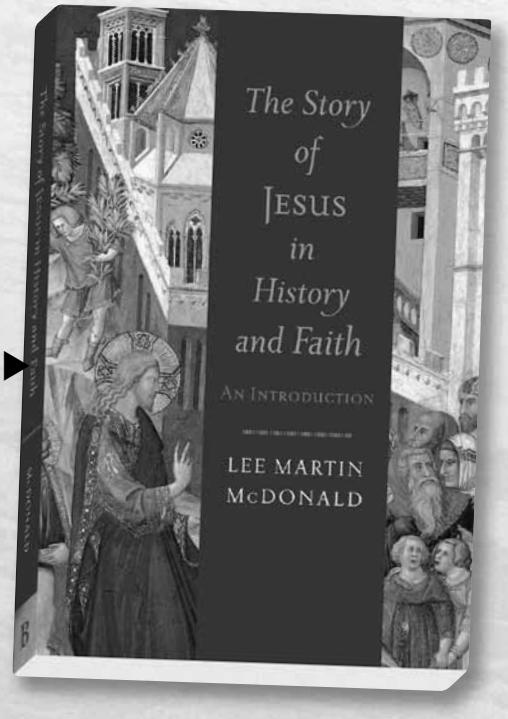

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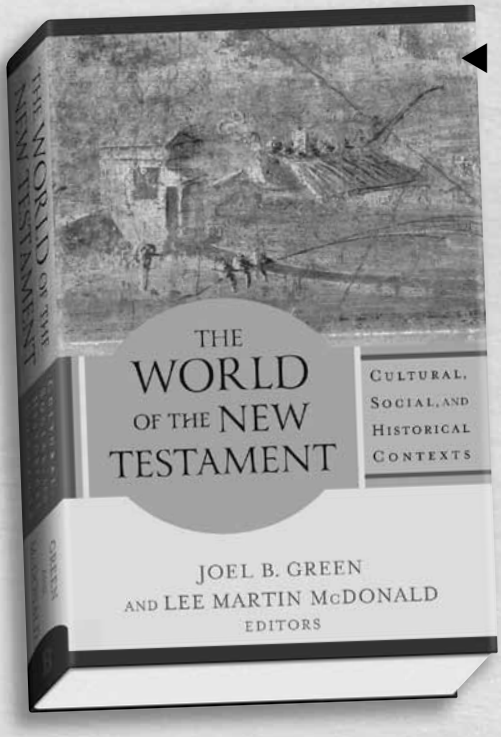

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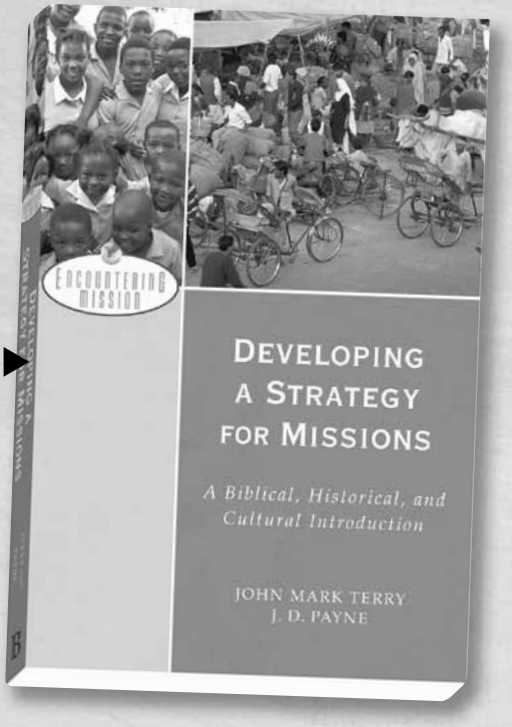

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"If You Continue in the Faith" (Colossians 1:21-23): An Exegetical-Theological Exercise in Syntax, Discourse, and Performative Speech

A. B. Caneday

INTRODUCTION

A generation ago, when blacksmith shops were still common in villages, Robert Shank aptly observed that Colossians 1:21-23 is one of several Scripture passages over which one could affix the sign: "All kinds of fancy twistings and turnings done here."[1]

> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Col 1:21-23).

For generations whether the apostle Paul's words imply that it is possible for reconciled believers to apostatize and perish has incited theological battles. This popular question dominates consideration of the passage in sermons, essays, and commentaries. As long we preachers, teachers, or scholars allow this question to govern our exegesis, I submit that we will fall short of addressing the proper and necessary question. The question, whether a believer can apostatize, biases our interpretation of the passage so that we erect defenses to protect our theological system. This is true whether we are Reformed Calvinists, modified Calvinists, Arminians, Wesleyans, or any blend of these. How does the question warp our reading of the passage? It prejudices interpretation by redirecting our focus away from the intended function of the passage to speculating about a question the passage itself does not pose. The prevailing question dulls our hearing the admonition by displac-

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ing urgency of heeding it with detached cerebral theological cogitation which reinforces truncated doctrinal beliefs we already hold.

As long as we overlook the apostle's pastoral urgency, we will fail to apprehend that the passage functions as a biblical *admonition*. As an admonition, it is to be obeyed promptly, not ruminated academically. Cogitative speculation concerning Paul's pastoral exhortation calls for correction that restores proper hearing of the apostle's words as an urgent appeal to persevere in the gospel of Christ in order that we might be presented holy, blameless, and irreproachable before God in the day of judgment.

How we are to read or to hear the apostle Paul's exhortation stated in Colossians 1:21-23 is consequential and calls for careful attention. Therefore, this essay makes no effort to present a full exposition of the passage. The focus is restricted but significant as it concentrates upon the perennial difficulties Paul's first class conditional—εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει—poses for preachers, exegetes, and theologians.

RECONCILED TO BE PRESENTED HOLY

The three verses of Colossians 1:21-23 follow Paul's hymnic praise of Christ. As "the image of the invisible God," Christ is the preexistent one who reveals the very character of God to and among humans. As "the firstborn of all creation," he preceded creation and is supreme over it as Lord. For all creation, including everything "in heaven and earth, visible and invisible," including rulers of every class, were created through Christ and for him (1:15-16). More than this, Christ actively holds all of creation together so that nothing disintegrates (1:17). Then Paul's praise of Christ becomes more particular in its focus without losing sight of the larger cosmological realm. He focuses upon Christ's exalted headship over the church, the body of humans he has redeemed, for through his sacrificial death upon the cross God reconciled all things to himself, "whether things on earth or in heaven" (1:18-20). The implication is that with Adam's disobedience in Eden the entire created universe sustained disruption, thus needing the Last Adam to reconcile it also to God.[2] At 1:21, Paul's praise of Christ centers even more particularly, now upon Christ's reconciling of the Colossians, "who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds." In his fleshly body, by his death, Christ has reconciled them to God. Paul tells the Colossians that God in Christ reconciled them for the purpose of presenting "you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and without shifting from the hope of the good news which you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation that is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." Paul reminds believers in Colossae that they participate in God's act of reconciliation in Christ Jesus, an act so vast that it entails the whole created universe but particular enough to encompass them individually. Paul adds that God's saving act toward the Colossians reaches beyond reconciliation to a purpose yet to be fully achieved in the implied day of judgment, for Christ's act of reconciling them was done with the goal of presenting them holy before God, "if indeed you remain in the faith, grounded and steadfast and without shifting from the hope of the good news." This first-class suppositional statement has been the focus of much exegetical and theological debate, especially since the Reformation, and is the focus of the remainder of this presentation.

IF YOU CONTINUE IN THE FAITH

A brief consideration of what Paul *means* by the combination of εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει is necessary before addressing the *function* he assigns to the suppositional clause in relation to the main clause which precedes it. What does he mean by using the word ἐπιμένω? With what meaning does he fill the dative τῇ πίστει? Is "the faith" subjective, the act of belief, or objective, the thing believed? Does "the faith" refer to the Colossians' belief in Christ Jesus (Col 1:4; 2:5, 12)? Or, is "the faith" referring to the object of belief, namely, the gospel?

The NIV reads, "if you continue in your faith," but the ESV translates, "if indeed you continue in

the faith." James D. G. Dunn favors understanding "continue in the faith" as referring to the Colossians' belief in the gospel though he acknowledges that, given the definite article (τῇ πίστει), it may be "an early example of the objectification of faith."[3] N. T. Wright thinks that Paul's phrase entails both senses but accents what is believed rather than the activity of belief.[4] Peter O'Brien takes "the faith" as "another description for the apostolic gospel rather than the subjective response of the Colossians to that gospel."[5]

Given Paul's figurative uses of ἐπιμένω with dative nouns which signify the location or sphere in which endurance is sustained (cf. Rom 6:1; 11:22, 23; Phil 1:24; 1 Tim 4:16), it seems likely that in Colossians 1:23 he is using "the faith" (τῇ πίστει) in the sense of the gospel as the sphere or place of persevering residence. As such, "the faith" aptly stands by way of metonymy for the gospel which calls for faith (cf. 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 21). That Paul uses "the hope of the gospel" as a synonym to rename "the faith" seems to confirm this metonymical use of the dative τῇ πίστει. As such, "the hope" (τῆς ἐλπίδος) is also a metonymy for the gospel which presents and grounds hope. Furthermore, if "the faith" refers to the gospel by a figure of speech, it also seems plausible that Paul represents the activity of believing with the figurative use of "continue" or "persevere" (ἐπιμένω), for the very act of persevering which is the sustained act of belief for which the gospel calls. Once again, as he renames "the faith" with "the hope of the gospel" so also Paul renames "continuing in the faith" with "not shifting from the hope of the gospel." Thus, he figuratively represents the activity of belief initially with "continue" (ἐπιμένετε) and then with "not shifting" (μὴ μετακινούμενοι). That which is believed, namely the gospel, Paul also represents figuratively initially with "the faith" (τῇ πίστει) and then with "the hope of the gospel" (τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου).[6] In other words, Colossians 1:23 is richly layered with figurative representations by way of word substitutions that feature the indispensability of sustained, unshifting belief in the gospel of Christ Jesus in order to be presented holy before God.

TWO DIVERGENT INTERPRETATIONS OF PAUL'S CONDITIONAL: POSING THE WRONG QUESTION

The Greek first class conditional sentence of Colossians 1:22-23 consists of the protasis, "if indeed you continue in the faith" (εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει) and the apodosis, "to present you holy, etc." (παραστῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους, κ.τ.λ).[7] Depending largely upon their theological presuppositions and grammatical assumptions, exegetes diverge widely when they interpret Paul's supposition. Some argue that the intensive "if indeed" (εἴ γε) signals the uncertainty of the believer's salvation, thus, the possibility of apostasy. Expressing an opposite interpretation, others contend that the intensified conditional construction indicates the certainty of the believer's salvation. Which interpretation does the grammatical evidence support? Or, are either of these two divergent interpretations correct?

Douglas Moo summarizes the two main competing views and opts for the view that tips toward the assured confidence of salvation.[8]

> The precise nuance of the conditional construction that Paul uses here is debated. Some believe that the construction (*ei ge*) suggests uncertainty—"if, though I doubt it"—while others think it connotes confidence—"if, as I am sure." Pauline evidence points in both directions, Galatians 3:4 falling into the former category and 2 Corinthians 5:3 and Ephesians 3:2; 4:21 into the latter. Since most of the parallels point to the idea of confidence, and because Paul expresses confidence in the Colossians elsewhere (see esp. 2:5), it is this direction that we should probably take here. Nevertheless, the condition is a real one, and it is very important not to rob the words of their intended rhetorical function.[9]

Concurring with Moo, James D. G. Dunn observes, "The confidence in the effectiveness of

the divine provision made for those estranged from God by their evil and for the blameworthy by Christ's death is qualified by a matching emphasis on human responsibility."[10]

One who holds the view that tilts in the opposite direction is I. Howard Marshall who tucks his comment on Paul's conditional construction into an endnote in his classic book on Christian perseverance, *Kept by the Power of God*.

> The need for perseverance in faith is also stressed in Colossians 1:23…here the construction, "provided that . . ." (εἴ γε), allows, but by no means demands, the possibility that the condition may not be fulfilled. While the general tone is one of confidence that the Colossians will stand firm, it remains true that their standing on the day of judgement depends on their not shifting away from the hope contained in the gospel.[11]

Informing his interpretation of Colossians 1:23 is the reasoning that prevails throughout the book—the believer's need for exhortations and warnings indicates the possibility that they may fall away and perish.[12] Even so, the point he emphasizes concerning this passage is the indispensable need for perseverance in faith in concert with Moo and Dunn.

Of particular curiosity is the ambivalence Robert Peterson expresses concerning the contingency when he states, "Col. 1:21-23 can be integrated into an Arminian systematic theology. But it can also be integrated into a Calvinist one."[13] Peter O'Brien disagrees that Paul's supposition is ambivalent, for he states "The Greek construction εἴ γε, translated 'provided that,' does not express doubt," though he acknowledges that J. B. Lightfoot claims that Galatians 3:4 may leave a "loophole for doubt."[14] O'Brien concludes, "So the words in this sentence may be paraphrased: 'At any rate if you stand firm in the faith—and I am sure that you will."[15]

Exegetical Miscues Traced to Greek Grammarians

Why do exegetes hold these divergent competing interpretations and some even opting for ambivalence? Divergence and ambivalence are due to their varied readings of Paul's use of εἴ γε, readings that reflect unchallenged dependence upon Greek grammarians who have conveyed miscues concerning Greek first class conditional sentences. For example, Fritz Rienecker claims concerning εἴ γε in Colossians 1:23—"The particle introduces a conditional clause which the author assumes to be true."[16] Judith Gundry Volf agrees and adds that "the indicative mood following εἴ γε suggests" that the apostle Paul is not doubtful but confident that the Colossians will remain steadfast in the gospel.[17] That Paul's supposition uses the indicative mood is important, but Gundry Volf over-interprets its significance because she follows the misstep taken by many exegetes who conclude that the Greek first class condition *assumes the protasis to be true*.

Actually, whether εἰ or the intensified εἴ γε imply confidence or doubt or suggest impossibility or possibility is a moot point. A grammatical miscue, however, concerning Greek first class conditional sentences induces exegetes to labor needlessly over the question of certainty or uncertainty. This misstep is well illustrated from S. Lewis Johnson's essay of a generation ago when he contends that Paul's use of εἴ γε in Colossians 1:23 "introduces a first-class condition, determined as fulfilled. The apostle *assumes the Colossians will abide* in their faith."[18] With this understanding of the Greek first class condition, he over-interprets the passage, concluding too much from the conditional clause by truncating the proper description of what the supposition assumes. The clause does not indicate that Paul "*assumes the Colossians will abide* in their faith." Rather, the apostle *assumes for the sake of the argument* that the Colossians will abide in the faith. How one expresses what the first class condition assumes is determinative of interpretation.

The notion that Greek first class conditions "assume truth" and thus express certainty or confidence concerning the thing supposed in the if clause (protasis) seems to derive from the confusing classification of first class conditional sentences as, "Deter-

mined as Fulfilled," by A. T. Robertson and from his less than careful definition: "This class of condition *assumes* the condition to be a reality and the conclusion follows logically and naturally from that assumption."[19] In subsequent discussion he restates without adequate clarification what he means by "assumes" and "assumption" when he states, "This condition, therefore, taken at its face value, assumes the condition to be true. The context or other light must determine the actual situation."[20] He makes his qualification clearer when he directs readers to consider the protasis of Matthew 12:27—"If I by Beelzebul cast out demons …"—as instructive concerning the first class condition because "the assumption is untrue in fact, though assumed to be true by Jesus for the sake of argument."[21]

Given Robertson's influence upon study of Koiné Greek, it is understandable how his not so lucid explanation of the first class condition continues to obscure exegesis of New Testament passages. This is especially so because some influential Greek pedagogical grammars lay claim to Robertson as their authority even as they transgress beyond his vagueness when they identify εἰ + indicative verb conditionals as causal constructions that can be translated "since," and they spread this misunderstanding to students of elementary Greek like a contagion. For example, Ray Summers claims,

> The first class condition *affirms* the reality of the condition . . . "εἰ μαθηταὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἔσμεν σωθήσεται" … This construction is best translated, "Since we are disciples of the Lord, we shall be saved."[22]

William Mounce correctly affirms that first class conditional sentences "are saying that if something is true, and let's assume for the sake of the argument that it is true, then such and such will occur."[23] In the first two editions of his textbook his next claim slips into muddle: "Sometimes the apodosis is clearly true, and you can translate" the protasis with "since."[24] Even intermediate Greek grammar textbooks sustain this confusion.[25]

Factors Contributing to the Exegetical Miscue

Despite grammarians' correctives concerning Greek first class conditions, why does this confusion persist among preachers, teachers, and exegetes, and even translators? Surely, much is due to received elementary Greek grammar teaching that does not receive correction but reinforcement when using Greek language tools and commentaries. My own experience in working through this issue suggests at least three factors worthy of mention.

First, after teaching Greek for many years, I have discovered that like myself, students universally have been subjected to a truncated and misleading notion that the indicative mood is the mood of fact, so it makes a statement of fact. This semantically ingenuous notion, ably critiqued by many, assumes an immediate correlation between language and reality.[26] That liars exploit the indicative mood destroys the naïve assumption of direct correspondence between reality and language. Instead, the indicative mood is the conventional mood of choice when someone wants to *present* something as factual or real. Speakers and writers principally choose the indicative mood to present what they regard to be a conventionally known state of affairs. Nevertheless, false ideas once deeply embedded in the memory from childhood are difficult to eradicate, including errant notions concerning the relationship between language and reality.

A second factor that contributes to misinterpreting Greek first class conditions as though they indicate causality, translated "since," or to express the truncated idea, "assumed true," is the uneasiness that a conditional sentence such as Colossians 1:21-23 brings to bear upon one's theological beliefs. This is why many who embrace the believer's security in Christ tend to emphasize Paul's use of εἴ γε in passages that assume confidence or certainty. It also explains why many who believe that it is possible for believers to apostatize and perish tend to emphasize Paul's use of εἴ γε in passages that they suppose assume doubt or uncertainty.

A third factor that aids and abets misunder-

standing of Greek first class conditions is the impact of modern English versions that translate several passages with "since" or "because" and some with adverbs—surely, when, or now—rather than with a conditional conjunction. Everyone knows that students in beginning Greek use standard English versions as guides for translating the Greek New Testament. Here, particularly worthy of comment is the New International Version. Given the wealth of discussion of the grammatical, semantic, aspectual, and speech act dimensions of Greek first class conditionals during the past three decades, it is curious that the NIV2011 still translates first class conditions causally as "since" in numerous passages or sometimes as "because" for εἴ γε, emphatically as "surely" for εἴ γε, and even temporally as "when" or "now."[27] Prior to and since publication of the NIV1984 significant efforts have been made not only to banish causal translations of first class conditionals but also to categorize all Greek conditionals with greater clarity and accuracy.[28] Long ago, Maximilian Zerwick said it well: "It is an astonishing fact that even scholars sometimes overlook … and seem to forget that, εἰ even in a «real» condition still means «*if*» and not «because» or the like."[29]

CORRECTING MISREADINGS OF FIRST CLASS CONDITIONALS

Several scholars have offered correctives for this errant grammatical contagion concerning Greek first class conditions. As part of his larger study of conditional sentences in the Greek New Testament, James Boyer contributes significantly toward correcting misunderstandings concerning first class conditional sentences.[30] Boyer challenges the prevalent notion that the Greek construction, εἰ + indicative verb should be understood as "assumed true" and be translated "since" as some prominent grammars have argued, an error widely propagated by sermons, exegetical essays, and commentaries.[31] He emphasizes that the first class conditional sentence in the Greek New Testament features the *logical connection* between "the condition proposed in the protasis and the conclusion declared in the apodosis," and which means "precisely the same as the simple condition in English 'If this … then that…'" implying absolutely nothing as to "relation to reality."[32]

Overcorrection often follows sustained errors. This seems apparent when Boyer appeals to Classical Greek grammarians who reacted to the standard understanding traced to Gottfried Hermann, a German classicist.[33] Boyer reduces the first class condition to a *simple condition* as Goodwin does who states, "When the protasis simply states a particular supposition, implying nothing as to the fulfillment of the condition, it has the indicative with εἰ."[34]

Others embrace Boyer's challenge as they do their own original research to test Boyer's work and to offer correctives and clarifications.[35] D. A. Carson reinforces Boyer's correction that the protasis of first class conditionals does not mean "since" but emphasizes that the condition expresses that something "is assumed true for the sake of the argument," and he adds that the thing "assumed to be true for the sake of the argument" may or may not be actually true as he demonstrates with the supposition in Matthew 12:27.[36]

More expansive is the measured discussion of the Greek first class conditional offered by Daniel Wallace within his full consideration of Greek conditional sentences.[37] He reaffirms Boyer's convincing demonstration that the εἰ + indicative verb protasis does not mean "since," but he cautions against concluding that the Greek first class condition is "just a simple condition" that expresses "If this … then that…" with no implication at all in "relation to reality."[38]

Assumed True for the Sake of the Argument

If many who misunderstand Robertson extract too much from the presence of the indicative verb in the protasis of a first class condition, Boyer, following Goodwin, suppresses the significance of the indica-

tive verb. That the Greek first class condition uses indicative mood verbs is not irrelevant but significant. For the indicative mood, correctly understood, is the mood of choice when one wants to portray something as in keeping with reality. As stated earlier, for this reason liars use the indicative mood to present falsehood as truth and truth as false.

The Greek first class conditional εἰ turns portrayal of reality into a supposition concerning reality. This does not mean that the thing being supposed is always true. Rather the thing supposed is being *assumed to be true for the sake of the argument that is being made*. Clearly, this is what the conditional means, for after all, Paul uses the first class condition seven times in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, with six of the uses expressing suppositions that assume things to be true for the sake of his argument which he is fully convinced are factually contrary to the very argument that he makes.[39]

Given Paul's leading question in 1 Corinthians 15:12, a teaching which may have been a precursor to the "shipwrecking" message Hymenaeus and Philetus taught (cf. 2 Tim 2:17-18) seems to have caught the fancy of some in Corinth, namely, that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul argues against the error. In order for his use of first class conditions to have persuasive impact, Paul roots his suppositional argument in reality, in the way things really are, in the firmness of his apostolic eyewitness of the Christ whom he proclaims as raised from the dead. So, first in the series of seven conditionals is his use of a suppositional query to set up the subsequent suppositional reasoning: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (v. 12). Paul poses this conditional question not to satisfy his own curiosity. Rather, he designs his suppositional query as a modified rebuke, not to sting the Corinthians but to persuade them against embracing the false teaching. Instead of issuing a direct apostolic rebuke, twice he softens it, first by framing it as a supposition and then by casting the supposition as a question. He effectively makes his point, not with a direct scolding but with reasoned appeal.

Paul does not use simple indicative statements to declare the truthfulness of the resurrection of the dead. Instead, he invites the Corinthians to reason with him through a series of interlinking first class suppositions in vv. 13-19 that have great rhetorical effect.[40] His suppositions draw readers or listeners in to participate with him in a discourse of reasonable belief, because the belief for which the gospel calls is not irrational nor rationalistic. His series of first class conditionals call upon readers, for the sake of the argument, to accept as truthful each negative assumption linked with corresponding negative conclusions. For if each of Paul's suppositions hold true, then the propositions of each main clause also hold true, and the truth prevails.

Paul reasons, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (v. 13). Expanded for clarity, this means, "Assume for the sake of the argument, which I am presenting, that there is no resurrection of the dead; then not even Christ has been raised from the dead." Abstracted by themselves, neither what Paul assumes for the sake of his argument in the protasis nor what he concludes in the apodosis are actually true. Nevertheless, the whole of Paul's suppositional statement asserts truth. It is true that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ also has not been raised from the dead. As a unit, his protasis and apodosis work together to affirm what logically coheres and corresponds to the reality which Paul shares in common with the Corinthians. His argument appeals to the state of affairs that govern human reasoning, for apart from the existence of the large set (resurrection of all from death), a subset of the larger cannot exist (resurrection of one from death, namely, Christ). Thus, the apostle shows skill in using a powerful language convention, the Greek first class condition, to persuade.

Paul's Appeal to the Colossians, Performative Speech

Others have accented the nonsense that results from accepting the notion that Greek first class

conditionals of 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 can be legitimately translated "since" because the thing supposes is "an assumed fact."[41] Most assuredly, Paul does not argue, "Now since there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised." Likewise, in Colossians 1:22-23, Paul does not reason that God will "present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him *since* indeed you continue in the faith." The NIV does not translate the verse this way but correctly reads "if you continue in your faith…" even though the passage uses εἴ γε, an intensified form.

Nevertheless, in passages adjacent to Colossians 1:22-23, the NIV translates two uses of εἰ without the intensive γε as, "Since you died with Christ" (εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ; Col 2:20) and "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ" (εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ; 3:1). These translations change suppositional clauses into simple declarative clauses. This alters the function of the apostle's words. Function concerns what scholars call "speech act" or "performative utterance."[42] Paul's suppositions are performative. They function dialogically, for they require readers to participate in faith's cognitive process by pondering their relationship with Christ as the premise for the question (2:20) and for the command (3:1).[43] To translate εἰ with "since," transforms the two suppositional clauses into a different kind of speech act, namely, an authoritative monologue that removes the cognitive process from readers and substitutes assertion that the Colossians have died with Christ and have been raised with him as the premise for the question of 2:20 and for the imperative of 3:1.

Paul's uses of εἰ in 2:20 and in 3:1 entail performative utterances that call for cognitive and behavioral responses. He exhorts his readers to process his words and to act accordingly. His use of the first class condition functions to engage readers to think, for his suppositions call for readers to ask themselves, "Have I died with Christ to the elementary things of the world? If so, then is not Christ my new master? Have I been raised with Christ? If so, then I must seek the things above where Christ is enthroned." Paul's suppositional clauses beckon readers to respond in keeping with the gospel's call to be united with Christ by belief that transforms conduct. This is how his two *assumptions for the sake of the respective arguments* form the premises for Paul's question (2:20) and imperative (3:1). The apostle formulates his appeals to stir sustained belief among the Colossians.

Paul structures his exhortation in Colossians 1:22-23 differently from that of 2:20 and 3:1. In both 2:20 and 3:1 he places the suppositional clause at the front of his sentences. Positioning the conditional clause as the cognitive frame of reference features the contingency of the main clause that follows.[44] Placing the supposition forward establishes the premise, the specific state of affairs to which the question (2:20) and command (3:1) of the main clauses, respectively, correlate.[45]

In 1:22-23, Paul places the suppositional clause after the main clause which diminishes the desired emphasis of the conditional clause, for the main clause reads like a simple declarative or assertive statement until one comes upon the condition or directive statement at the end. Because of this, Paul rarely places the conditional clause after the main clause, but he does so in 1:22-23—"But now he has reconciled you in his fleshly body to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, if indeed you continue in the faith." Because Paul places the conditional after the main clause he immediately adds the emphatic particle γε to the conditional conjunction εἰ just as he does in four other passages where he places the main clause before the conditional clause (cf. 2 Cor 5:3; Gal 3:4; Eph 3:2; 4:21; Col 1:23).[46] Addition of γε as a syntactical marker is needed to restore the emphasis that is otherwise mitigated by placing the conditional clause after the main clause instead of preceding it as in Colossians 2:20 and 3:1. The discourse function of Paul's syntactical marker to emphasize the conditional as indispensable should redirect the misguided debate as to whether the presence of εἴ γε implies confidence or

doubt.[47] Rather than implying certainty or uncertainty, the syntactical function of εἴ γε is to intensify the supposition.[48] The emphasis Paul assigns to the conditional clause in 1:22-23 alerts readers that the directive supposition must hold true for the primary assertive proposition to hold true. So, "if indeed" (εἴ γε) emphasizes that to "continue in the faith" is indispensable, not optional. How one responds to Paul's directive expressed in the conditional clause has consequences that are invariable, inviolable, and eternal. Perseverance in the faith is essential to being presented holy, blameless, and irreproachable before God.

If response to Paul's exhortation has inviolable consequences, does this imply that failure to persevere in the faith will have the consequence of not being presented holy and blameless before the Lord in the Day of Judgment? Many years ago a fervent youthful logician admonished me that according to the rules of logic the inference is invalid. He accused me of committing the logical fallacy of "denying the antecedent," a fallacy that consists in faulty reasoning symbolized in this manner:

If A then B
Not A
Therefore, Not B

The zealous logician reasoned that the supposition and consequence of Colossians 1:22-23 cannot legitimately be read as saying, "If you do not persevere in the faith you will not be presented holy before God." He took a step further to say that it may be true that God will not save those who do not persevere in the faith, but we have no way of knowing this from Colossians 1:22-23; if you can find another passage that actually says so, then fine. Is he correct in his application of logic's rules to Paul's exhortation? No. He had command of logical fallacies, delightfully popping what he thought were logical fallacy balloons. However, he had an inadequate command of Scripture.

Two elements within the context validate the legitimacy of inferring the inverse of the supposition and consequence in Colossians 1:22-23. First, Paul's exhortative conditional (1:23) attached to his assertive declaration (1:22) concerning what God has done for us in Christ Jesus is hardly a statement devoid of context. The exhortation is embedded within the context of a letter but also within the context of a large collection of letters in which Paul labors to argue that salvation is found exclusively in Christ Jesus. Christ's singularity as the one through whom God reconciles all things to himself by establishing peace through his sacrificial death on the cross is extolled with hymnic praise (1:18-20) from which the apostle seamlessly transitions to include believers as recipients of God's reconciliation and peace-making in this same Christ. Paul leaves no ambiguity for his readers, whether in Colossae or elsewhere. Universally, salvation is received exclusively in Christ Jesus, for there is no other gospel to be proclaimed "in all creation under heaven" (1:23). Expressed another way, as Paul states the matter, only those who persevere in the faith will be presented holy and blameless and irreproachable in the presence of God. Thus, failure to persevere in the faith will result in God's condemning judgment.

A second element within the context, even in 1:23, legitimates inferring the inverse of Paul's supposition. For, following the positive exhortation—"if indeed you continue in the faith, established and firm"—he adds a negative, "not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard." As shown earlier, to "continue in the faith" is to be "not shifting from the hope of the gospel." Does not Paul's portrayal of perseverance with the negative imagery indicate that he induces readers to ponder the legitimacy of inferring the inverse of his conditional? "What will happen if I do not continue in the faith?" Is not the necessary response self-evident? Thus, the notion that the inference—if I do not persevere in the faith I will perish—is a fallacy because Paul did not pen his own explicit statement of negating the antecedent is symptomatic of the rigidified cerebral reasoning some bring to Scripture, but it is incorrect. If we fail to persevere in the faith, we will be lost eternally.

CONCLUSION

We need to hear Paul's exhortation in Colossians 1:21-23 properly. This requires correct understanding of the Greek first class condition. It implies neither doubtfulness nor confidence of its fulfillment. The conditional does not "assume the supposition to be true." Rather, Paul assumes for the sake of his argument that the Colossians will remain steadfast in the Christian faith. Whether they would remain steadfast required them to heed the apostle's exhortation. In Colossians 1:22-23 Paul uses a condition as a softened form of an imperative to emphasize the invariable correlation of perseverance in the gospel in the present age with receipt of God's salvation in the age to come.

We need to allow the gospel's admonitions and promises to have their respective functions within their contexts, for each utterance has its own performative design. Therefore, we must conscientiously avoid superimposing our theological constructs onto Scripture's speech acts to master either promise or exhortation and warning to serve our systems of belief. We must not impose Scripture's exhortations onto divine promises as though they call into question God's assured promise of salvation to everyone who believes in his Son. Likewise, we must not force God's promises onto the gospel's admonitions to mute their urgent appeal to persevere in loyalty to Christ lest we perish. God relates to his children covenantally, not mechanistically.[49] Therefore, however much tension Scripture's juxtaposition of God's covenantal promises and exhortations may bring to bear upon us, belief in the gospel obliges us to submit, not to domesticate them. Christian faith embraces divine promises and divine admonitions as harmoniously functioning and not conflicting with one another.[50] This is true because gospel exhortations and warnings serve gospel promises.[51] Promise of assured salvation in Christ grounds belief in God who keeps his promises and oaths on behalf of his children. Exhortations and warnings elicit enduring belief in the promise-keeping God who preserves his children but only in Christ Jesus. Thus, gospel exhortations draw out the gospel's initial call by urging believers to remain steadfast in their initial belief in Christ Jesus.[52] This is how exhortations serve the gospel's promise that God will safely deliver everyone into his presence who remains a loyal follower of Jesus Christ.

Humans imitate God. Parents make promises to their children that entail implicit and often explicit obedience. Subsequent parental exhortations and warnings do not contradict the initial promise but remind children of the behavior required of them, if they are to receive the thing promised. God's covenant keeping with his children, however, is not measured by promises human parents make to their children, for they are both able to break their promises and not able effectually to make their children obey. Dissimilar from humans, because he cannot lie, God's promise and oath of assured salvation in Christ Jesus are inviolable. Also, the Heavenly Father is able to secure effectively his children's obedience to the gospel through various means of which the primary is the gospel's call, whether through the initial appeal to repent and believe or through sustained entreaties to persevere in repentance, belief, and obedience by way of warnings and exhortations.

ENDNOTES

[1] Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (2nd ed., 16th printing; Springfield, MO: Westcott, 1976), 67.

[2] Cf. Rom 8:81-25.

[3] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111.

[4] N. T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 84. He accents "'the faith' as a 'place' … where Christians must 'remain' rather than just the activity of believing. 'The faith' includes that activity, but goes beyond it to indicate the content of what is believed, and perhaps the whole Christian way of life."

[5] Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, Texas: Word, 1982), 69.

[6] See Ibid., 70, where O'Brien takes "the hope of the gospel" as "that hope which was the content of the gospel." He identifies εὐαγγελίου as a subjective genitive, but it would seem more likely to be an epexegetical genitive, a genitive that renames "the hope," which is to say, "the hope" is "the gospel."

[7] More than a generation ago, Willard M. Aldrich argued that the verb of the apodosis is not "to present" (παραστῆσαι) but "reconciled" (ἀποκατήλλαθεν). He concludes that Col 1:21-23 is a "Scriptural test and proof of personal salvation." So he reasons that a future contingency (remaining in the faith) cannot alter a past fact (reconciled), so "What it must mean is that the past fact will be evidenced by continuing faith" ("Perseverance," *BibSac*, 115:457 (1958): 16). It seems apparent that Aldrich's theological commitments led him to adopt this reading, for he did not like what he considered to be the necessary implications, if he took the verb of the apodosis to be "to present" (παραστῆσαι). Aldrich rejects the converse of the supposition—"if we do not continue in the faith we shall be lost." Against this, he asserts, "That is not what it says," but rather "'you have been reconciled, if you continue.' And the punch line of clear inference is that you have not been saved if you do not continue in the faith" (p. 16).

[8] This essay does not engage one version of the interpretation that regards the first class conditional as implying doubt which is presented by Charles C. Bing, "The Warning in Colossians 1:21-23," *BibSac* 164 (2007): 74-88. Bing advocates a "loss-of-rewards" interpretation of the passage that calls for embracing Classic Dispensationalism's insistence that believers will be subjected to a judgment of their deeds at "the judgment seat of Christ" which has no necessary correlation to their receipt of salvation in the Last Day. For a critical assessment of this view see Thomas R. Schreiner & A. B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 24-29.

[9] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 144.

[10] Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 110.

[11] I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, (London: Epworth, 1969; Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1974), 243, n. 64. Marshall's note attaches to his discussion of 2 Cor 6:1 where he argues that "the possibility exists that Christians may receive God's grace to no purpose after conversion and so become backsliders" (p. 119).

[12] Ibid., 125. See Marshall's conclusion concerning Paul's letters.

[13] Robert A. Peterson, "The Perseverance of the Saints: A Theological Exegesis of Four Key New Testament Passages," *Presbyterion* 17.2 (1991): 98. See his fuller statement: "Fairness leads me to conclude from Paul's making final sanctification dependent upon Christians' perseverance in faith that one could deduce the possibility of their losing salvation. But it is important to note that the apostle himself does not draw that conclusion here. Frankly, Colossians 1:21-23 can be integrated into either an Arminian or Calvinist systematic theology. The passage by itself does not prove or disprove either theological system. Theologians must bring other passages to bear on their understanding of Colossians 1:21-23, including not only other warning passages but preservation passages as well. This passage, then, is inconclusive" (Robert A. Peterson, *Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy* [Explorations in Biblical Theology; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009], 133).

[14] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 69. Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (2nd American reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 135.

[15] Ibid. O'Brien also introduces additional theological claims: "But continuance is the test of reality. If it is true that the saints *will* persevere to the end, then it is equally true that the saints *must* persevere to the end. And one of the means which the apostle uses to insure that his readers within the various congregations of his apostolic mission do not fall into a state of false security is to stir them up with warnings such as this."

[16] Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 569.

[17] Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away*, (Tübingen: Mohr[Siebeck]; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 197, n. 231.

[18]S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians: From Enmity to Amity," *BibSac* 119 (1962): 147. "Determined as fulfilled" is Robertson's category designation for Greek first class conditions. See note 15.

[19]A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1007.

[20]Ibid., 1008.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 108-109.

[23]William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (1st & 2nd eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 330.

[24]Ibid. In the third ed. (2009) Mounce modifies the statement from his first two editions: "Sometimes the apodosis is true, and you may want to translate εἰ as 'since.' … This may be over-translating a bit, saying more than what the sentence actually means, but there are times when using 'if' adds an element of uncertainty that is not appropriate to the verse." Confusion persists, for "if," rightly understood, does not imply doubt or uncertainty (329). Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell state, "Some think that first-class conditionals should routinely be translated 'since.' Although in some instances this may be true, it is best to avoid this formulation," given the example of Matt 12:27 (*Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 358).

[25]See the less than clear discussion by H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (40th printing 1955; Toronto: Macmillan, 1927), 287-89. Better is James A. Hewett, *New Testament Greek: A Beginning and Intermediate Grammar* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986), 32-33. However, the revised edition (2009, p. 52), revised and expanded by C. Michael Robbins and Steven R. Johnson truncates and muddles the fuller and clearer discussion of the first edition.

[26]For a critique, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," *New Testament Interpretation: Essay on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 75-114.

[27]See passages where NIV2011 over-translates εἰ in various ways indicating translations respectively NIV1984/NIV2011: 2 Cor 5:3 (εἴ γε; "because"/"because"); Gal 4:7 (εἰ; "since"/"since"); 5:25 (εἰ; "since"/"since"); Eph 3:2 (εἴ γε; "surely"/"surely"); 4:21 (εἴ γε; "surely"/"when"); Col 2:20 (εἰ; "since"/"since"); 3:1 (εἰ; "since"/"since"); 1 Pet 1:17 (εἰ; "since"/"since"); 2:3 (εἰ; "now"/"now"); 1 John 4:11 (εἰ; "since"/"since").

[28]See the extensive discussion of εἰ +indicative conditionals in Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 294-304. See also Richard A. Young, "A Classification of Conditional Sentences Based on Speech Act Theory," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989): 29-49; and idem, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 227-30.

[29]Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (trans. by Joseph Smith; 2nd reprint 1985; Rome: Editrice Pontifico Istituto Biblico, 1963), 104, §308.

[30]James L. Boyer, "First Class Conditionals: What Do They Means?," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 75-114.

[31]See, e.g., two important reference grammars: Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (vol. 3 Syntax; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 115; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. by Robert W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 188-90.

[32]Boyer, "First Class Conditionals," 82.

[33]See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 692, n. 18.

[34]W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar* (rev. C. B. Gulick; Boston: Ginn, 1930), 294. Others follow Goodwin's over-simplification.

"The protasis *simply states* a supposition which refers to a particular case in the present or past, implying nothing as to its fulfilment. … Conditional clauses of the first class are frequently used when the condition is fulfilled, and the use of the hypothetical form suggests no doubt of the fact. This fact of fulfilment lies, however,

not in the conditional sentence, but in the context" (Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1897; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976], 102.)

"When the Protasis simply states a present or past particular supposition, implying nothing as to the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the condition, a present or past tense of the Indicative is used in the Protasis: any part of the finite verb may stand in the Apodosis" (H. P. V. Nunn, *A Short Syntax of New Testament Greek* [5th ed. reprinted 1965; Cambridge: University Press, 1912], 117).

"Simple present and past conditional sentences are sometimes called 'neutral,' because nothing is implied with regard to the truth of either condition or conclusion" (H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar* [New York: American Book, 1916], 341). This statement follows one that is almost identical to Goodwin's statement above.

"This form merely sets forth the nexus between the conclusion and the condition; it sets forth the conclusion as real, if the condition is real—but implies nothing as to the latter" (Adolph Kaegi, *A Short Grammar of Classical Greek* [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1914], 144).

[35]See, e.g., L.W. Ledgerwood, III, "What Does the First Class Conditional Imply? Gricean Methodology and the Testimony of the Ancient Greek Grammarians," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1992): 99-118 for detailed consideration and correction of grammatical confusion concerning first class conditions resulting from Robertson's vague and untestable category designations and claims.

[36]D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (2nd ed. 1996; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 77-78.

[37]See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 679-712.

[38]Ibid., 691. Wallace responds expressly to Boyer, "First Class Conditionals," 82.

[39]Six times Paul's first class conditionals use the conjunction, εἰ (1 Cor 15:12, 13, 14, 16, 17 & 19); once he uses the intensified conjunction, εἴπερ (v. 15).

[40]It is worth noting how Paul weaves his reasoning together by turning the apodosis of v. 12 into the protasis of v. 13 and the apodosis of v. 13 into the protasis of v. 14. With v. 15 he begins another chain by turning the apodosis of v. 15 into the protasis of v. 16 and the apodosis of v. 16 into the protasis of v. 17.

[41]Cf. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 77. The fallacy to which he points is committed by W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians* (Expositors Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10.283.

[42]See Richard S. Briggs, "Speech-Act Theory," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 763-66. See also the recent dissertation by Laurie L. Norris, "The Function of New Testament Warning Passages: A Speech Act Theory Approach," (Ph.D. diss.; Wheaton College, 2011), 88-122. Norris observes, "While Schreiner and Caneday have similarly highlighted the functional dimension of NT warnings (as the means by which God causes the elect to persevere), they have not explicitly related their discussion to speech act theory or appropriated its helpful categories" (p. 8). Later, she also notes, "While adopting a decidedly more functional reading of these texts, they do not employ the specific language and constructs of speech at theory—terminology which actually is compatible on many levels with their interpretation" (p. 288, n. 34). Her observations are astute, for she alone has stated in written form an acknowledgment that in *The Race Set Before Us*, we do address the exhortations and warnings of Scripture with regard to function, which is a concern of speech act theory. We consciously avoided using the terms and categories of the field of study in order to keep the book as accessible as possible to a wide a readership.

[43]"Faith's cognitive process" must not be confused with "detached theological cogitation," "academic rumination," or "cogitative speculation" mentioned earlier as improper responses to the gospel's admonitions and exhortations. Saving belief necessitates cognition, for faith is not irrational. That saving faith entails a cognitive process does not render belief rationalistic.

[44]Cognitive processing of the exhortation's function is what Tom Schreiner and I refer to when we state, "Warnings and admonitions … express what is capable of being conceived with the mind. They speak of things conceivable or imaginable, not of things likely

to happen. In fact, this is the objective of warnings and admonitions. They appeal to the mind to conceive how actions have consequences. Warnings and exhortations project a supposition that calls us to imagine that a particular course of action has an unequivocal and inviolable consequence … They appeal to our minds to conceive of cause-and-effect relationships or of the relationship between God's appointed means and end. They warn us on the basis of God's inviolable promise and threat proclaimed in the gospel: salvation is only for those who believe to the end … They do not confront us with an uncertain future. They do not say that we may perish. Rather, they caution us lest we perish. They warn that we will surely perish if we fail to heed God's call in the gospel" (*The Race Set Before Us*, 207-208).

[45] On the significance of fronting the suppositional clause, see Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 227-28.

[46] Similarly, Paul uses εἴπερ Rom 3:30; 8:9, 17; 1 Cor 15:15; 2 Thess 1:6. 1 Cor 8:5 is one exception where εἴπερ occurs in the conditional clause which is placed first where the subject matter seems to call for the added emphasis.

[47] Cf. Margaret Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 82-92 for a discussion of whether εἴ γε indicates confidence or doubt.

[48] The particle γε "normally follows the word which it stresses." See J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (2nd ed; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 146.

[49] As Marshall casts the situation, one can hardly disagree with him: "Paul, then, did not regard grace as operating in such a mechanical fashion that the believer is inevitably carried on to perfection with no effort on his part. The paradox of grace and freewill is not to be solved by emphasizing the former to the exclusion of the latter" (*Kept by the Power of God*, 125).

[50] I. Howard Marshall says something similar: "To reconcile these two strands in biblical teaching, the promises of eternal security and the warnings against falling away, is not easy. Our tendency is to push beyond the evidence to some kind of logical system which over-emphasises the sovereignty of God or human freedom. We have to learn not to go beyond the things that are written, and to be content with the full teaching of the Scriptures" (*Kept by the Power of God*, 12). Marshall's word choice implies that promise and warning need to be reconciled. Against this notion, see Schreiner & Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 142-47; 194-95; 204-13.

[51] Concerning this relationship between divine promise and divine exhortation G. C. Berkouwer observes, "We will never be able to understand these words if we see the divine preservation and our preservation of ourselves as mutually exclusive or as in a synthetic cooperation. Preserving ourselves is no an independent thing that is added paradoxically to the divine preservation. God's preservation and our self-preservation do not stand in mere coordination, but in a marvelous way they are in correlation. One can formulate it best in this way: our preservation of ourselves is entirely oriented to God's preservation of us" (*Faith and Perseverance* [trans. Robert D. Knudsen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 104).

[52] Berkouwer expresses well the gospel function of exhortations, "The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints can never become an *a priori* guarantee in the life of believers which would enable them to get along without admonitions and warnings. Because of the nature of the relation between faith and perseverance, the whole gospel must abound with admonitions. It has to speak thus, because perseverance is not something that is merely handed down to us, but it is something that comes to realization only in the path of faith. Therefore the most earnest and alarming admonitions cannot in themselves be taken as evidence against the doctrine of perseverance" (*Faith and Perseverance*, 110-111).

The Cross in Colossians: Cosmic Reconciliation through Penal Substitution and *Christus Victor*

David Schrock

Since Gustaf Aulén published his work *Christus Victor,* the view that Christ died to defeat the powers and principalities has enjoyed a rise in theology and popular thought.[1] Among evangelicals (broadly defined), advocates of the view known as *Christus Victor* (henceforth CV) might be classified in three ways: (1) those who reject penal substitutionary atonement (henceforth PSA) outright, and argue instead for CV (e.g., Steve Chalke, Joel Green, Darrin W. Snyder Belousek), (2) those who advocate CV but retain a secondary place for PSA (e.g., Gregory Boyd, Hans Boersma, Ron Sider),[2] (3) and those who stress the centrality of PSA while recognizing CV as a complementary feature of the atonement (e.g., Sinclair Ferguson, Henri Blocher, Thomas Schreiner, Graham Cole).[3] Together, a large corpus of work on the atonement has been published in recent decades.

In this article, it is not possible to explain all the ways that PSA and CV intersect, but neither is it necessary since there are several fine works written on the subject.[4] Instead, I will consider the cross of Christ in the letter to the Colossians. I will argue that in this epistle Paul describes the cosmic reach of the cross with its twin designs of saving God's people and defeating the enemies of God. More precisely, I will argue that in agreement with PSA, Christ died to atone for the sins of his "chosen ones" (3:9), that is, his people, and in keeping with CV, his death defeated his enemies and put them to open shame. In other words, through a theological reading of Colossians 1:15-2:15, I will argue that together PSA and CV are the twin means by which Christ's death brings peace to the cosmos (Col 1:20). To put this graphically, see Fig. 1.

Cosmic Reconciliation	**=**	**Penal Substitution**	**+**	**Christus Victor**
Col. 1:20	**=**	**Col. 1:21-23 2:11-14**	**+**	**Col. 2:15**

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My argument will move in three steps: First, to understand how Christ's death reconciles all things in 1:20, it is vital to consider the flow of Paul's argument—how 1:15-20 relates to 1:21-2:23. Only as we relate the first use of *apokatallaxai* to the explanation that follows can we understand how Christ's death reconciles the Colossians to God (Col 1:22) and defeats those rulers and authorities who seek to deceive them (2:15). Second, I will show from a close reading of 1:21-23, 2:11-14, and 2:15 how Paul understands the outworking of Christ's cosmic reconciliation (1:20). I will argue that Paul's explication of Christ's death in Colossians makes PSA the decisive factor in the church's purification *and* his enemies' pacification. Third, I will close with a brief theological explanation of how PSA and CV relate.

THE ARGUMENT IN COLOSSIANS 1:15-2:23

Four key texts outline the theology of the cross in Colossians. First, in 1:20, Paul concludes his Christological hymn (1:15-20) stating that Christ has "reconciled to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." Second, in 1:21-23, Paul addresses the previous condition of the Colossians "who once were alienated and hostile in mind," but who Christ "has now reconciled by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him." Third, in 2:11-15, Paul presents a view of the cross that describes how Christ effects salvation for the recipients of his letter and triumphs over "the rulers and authorities" who stand in opposition to Christ. Finally, in 2:20, Paul reminds the Colossians that when they died with Christ, they died to the "elemental spirits," spirits who they were tempted to serve again by means of stringent asceticism (2:21-23).[5]

Typically, these passages are read independently. For instance, theologians point to 1:20 to explain the cosmic scope of the cross and 2:15 to support CV. Similarly, 1:21-23, along with other passages on reconciliation (Rom 5:9-10; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Eph 2:16), is cited in support of God's personal reconciliation. These proof-texts (and the doctrines that they support) are not wrong *per se*, but they simply do not allow Paul's holistic view of the cross to surface. By turning our attention to the cross in Colossians, we will better understand how Christ's death brings peace (*shalom*) to the cosmos. In what follows I will argue that a unified reading of 1:15-2:23 makes best sense of Paul's argument and is necessary for understanding Paul's theology of the cross. There are at least four points of continuity.

First, the local problem of false teaching in Colossae is especially prevalent in the first two chapters. As Moo observes, Paul presents the glories of Christ in order to guard the Colossians against false teaching that was causing them to his sufficiency in all things.[6] In 1:15-20 Paul extols Christ as creator, sustainer, and reconciler of the cosmos, so that the Colossians would not be deceived and follow false philosophies (2:8) or submit themselves to the ascetic practices promoted in their region (2:20-23). While the specifics of the false teaching are difficult to define,[7] most agree that the "principle themes of Colossians are announced in this hymn" (1:15-20) and applied to situation in Colossae (1:21-2:23).[8] As the one in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily (1:19; 2:9), Christ is the source of all that the Colossians will need for wisdom and growth (2:3, 6-7).

Second, the centrality of Christ is not only evident in a mirrored reading of Colossians; it is also plain from the repetition of the phrase "in him" that pervades the first two chapters. Twelve times in these two chapters (1:14, 16, 19, 22; 2:3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15; cf. 3:20; 4:7; 4:17), Paul explains what it means to be in Christ. The focus on Christ makes it clear that Paul wants his readers to see this section as one unified whole. What he introduces in the hymn becomes the focus of the rest of Colossians.[9]

Third, there are numerous verbal connections between Paul's hymn (1:15-20) and the ensuing verses. (1) In 1:20, Paul uses *apokatallaxai* to

describe how the cross brings peace to all creation. Two verses later, he uses the same word to describe how the same event (his death on the cross) effected reconciliation for the Colossians. While the meaning of reconciliation is debated, the best contextual evidence suggests that Paul has in mind a "cosmic renewal" in 1:20.[10] Clearly, Paul's deliberate repetition of this word with divergent objects of reconciliation marks a clear linguistic connection between these verses (1:20, 22), but also a theological distinction that careful readers must reckon. (2) The fullness language of 1:19 ("For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell") is repeated in 2:9 ("For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"). Affirming Christ's superiority to the elemental spirits (2:8, 20) and the angels (2:18), Paul reiterates the deity of Christ to esteem his all-sufficiency. (3) On the other side of this coin, Paul twice speaks of "rulers and authorities." In 1:16, he uses three pairs of terms to describe the invisible spirits whom he created and rules over. The last of these pairs is mentioned again in 2:15, when Paul says that Christ put these fallen angels to open shame on the cross. (4) Paul twice uses the word *stauros* (1:20; 2:14) to underline the "cosmic significance of the cross."[11] This reference to the cross is echoed by multiple references to the death of Christ (1:21-23; 2:11-14, 20), not to mention the cruciform ministry of Paul ("I fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions," 1:24).

Fourth, Paul's emphasis on the cross in 1:21-2:23 suggests a theological unity in these verses. As many have observed, Colossians "advances a case for the superiority of Christ over the universe, particularly over its inimical powers."[12] In 1:15-20 this is clear from the high Christology, and in 1:21-2:23 the emphasis on Christ and his cross continue to be the main focus. However, in addition to the theological unity, there may also be a literary structure uniting Colossians 1:15-2:15—one that intends to highlight the gospel ministry of Paul (over against that of the false teachers) and the death of Christ. In a *First Things* blog post, Peter Leithart has offered a reading of Colossians 1-2 that organizes Paul's argument around two overlapping chiasmuses.[13]

The first chiasmus extends from Colossians 1:16 to 2:15 and centers on Paul's ministry to the Colossians.[14] The second envelops 2:9-15 and focuses on the death of Christ.[15] In the first chiasmus, some of the strongest connections include the mention of Christ's deity in 1:19 and 2:9, the repetition of "rejoice" and "flesh" in 1:24 and 2:5, and the mystery theme in 1:26-27 and 2:2-3. At the same time, there are weaknesses: The outside bracket (1:15-20 and 2:10-15) is too vague. With Paul's elevated language in 1:15-20 and the multiple metaphors overlapping in 2:10-15, it is insufficient to say that these verses broadly mirror one another. Likewise, Christ's hypostatic union is immediately followed by a description of his death—first in Colossians 1:19-20 and again in 2:10-15. Leithart's chiasmus does not account for these. Exegetically, his observations call for further inquiry, but theologically his observations add plausibility to the way 1:21-2:23 explicates the themes of 1:15-20.

To summarize, we can have great confidence that what Paul writes in 1:15-20, 1:21-2:23 expounds. The former section introduces Paul's cosmic Christology; the latter articulates how Christ's death purifies the Colossians' sins, raises them to new life, and liberates them from bondage to the elemental spirits. Therefore, on the basis of the historical setting, Christological focus, linguistic connections, and thematic unity, there is good reason for reading 1:21-2:23 as the theological outworking of 1:15-20, with special attention to the cross of Christ.

Still, before considering 1:21-2:23, one more point must be made. In *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*, Gregory Boyd argues that the cross *first* accomplishes a cosmic defeat of the powers and principalities and *then* elicits a personal application for believers.[16] He states, "While Christ's death for sinful humans is central for understanding what Christ did for us, therefore, this dimension of Christ's work is possible only

because of the broader cosmic victory Christ won on the cross."[17] Exegetically, Boyd supports his claim by appealing to a number of texts, including Colossians 1:15-22. Of these verses, he writes, "Only after this cosmic dimension of the cross is stressed does Paul then turn to talk about what this means for believers … The cosmic conquest, one might say, logically precedes the anthropological application."[18] One might say that the cosmic conquest is logically prior, but is that what Paul intends to say? I think not.

Because of his penchant to support his victory-centered understanding of the cross, Boyd fails to recognize the literary and thematic structures of Paul's letter. He connects Colossians 1:15-20 to the subsequent text which serves as an explanation for 1:15-20. He does not appreciate that a new section begins at Colossians 1:21. In fact, a rhetorical analysis of Colossians provided by Michael Bird suggests that "the whole section of 1:21-2:7 constitutes a rhetorical *probatio* or logical argument that enumerates the main proposition."[19] In other words, the Christological hymn is the main point, or *propositio,* in Paul's letter, and that 1:21-2:7 is written to support this main point.[20] Boyd fails to consider the literary arrangement of Colossians and assumes without warrant that the first mention of reconciliation is the most important one.[21]

By contrast, the relationship between 1:15-20 and 1:21-2:23 should be seen as epexegetical, not sequential.[22] Paul uses *apokatallaxai* in the broadest sense possible in 1:20 as a precursor to his detailed explanation that immediately follows.[23] Colossians 1:22 shows that the personal focus of Christ's cosmic reconciliation are the believing elect. Yet, this is not because personal reconciliation is logically subsequent to cosmic reconciliation, but because personal reconciliation is the first way in which God reconciles the cosmos.[24]

CHRIST'S DEATH EFFECTS PERSONAL RECONCILIATION

As we return to the theological question concerning the relationship between PSA and CV, let me reassert my main argument: The cross in Colossians accomplishes PSA for the believing elect as exhibited in 1:21-23 and 2:11-14. By the same event, Christ subdues all created things (angelic and human) who stand against the Lord as Paul explains in 2:15, 20. The result of this two-fold intention is cosmic *shalom* between God, man, and the rest of creation. We will first look at Christ's work of personal reconciliation (Col 1:21-23; 2:11-14) and then personal subjugation (2:15).

Colossians 1:21-23: Personal Reconciliation (Part 1)

Colossians 1:21-23 provides the first explication of Christ's reconciling death. Shifting from the glories of Christ in verses 15-20 to work of Christ on the behalf of the Colossians, Paul addresses the Colossians personally ("and you") to "indicate that reconciliation is personal as well as cosmic in its effects."[25] In verse 21, he reminds them of their previous condition ("alienated," "hostile in mind," "doing evil deeds") and says, "[God][26] has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death."

Paul uses the same word in verse 22 that he does in verse 20. This has led some scholars to argue that the word means the same thing. For instance, I. Howard Marshall says of the angelic powers threatening the church that "Paul's stress is not so much on the fact of their reconciliation as on their own need for reconciliation which renders them unfit to mediate between man and God; only Christ can act as reconciler."[27] Marshall concludes that this reading saves us from any "desperate attempts to give 'reconcile' [in v. 20] a sense other than it usually bears."[28] We can agree with Marshall that Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), but what stands out as odd is the way Marshall ascribes a salvific "need" to angels—a problem that Scripture never offers to solve. Fallen angels are beyond salvation, and thus the language of 1:20 presses the reader to think more deeply about how Christ reconciles all things.

It is more likely that these twin uses of *apokatallaxai* have different objects in mind. In 1:20, "all

things" is explicitly defined by the clause, "whether on earth or in heaven." Functioning as a *merism*,[29] earth and heaven includes all sentient beings (human and angelic) as well as every inanimate object created by God.[30] This reading is supported by the earlier use of "heaven" and "earth" in 1:16, where the appositive description is even broader: things "visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Add to this the fact that Paul's hymn moves from creation (vv. 15-17) to new creation (vv. 18-20), and it becomes clear that Paul understands Christ's death to reconcile every created thing.

Therefore, it can be said with confidence that the first use of "reconciliation" in Paul's letter to the Colossians entails the whole cosmos. As Peterson states: "All things" in Colossians 1:20 "refers to saved human beings, subjugated demons, and the renewed heavens and earth."[31] The second use is clearly restricted to the saints at Colossae, who experience the saving benefits of Christ's death by means of persevering faith. For them, the death of Christ is not simply a cosmic reality, but a personal one: "The purpose of [God's] reconciling action wrought in the body of Christ's flesh through death is stated to be the presentation of the beneficiaries as holy and without blemish and [beyond reproach]."[32]

In sum, Jesus died first and foremost for his own, for those who were in solidarity with him.[33] In Colossians, this personal aspect of the cross with its unifying effects is repeated often. In the broader context of the New Testament, a variety of personal metaphors stand out to describe Christ's death: Christ died for his body, bride, church, sheep, etc. In 1:21-23, God's personal reconciliation is at the forefront, but it is not alone. Colossians 2:11-14 is even more detailed in the way that Christ's death effects personal reconciliation.

Colossians 2:11-14: Personal Reconciliation (Part 2)

After describing his ministry and exhorting the believers to grow in Christ (1:24-2:7), Paul starts to oppose the false teachings present in Colossae (2:8-23). In this section, Paul bolsters the Colossians trust in Jesus by presenting a picture of the exalted Christ, one that highlights the deficiencies of mystical Judaism. Mirroring the conclusion of his hymn (1:19-20), Paul mentions "the fullness of deity dwell[ing] bodily" in Christ (2:9) and then describes the death of Christ in terms of circumcision and baptism, death and resurrection (2:11-14). The Colossians (v. 10) stand between Christ's hypostatic union (v. 9) and his atoning sacrifice (v. 11-15). United to the head, this body of believers has been "filled in him," the one "who is the head of all rule and authority." Polemically, Paul speaks of this unbreakable union to show that the Colossians need not adopt the ascetic practices promoted by the false teachers. Theologically, these verses provide a rich tapestry of all that Christ's death, burial, and resurrection accomplish for his body. Going farther than 1:21-23, these verses show how God's work of reconciliation in Christ brings about regeneration, union in Christ, a new covenant relationship, and the forgiveness of sins.[34]

While Paul begins with a focus on union in Christ before addressing the penal nature of the cross, I will approach Colossians 2:11-14 in reverse order. Since Paul grounds the benefits of Christ's death (vv. 11-14a) in the cross itself (v. 14b), I will show how the punitive nature of his substitutionary death procured forgiveness, a new covenant relationship, union with Christ, and regeneration for the believing elect. In other words, by means of Christ's PSA, God effectively reconciled the body of Christ to himself.[35] There are four things to observe in these dense verses.

First, *penal substitution is the heart of the cross.* According to the logic of Colossians 2:14, PSA triggers forgiveness as the first domino in a string of (new covenant) benefits. As opposed to other passages where forgiveness is the immediate effect of Christ's blood (see Matt 26:28; Eph 1:7; cf. Col 1:14; Heb 9:22; 10:18), Colossians 2:14 makes forgiveness dependent on an antecedent legal transaction.[36] Paul relates how Jesus' death terminated

the requirements of the law, which in turn brought forgiveness. While it is biblical and true to say that Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3) or to reconcile us to God (Eph 2:16), what makes forgiveness of sins and reconciliation possible is the termination of the old covenant law and the beginning of the new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood. Regardless of how one interprets *cheirographon*,[37] a penal substitution is necessary for reconciliation.[38] What George Smeaton observed of Colossians 2 still stands:

> Forgiveness presupposes the objective fact of blotting out the handwriting of ordinances and nailing it to the cross … Christ's body was no bond; but as he was made sin, or bore our sins on His own body to the tree, all was embodied in Him. The handwriting, the curse, the sin of His people are identified with Him; and the language of exchange can be competently applied to Him in the performance of that great work of procuring our discharge.[39]

Though, Smeaton does not use the phrase "penal substitution," he gets at the heart of what Christ's death accomplished—a vicarious punishment that satisfied the law of God. Though such justice might seem foreign today, under the biblical system of covenantal representation, such a substitution was perfectly acceptable. The whole sacrificial system was intended to teach this point: "Sin could be forgiven only on the one condition that its guilt was expiated, and that not by the sinner, but by a surety in his stead."[40] Therefore, in one climactic moment, Christ's death satisfied God's legal requirements, so that something new might be put created—namely, the forgiveness of sins stipulated by the new covenant, "signed into law" by Christ's death (cf. Matt 26:28).

In its brief description Colossians 2:14 makes a strong case for penal substitution. The collocation of Christ and the law argues for PSA, because it does not say that "Christ was nailed to the tree" or that "by Christ's crucifixion the law was satisfied." Rather, in the very same act, the Christ who perfectly embodied the law was executed as a lawbreaker. When this seemingly unjust execution is coupled with the fact the believing elect are in solidarity with Christ, it becomes apparent that Christ is not a third party representing someone else.[41] By its covenantal nature, Christ's death is for those *in him*. This covenantal understanding of penal substitution stands against the idea that Christ's death is a legal fiction or a grotesque execution of an innocent man. In context, Jesus' (il)legal execution serves as the basis for all the covenantal blessings—blessings which are delineated in 2:11-14.

Second*, penal substitutionary atonement establishes a new covenant.* Verse 13 ends saying that the trespasses were forgiven by canceling the records of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. In other words, the instrumental cause of forgiveness comes from the penal nature of the cross. While Paul is restrained in speaking about the new covenant, as compared to Hebrews, his understanding of forgiveness cannot be separated off from the terminating and most basic promise of the new covenant—namely, the forgiveness of sins and God's promise to no longer hold sins against his covenant people.[42] If a covenantal reading of Colossians 2:13-14 may be entertained, then there are at least two things to posit.[43]

First, PSA stands as the legal basis for the forgiveness of sins. Clearly, the legal execution of Jesus (2:14) procures the forgiveness of sins (2:13), which stands as the ground clause for Jeremiah's new covenant.[44] Speaking generally of the new covenant, Peterson notes that "various … New Testament writers point to the fulfillment of such expectations in the death of Jesus and link this to the promise of Jeremiah 31:34."[45] In 2:13-14, we see how Christ's cross bears new covenant fruit—first the forgiveness of sins, then union with Christ, and the gift of spiritual circumcision.[46]

The connection between PSA and the new covenant conjoins the legal requirements of the law with the Trinitarian love of God.[47] It was the love of the Father that moved him to save sinners

through the sacrifice of his son (John 3:16), and it was the voluntary love of the Son that moved him to lay down his life for his own (10:17-18). Therefore, the relationship between covenant-law and Trinitarian love—both of which indivisibly exist in the new covenant—defends PSA from the frequent caricature of divine child abuse or pagan notion of blood lust. On the cross the mercy and justice of God meet.[48]

Second, Christ's penal substitution is set in the context of personal relations.[49] PSA is not superimposed on the Bible from some foreign system of justice; rather it arises from the covenantal (and hence personal) accountability sinful men have before a holy God. Often PSA is charged with assigning to God a kind of distasteful legality (e.g., retributive justice) devoid of personal love.[50] Perhaps some presentations of PSA have made this error, but the Bible does not. Aside from the fact that Scripture demands a covenantal version of retributive justice (see Lev 26-27; Deut 27-28) and that most complaints against retributive justice come from scholars who want to conform the Bible to contemporary culture,[51] Paul's articulation of PSA and the forgiveness of sins clarifies that there is no divide between legal justice and personal love.[52] Just the reverse: PSA arises from and culminates in the Father's love for his children. As Paul develops his theology of the cross, he asserts that Christ died for those people whom the Father gave him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-6), so that at God's appointed time (2 Tim 1:9-10), the enthroned Son could baptize them by means of the Spirit and bring them into covenantal union with the Father and the Son. This is not a mechanical transaction offered to appease a vengeful deity; it is God's triune love at work to save sinners without impugning his holy character.

Third*, baptism symbolizes the believers' identification with Christ.* Admittedly, this assertion is debated. Paedobaptists argue from 2:12 that baptism functions in the new covenant in the same way that circumcision functioned in the old.[53] This point has been well-refuted by a number of Baptists. For instance, Fred Malone says, "Paul defined the circumcision of Christians … as primarily heart union with Christ by faith … symbolized in their water baptism as a confession of faith which they received in regeneration (as in Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 12:13; and Gal 3:29)."[54] Likewise, Stephen Wellum shows that the typology of circumcision is not carried over into baptism but into spiritual circumcision.[55] Water baptism stands as the new covenant symbol of the believer's new birth.

Taking this new covenant fulfillment as my starting place, I am arguing that Paul asserted that believers who abide in faith (see Col 1:23) are the ones who have died and risen with Christ (cf. Rom 6:4-6). In other words, baptism, which portrays burial (descent) and resurrection (ascension), provides a bridge between regeneration (circumcision without hands) and faith (the necessary response of the believer). In 2:12-13, those who are circumcised without hands (i.e., by the Spirit) are made alive by God. This new life is evidenced by their faith in Christ, making them fit recipients for baptism. Still, Colossians 2 is only secondarily about the ordinance of baptism. Its primary significance concerns the theological reality of the believers' union in Christ.

In context, Paul reminds the Colossians that because of Christ's death and resurrection, they have an unbreakable bond with the creator of the universe, the one who is also the reconciler of all things. Since Paul is writing to overthrow a false cosmology threatening the church, he does not start with a legal argument as he does in Galatians. Rather, Paul aims to unseat the veneration of angels and the appeal of self-flagellation to overcome the flesh. Therefore, he argues that those who are in Christ have put off "the body of flesh" in Christ's death and been made new by a "circumcision without hands." This brings us to the last aspect of personal reconciliation.

Fourth, *the cross effects regeneration.* As an outworking of their union with Christ (2:10), Paul says that the Colossians "were circumcised with

a circumcision made without hands." Though Paul speaks of circumcision often, this is the only place where he speaks of a circumcision "without hands." The point he seems to be making is that true circumcision does not come from the impure hands of men but from God himself.[56] The Old Testament speaks of circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6) and later of the removal of the whole, impure heart (Ezek 36:26-27). Both of these texts are regarded as anticipations of the new covenant when God will give the circumcision he demands. Indeed, the hope of the new covenant is not only "forgiveness of sins" but genuine purity (the thing that circumcision was meant to symbolize) and the newfound desire to do the will of God (the law of God written on the heart).

In Colossians, Paul uses circumcision language to explicate this new covenant reality.[57] Speaking of the complexity of Paul's use of the law, Schreiner writes of 2:11-12, "Circumcision [in the flesh] points to the circumcision of the heart accomplished by the cross of Christ."[58] The complexity is most obvious in the way that Paul speaks of the circumcision objectively and subjectively in the same verse. He describes Christ's objective death in terms of "a circumcision made without hands."[59] Yet, at the same time, he applies Christ's circumcision subjectively to the Colossian believers, "in him you also were circumcised."[60] Exegetically, opinions vary and there is no settled consensus. The point I want to introduce concerns the covenantal nature of circumcision, and how a covenantal reading of this passage may help bridge the objective-subjective impasse.

In his objective death, Christ gives his church—and only his church—the thing that he accomplishes on the cross—namely the removal of dead flesh. "At his death, … God cut off Christ's bodily life, just as the foreskin is removed in circumcision," but now in the new covenant, "the only circumcision believers need … is the circumcision they receive by virtue of their incorporation into Christ's death on the cross."[61] Therefore, by means of (a covenantal) union in Christ—a predominate theme in Colossians, especially in 2:9-12—the objective work of the cross becomes the subjective experience of the believer when that individual puts their faith in Christ, which in turn happens because Christ baptizes that individual with the Spirit.[62]

Admittedly, the complex of metaphors and historical events combined with the personal impact that the gospel has had on the Colossians is difficult to decipher. However, from what has been observed in these verses, the following synthesis may be provided: When Christ died on Calvary, he solved the legal problem by dying in the place of guilty sinners. With this legal problem solved, the rest of the blessings follow: The relational problem is solved by the gift of forgiveness and inauguration of a new covenant; the alienation problem is overcome by Christ uniting himself to his body by means of spirit baptism; and the twin problems of purity and death—which were not unrelated in the law (see Lev 21:1-3, 11)—are resolved by Christ circumcising the hearts of the Colossians. In one decisive act, Christ accomplished everything necessary for the new creation, with especial attention to the church he would create by means of PSA. Subsequently in redemptive history, new covenant circumcision and baptism by Christ have been carried out as the Spirit of Christ comes to apply all that Christ accomplished for his elect on the cross. In this way, we get a glimpse of how Christ's death was "finished" (John 19:30) and yet is still being finished.

This "already-but-not-yet" approach to personal reconciliation is confirmed by the nature and scope of the gospel. The gospel message proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential for applying the benefits of the cross to the elect. Significantly, it is Christ who died on the cross and it is Christ still—through his mediation from the throne—who is raising sinners to life by means of his Spirit and his gospel. In other words, Jesus, in his humility, died on the cross personally to reconcile his church to his Father, and now in his glory, he builds his church, by means

of Spirit-filled ministers of reconciliation (cf. Col 1:24-2:7). The scope of Christ's cross is universal, but its accomplishments are gradual as the gospel goes into all the earth (1:23).

Still, cosmic reconciliation is not completed by Christ's work of personal reconciliation. With all that the cross accomplished for the believing elect, it will not restore *shalom* between heaven and earth until Christ's enemies are subdued. To say it differently, PSA is only one part of the equation. Aware of this, Paul goes on in 2:15 to explain how Christ's death also effects CV. In conjunction with PSA and even because of PSA, CV puts to shame all those enemies of God who will not be reconciled to God by faith in the Son. To this central but ancillary effect of the cross, we now turn.

CHRIST'S DEATH EFFECTS PERSONAL SUBJUGATION

I have argued that Christ's personal reconciliation is accomplished on the basis of his personal (and covenantal) relationship with his church. On the basis of this genuinely personal relationship, the nature of Christ's atonement is truly substitutionary—person for persons, not person for predicament (sin, justice, evil). This is the primary aspect of Christ's cosmic reconciliation, but it is not the only effect of the cross. Christ's death also reconciled the remainder of creation by subjugating all rebel angels and humans. In theology, this aspect of the atonement has been labeled *Christus Victor,* and Colossians 2:15 has been one of its chief proof-texts. In what follows, I will argue that a central but ancillary work of the cross was Christ's cosmic but personal subjugation of rebel angels and humans.

Colossians 2:15: Personal Subjugation

Colossians 2:15 comes after Paul has explained how Christ's death personally reconciles the church (2:11-14) and in the middle of a section contesting the philosophies threatening the Colossians' faith (2:8-23). Therefore, when Paul declares that Christ has "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them," he is (1) making a polemical statement against other competing deities and (2) stating that this victory is accomplished by Christ's penal substitution on the cross. To understand how Paul develops CV, we need to develop these twin ideas.

First, Christ's death on the cross is the fulfillment of God's promise to destroy the devil. In Genesis 3:15, the *protoeuangelion* consisted of a declaration to crush the head of the serpent's seed through the bruising of the woman's seed. God imbedded in this gospel promise a plan to restore the world through the means of destroying the evil one.[63] Henceforth, the story of the Bible is one of cosmic warfare.[64] Advocates of CV have done a good job recovering this important biblical theme.

Throughout the Old Testament, salvation for God's people is accompanied by the defeat of and deliverance from God's enemies. For instance, God's covenant with Abraham included the promise of land to the patriarch's offspring *and* the destruction of its inhabitants (Gen 15:13-20). In the Passover, God saved Israel *and* judged Egypt. God manifested his covenantal love for Israel by destroying their enemies (Ps 136). The Davidic covenant promised an eternal throne to the king's offspring *and* the subjugation of the nations. This means that some of those nations will come to find salvation through David's offspring, but others will not. The Psalmist regularly cries out for God's righteous intervention and salvation against over the enemies. In Esther, the people of God are delivered at the moment that God turns the sword on Haman, the descendent of Agag. Across the canon and ultimately in the new creation, God manifests his glory by means of saving his people and judging his enemies.[65]

Colossians 2:15, along with Hebrews 2:14-15 and 1 John 3:8, is the capstone of this biblical theological truth: God's salvation defeats all other oppressive competitors. On the cross, Jesus won the victory for his people. He defeated Satan and every other false god. In the context of Colossians,

the other philosophies lacked true wisdom and cosmic power. Consequently, they were inferior to Jesus. Paul writes in 2:8-23 that the spirits behind these philosophies—the invisible spirits Paul calls "rulers and authorities"—were defeated foes.

Paul's point is this: Do not let any false spirit, philosophy, or religious persuasion lead you astray. Christ has triumphed over them all. More broadly, since the Father delivered the members of his covenant from the dominion of darkness (Col 1:13-14), there is no need to return to the "elemental spirits of this world," for they have died to them and are alive in Christ. Thus, the truth that Christ's death defeated all other "rulers and authorities" is a strong pastoral argument for abiding in Christ. Yet, we still need to understand how Christ's victory relates to his legal sacrifice. This is the second point to be made from Colossians 2:15.

To understand Colossians 2:15, we must see how it depends on 2:14. In Paul's letter, it is necessary to understand what "armed" the rulers and authorities and how Christ's death rendered these rulers and authorities useless against the saints of God. In order, we need to clarify who these rulers and authorities were, what armed them, and how Christ's death caused their defeat.

First, "rulers and authorities" refer to the inimical spirits who opposed Christ and his church.[66] As Colossians 1:16 states, God in Christ created these invisible spirits and endowed them with authority on earth (cf. Deut 32:8-9; Dan 7:2-8). However, through rebellion against their maker, these demonic spirits have joined with Satan to deceive humanity and Christ's church.[67] Therefore, Paul informs the Colossians that Christ's death has brought cosmic *shalom* by pacifying these spiritual agents of wickedness.

Second, "the devil," Jesus said, "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Jesus' testimony affirms the historicity of Genesis 3. In the beginning, the serpent took the word of God and twisted it to sow doubt in the mind of Adam and Eve. Satan tried to do the same thing with Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4). Following Satan's lead, the demonic spirits that Paul describes in Colossians 2:15 take God's word and use it to deceive and kill. This is part of the cosmic warfare threatening the Colossian church.

In Colossians, the elemental spirits are misusing God's word, especially its teaching on circumcision, to tempt the Colossians to believe false philosophies (2:8) and seemingly wise but worthless acts of religion (2:20-23).[68] Therefore, it is apparent from a careful reading of Colossians that the weapon of choice is the law.[69] The false teachers were "inspired" by these spirits and tempted the Colossian believers to turn away from Christ with the very laws that God meant to draw people to Christ (see 1 Tim 1:8-11). In response, Paul tells how the crucifixion canceled God's legal demands (v. 14) resulting in the defeat of the powers (v. 15). More specifically, by showing that these Colossians believers are dead to sin and alive in Christ, Paul shows that the rulers and authorities have no means of controlling them any longer. The fear of death is dead, and the Colossians now are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Col 3:1-4).

In short, Jesus' death rendered the law inoperable and no longer able condemn those who died with him. While it would take us too long to consider all the ways that Christ fulfilled, terminated, and reapplied the law, we can see from 2:11-14 that what Paul has in mind is the annulment of the old covenant with its legal demands. On the cross, Jesus received the curses of the law earned by the members of his body—the church that was at one time hostile towards the law and alienated from God (1:21). At the same time, by means of his death and resurrection Jesus established a new covenant by his blood. This covenant was not made with the world (i.e., rebellious spirits and unbelieving humans), but with those who would believe on Christ by means of the new birth. This leads to the third point.

The overarching point to be made from 2:15 is that Christ's death disarms and defeats the rulers and authorities. Especially in the early church some thought that the "disarming" was actually

Christ "stripping away" his flesh because the same word is used in 3:9.[70] However, it seems better to follow Moo who argues that God stripped the rulers and authorities of any power.[71] Through Christ's death, God publicly exposed the weakness of these "usurpers of authority."[72] As Bird and Wright acknowledge, this public defeat stands at the heart of CV and the cross itself. However, as I argue above, "victory [must come] through vicarious punishment."[73] As Henri Blocher comments, "Efforts to elude the thought that justice was satisfied, and thus the bond that was against us removed, look strangely artificial"—artificial, and in the case of Colossians, incomplete.[74]

In the second half of 2:15, Paul uses a Roman military custom to depict Christ parading his captured enemies as a victorious general.[75] While some commentators take the final "in him" to refer exclusively to the cross, it fits better with 2:11-14 to see Christ and his death and resurrection as the antecedent.[76] Accordingly, verse 15 espouses a "temporal progression" which parallels a previous point that the effect of Christ's death has a ripple effect on the universe.[77] In this case, Christ's death first disarms the powers, then in his enthronement (i.e., his resurrection and ascension) he parades them as a defeated foe and now, after Pentecost, the strongholds of Satan are being overrun by the power of the gospel. Satan's captives are being set free because Christ "removed any power that these evil spirits might have over us," by once and for all nailing the law and its legal demands to the cross.[78]

Through PSA Christ effects CV. By means of personal reconciliation and personal subjugation, Christ brings about cosmic *shalom*. In relation to 1:20, Christ personally reconciles the church to God by means of his atoning sacrifice. Then, with the same event (the cross), Christ brings about the other half of cosmic *shalom* by means of personally subduing all creatures—angelic and human—who refuse to submit to God in Christ. In 2:15, Paul has angelic beings in view. However, when the whole canon of Scripture is reviewed, it is clear that Christ's death and resurrection gave him authority over all flesh, such that he has the authority to grant eternal life to the ones given him by the Father (John 17:2), and at the end of the age, Christ by means of his death has authority to open the seals of judgment and personally subdue all men and women who refused to call him Lord (see Rev 5-6, 19-20).

In the realized eschatology of 2:15 this victorious disarmament is presented in clear and certain terms. Yet, this existential reality is still forthcoming. Even as Satan is a defeated foe and the inimical spirits have been stripped of all authority, many in the world—including Christians—still do not know that. This is why Paul writes his letter and labors with unceasing anguish to proclaim the gospel to the world (1:23-29). The rulers and authorities continue to deceive and misrepresent the truth, but the gospel announces liberty to captives and sheds light on the defeat of the powers and principalities. Because of his death, Christ has been given authority over all creation (Matt 28:18), and through him God is reconciling the world to himself—by means of peace-making and pacification.

At present, creation continues to groan (cf. Rom 8:18-22), but as the Gospel gathers more of the elect, the number of days between today and the last day shrink. Christ who reigns on high will return and complete what he has started. In short, since Pentecost, the world has witnessed the effects of the cross—PSA personally reconciling the church unto God and CV liberating Christians from the deceptive bondage of the elemental spirits. This is the point of 2:20 with its reminder that the Colossians have died to the power of the elemental spirits. All that remains is the number of the elect coming to completion, and the wickedness of the world reaching a boiling point where Christ will return to save his own and remove once and for all his enemies—angelic and human. Colossians anticipates this final victory, but it does not discuss the matter as Revelation does.

A FINAL WORD: COSMIC RECONCILIATION REQUIRES PENAL SUBSTITUTION AND *CHRISTUS VICTOR*

When we consider all the biblical data about the cross in Colossians 1-2, the culminating point is that cosmic reconciliation consists of both personal reconciliation of Christ's church and personal subjugation of his enemies. Both of these works come from the singular event of the cross, and both are being worked out in history. In this regard, advocates of CV are right to see 2:15 as defending the view that Christ died to defeat evil and bring justice to the world. Truly, CV is *a central* aspect of the cross, but it is not *the center* of the cross. Many conceptions of CV go too far. Instead of complementing PSA, they replace it with CV, or reduce PSA so much that the justice of God is impugned. These views are typically right in what they affirm but err in what they deny—namely PSA.

By contrast, advocates of PSA need to give attention to PSA *and* CV. They need to come to passages like Colossians 1-2 and wrestle with all the data. Instead of quickly fitting certain verses into preexisting systematic categories, they need to wrestle with the variegated metaphors that Scripture uses to speak of Christ and the cross. Defenders of orthodoxy and preachers of PSA need not fear a more nuanced view of the cross, so long as it attends to all the biblical data in all of its proper proportions. In truth, Christ's cross is the one thing that reconciles all things. It is by his death that the cosmos is and is being reconciled—first the church, then his enemies. Finally when the sons of God are revealed, Christ will make all things new—in heaven and on earth.

In conclusion, when 1:15-2:23 is read as one literary unit, the latter section (1:21-2:23) provides a binary explanation of 1:20. Exegetically, Paul's presentation of the cross in Colossians unifies PSA and CV as the two central aspects of his cross. At the same time, Paul distinguishes personal reconciliation for the church from personal subjugation of the inimical powers opposing the church. While Colossians does not answer all the questions concerning PSA and CV, it clearly establishes the priority of PSA to CV and shows how cosmic reconciliation is the net result of personal reconciliation (PSA) and personal subjugation (CV).

On a practical level, preachers should feel no hesitation to preach CV, so long as they remember that Satan's deathblow comes from the penal substitution of Christ on the cross. Only when God's legal demands are satisfied by God's legal substitute can the defeat of sin, death, and the devil be truly good news. This is how Paul presents the gospel in Colossians, and it is a stellar model for explaining how the various intentions of the cross work together.

ENDNOTES

[1] Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (1931; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1951). Hans Boersma suggests that before the evangelical reemergence of CV, Aulén's book was an "isolated occurrence" in post-Enlightment theology (*Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 193-99). Conversely, Phillip Bethancourt shows that variations of *Christus Victor* appear in Karl Barth, post-Vatican II Latin America, and feminist theology, before numerous evangelicals expounded this view ("Christ the Warrior King: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Analysis of the Divine Warrior Theme in Christology" [Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010], 47-52).

[2] Often, when CV is fore-fronted, the penal nature of the cross changes. For instance, Boersma replaces a person-to-person exchange with a corporate version of substitution he calls "penal representation" (*Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross,* 177-79).

[3] I am intentionally leaving out a fourth group identified by Steve Chalke. See his article, "The Redemption of the Cross," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement* (eds., Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 34-45. According to Chalke, the "penal substitution

of the pulpit" and "the seminar room" is a "monochrome" doctrine that fails to perceive Christ's "multicoloured" atonement (ibid., 35, 37). For Chalke, PSA presents God as a wrathful deity who demands blood sacrifice in order to be appeased (ibid., 38). The trouble with his view is it reductionism. As Thomas R. Schreiner observed, "No credible or scholarly defender of penal substitution ... teaches such a theology" ("The SBJT Forum: The Atonement under Fire," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11:2 [2007]: 108). The operative word is "credible." Errant versions of PSA exist, but these caricatures are not the same as scholarly treatments that incorporate all the biblical data and yet retain PSA as the heart of the atonement.

[4] Perhaps the best treatment is Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 124-30, 236-38. See also, Henri Blocher, "*Agnus Victor*: The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment," in *What Does It Means to be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation* (ed., John G. Stackhouse, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 67-91; Sinclair Ferguson, "Christus Victor et Propitiator: The Death of Christ, Substitute and Conqueror," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (eds., Sam Storms and Justin Taylor; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 171-89.

[5] The death of Christ may also be evidenced in two other places in Colossians. First, in 1:24-2:5, Paul describes his gospel ministry as that of a suffering servant—not *the* suffering servant—"filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (1:24). As Christ suffered on the cross, so Paul carries the cross of an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 4:1, 9-13) and portrays in his visible sufferings a testimony to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Second, in 3:5, Paul commands those who have been raised with Christ to put to death sin ("what is earthly in you"). For those who have died and risen with Christ (3:1-4), they are to 're-enact' the cross daily by putting off the old man and putting on the new.

[6] Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 46-60. Others like Dunn, Wright, and Bird insist on using Colossians own terms to identify the problem—they call it the Colossian "philosophy" (N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* [Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1986], 25-26; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon,* [New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 23-35; Michael F. Bird, *Colossians, Philemon,* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009], 15-26). Either way, the solution is the same: Christ the Lord supplies all that the Colossians need, and thus the positive presentation of Christ in 1:15-20 serves as the wellspring for all that follows.

[7] Clinton E. Arnold, *Colossians,* in vol. 3 of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (ed., Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 371-76. For a more in-depth look at the religious syncretism present in Colossae, see Clinton Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief in Colossae* (WUNT 77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

[8] See Bird (*Colossians, Philemon,* 50) who relies on the work of Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians, Ephesians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008), 67.

[9] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon,* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 178; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 194.

[10] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon,* 133-37; Robert A. Peterson, "'To Reconcile to Himself All Things': Colossians 1:20," *Presbyterion* 36 (2010): 37-46.

[11] E. Brandenburger, "Cross," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed., Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:401-02.

[12] Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 377.

[13] Peter Leithart, "Structure in Colossians 1-2" [cited 30 July 2013]. Online: http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2010/11/04/structure-in-colossians-1-2/. Thanks to Sam Emadi for pointing out this article.

[14] While the center of this chiasmus may seem surpris-

ing—something Leithart acknowledges—it does cohere Paul's clear intention to elevate his gospel above the false philosophies in Colossae.

[15]The second chiasmus centers on Christ's "circumcision," which is a metaphorical description of his death. The death of Christ stands prominently in 1:21-2:23 lies at the center of this chiasmus, giving explanation to the whole pericope. Through Christ's cross the Colossians have been reconciled to God (1:22), made alive in Christ (2:11-14), and liberated from the elemental spirits (2:20). It is this death that reconciles all things (Col 1:20).

[16]Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 240.

[17]Ibid., 241.

[18]Ibid., 250.

[19]Bird, *Colossians, Philemon,* 60.

[20]Ibid., 50.

[21]Boyd makes the same error when he fails to observe the change in subject between Eph 1:20-22 and 2:1-8. In the same section of *God at War,* he argues that cosmic reconciliation is God's *primary* intention because Paul speaks of it first in Ephesians (Boyd, *God at War,* 251-52).

[22]I am using epexegetical in a slightly broader sense than it is typically applied. In the flow of thought, Colossians 1:21-2:23 expands on the theological truths asserted in Paul's hymn (1:15-20).

[23]Moo says of Col 1:21-23 that "the high theology of vv. 15-20 is being applied" (*Colossians and Philemon,* 138). This is right. Paul is applying his theology in Col 1:21-2:23, but he is doing more. Paul's puzzling statement in 1:20 is best understood as an invitation to see how the following verses explicate the details of Christ's cross.

[24]Ibid., 133-37; Shawn Bawulski, "Reconciliationism, a Better View of Hell: Reconciliationism and Eternal Punishment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56 (2013):129-31.

[25]Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 57.

[26]On reading "he" (*autos*) as God the Father, against the textual commentary of Bruce Metzger, see P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 64; Harris, *Colossians and Philemon,* 57-58; Moo, *Colossians and Philemon,* 140-41.

[27]I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation,'" in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology* (ed., Robert A. Guelich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 126-27.

[28]Ibid., 127.

[29]A *merism* is a figure of speech which includes everything between two extreme elements.

[30]For a thorough defense of this position, one that considers all the theological positions, see Peterson, "To Reconcile to Himself All Things," 37-46.

[31]Ibid., 46.

[32]John Murray, "The Reconciliation," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (4 Vols.; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 4:105.

[33]On the subject of substitution and solidarity, see J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," in *In My Place Condemned He Stood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 84-88.

[34]Murray, "The Reconciliation," 102.

[35]Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 244-49.

[36]In truth, "forgiveness" is attributed to a number of causes: baptism (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38); knowledge of salvation (Luke 1:77); receiving or believing the gospel (Luke 24:27; Acts 10:43; cf. Acts 13:48), and turning from sin (Acts 26:18). It is also a gift of God (Acts 5:31), which can be missed by blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29). The point to be made is that the forgiveness of sins is the most basic gift of the new covenant, which the blood of Christ ratifies.

[37]Because of the accursed nature of the cross, stipulated by Deut 21:22-23, I am inclined to see the Mosaic law standing behind these verses (so Wright, *Colossians and Philemon,* 115-19). For the Jews, it was the legal demand of the law that stood to condemn them. Perhaps, because the Colossians church was mostly Gentile, Paul uses a non-Jewish term—hence, O'Brien's insistence that Col 2:14 speaks of a universal IOU (*Colossians, Philemon,* 124-26). Nevertheless, since the law of God in creation and the laws of the old covenant do not stand at odds with one another, and since both are covenantal in nature, it is permissi-

ble—even optimal—to read Col 2:14 as God's legal case against sinners—Jew or Gentile.

[38]Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross,* 249-50.

[39]George Smeaton, *The Apostle's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 305-06.

[40]Ibid., 306.

[41]John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 158.

[42]David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2012), 17-43.

[43]I am aware that the presence of (new) covenant theology in Paul is scant and debated. I am simply suggesting that Col 2, with its use of circumcision, baptism, and forgiveness of sins may be best understood by comparison to the covenantal structures of the Bible. This is especially true when in Col 2:16 Paul says that Christ is the "substance" which the food laws, festivals, and special days foreshadowed.

[44]Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 503.

[45]Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 35.

[46]Could it be that when Paul speaks of the cancellation of the handwritten "record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands," he is intending to hint at another handwritten law (cf. Exod 31:18)—namely the new covenant's law written on the hearts of his people (Jer 31:33)? The imagery is suggestive.

[47]For such a theological proposal, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 380-94.

[48]David Peterson (ed.), *Where Wrath & Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001).

[49]Writing on the priestly nature of the cross, Hugh Martin avers, "If the atonement of Christ falls under the category of his priesthood," which it certainly does, "it is impossible it can be impersonal, indefinite, unlimited; for the priesthood [as typified in the Old Testament] is not" (*The Atonement: In Its Relation to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of Our Lord* [London: Ames Nisbet & Company,1870], 55-56).

[50]Darrin W. Snyder Belousek makes the broad assertion against PSA that "Scripture does not reveal either a divine character of a covenant relationship that is essentially or necessarily retributive" (*Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross the Mission of the Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 48). Defenders of PSA would not describe God as *essentially* wrathful but would argue that economically and covenantally, God's retributive justice is a necessary aspect of his covenantal love (see Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 70-73).

[51]Joel Green and Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 30, is a notable example. Arguing for a kaleidoscopic approach to the cross, Green and Baker deny any abiding fixity to the inspired metaphors for the atonement. Instead, they suggest that contemporary models and metaphors should be employed in order to convey the message of the cross. However, such willingness to discard (or demote) inspired metaphors in exchange for new models reveals their willingness to elevate the changing currents of culture over the Bible and their inability to see that Christ's atoning work is *sui generis* and incapable of adequate description apart from biblical revelation. Cf. Stephen Holmes *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (ed., Richard Bauckham, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 248.

[52]Cf. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010), 41-43; cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 98-108.

[53]See John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970); Greg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003).

[54]Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument of Credobaptism versus Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2002), 116-17.

[55]Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign*

of the New Covenant in Christ (eds., Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), esp. 75-79.

[56]On the notion that "handmade" is synonymous with idolatry, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2008), 188-96.

[57]Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 75-79.

[58]Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 653.

[59]The strongest support for this objective sense is to understand the subsequent phrase, "by putting off the body of flesh," as referring to the death of Christ, as it does in Col 1:22. Cf. O' Brien, *Colossians, Philemon,* 116-17; Dunn, *Colossians,* 157-58.

[60]Moo spends little time considering the way "the body of flesh" qualifies Christ's circumcision. Instead, he notes the strong emphasis on identification with Christ in v. 11 (*Colossians and Philemon,* 200-01). Both he and Constantine Campbell (*Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 196-97) stress the "realm transfer" that takes place when a believer dies with Christ and is freed from their "body of flesh." Of course, removal of the dead flesh does not happen existentially until a believer dies physically. Hence, it seems better to read Col 2:11 as referring to Christ's real displacement of the flesh (i.e., physical death) on behalf of those who will later (in redemptive history) enjoy spiritual circumcision.

[61]Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," 76.

[62]Under the terms of the old covenant, the outpouring of the Spirit followed repentance (cf. Prov 1:23); under the stipulations of the new covenant, the Spirit regenerates a believer when the covenant mediator—enthroned at God's right hand—grants the power to repent and believe (Joel 2:32; cf. Acts 5:31; 13:48; 2 Tim 2:25).

[63]For a biblical-theological treatment of this skull-crushing salvation, see James M. Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10:2 (2006): 30-55.

[64]Bethancourt, "Christ the Warrior-King," 167-68.

[65]James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

[66]Daniel G. Reid, "Principalities and Powers," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (eds., Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 747-52.

[67]P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church* (ed., D. A. Carson; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 128-41. In Colossians another term is used, "the elemental spirits of the world" (2:8, 20). O'Brien describes them as "spiritual beings, regarded as personal and active in the physical and heavenly elements" (*Colossians, Philemon,* 132).

[68]Dunn, *Colossians,* 156-58.

[69]Dunn suggests that error is not heresy and that false teaching is too strong a word. Dunn has a point; Colossians is not Galatians (ibid., 155-56). However, Paul writes Colossians to teach the church how the Lord, not the law, is their life (Col 3:1-4), and that growth and godliness comes by faith in him (2:6-7) as they walk in the power of Christ, not the flesh.

[70]See the discussion in O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon,* 127.

[71]Moo, *Colossians and Philemon,* 213-14. He appeals to the use of *ekdyō*, a related verb, and the "personal object that follows the verb." He comments notes that in biblical Greek, the idea is always that 'someone stripped the clothes off someone else'" (ibid.).

[72]Wright, *Colossians,* 121.

[73]Blocher, "*Agnus Victor:* The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment," 87.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Arnold, *Colossians,* 387-88.

[76]Harris, *Colossians and Philemon,* 111-12; Moo, *Colossians and Philemon,* 215-16. For an alternative reading, see Bird reads *autō* as "by the cross," because of the dative pronoun "relates back to the dative 'by the cross' in v. 14" (*Colossians, Philemon*, 82).

[77]Moo, *Colossians and Philemon,* 216.

[78]Ibid.

Raising the Worship Standard: The Translation and Meaning of Colossians 3:16 and Implications for Our Corporate Worship

Barry Joslin

INTRODUCTION

What is the role of musical worship in the local church? Why do we sing when we come together? Why was singing so important to God's people in the Old Testament? Why is it so important to the New Testament people and the Church throughout its history? Why are we told by Matthew that just before Jesus went to the cross, he and the disciples sang together (Matt 26:30)? Why does Luke tell us that the early Church would sing together (Acts 16:25)? Why are we commanded to do so? In short, why is singing so important?

It is important because God loves music. The command to sing is the most frequently repeated command found in all of Scripture.[1] Over one hundred years ago, F. M. Spencer wrote, "No command is more frequently and emphatically imposed on God's people in the Old Testament than is the duty of singing praise to God. In the New Testament these commands are renewed and made emphatic." In commenting on our verse from Colossians he stated, "Language in the form of a command could not insist more clearly and distinctly upon the duty of singing praise to God."[2]

Indeed, Scripture teaches us important things about musical worship. As far as the *role* of musical worship, there is a key text that must be understood if we are to understand one of the main things the Church does. Colossians 3:16 (and its parallel Eph 5:19) is important for a biblical understanding concerning the role of music in the Church's gathered, corporate worship. I want to raise the worship standard. God loves music. He is honored and glorified in a way that makes it unlike any other medium. There is something special about God's people singing praises to him. And, as I assert in the following pages, when rightly translated and understood, Colossians 3:16 *elevates* the role of musical worship to its proper place. Here is

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how I suggest the verse be translated: "*Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom by means of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts*."

The main point I wish to press here is that corporate, musical worship is an essential, God-ordained *means* of our teaching and admonishing one another, such that the word of Christ might richly dwell in us. I will argue this case in three steps. First, I will overview the paragraph of Colossians 3:12-17. Second, special attention will be given to verse 16 with regards to its translation, grammar, and meaning. Finally, I will note several practical implications for local church worship.

OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Colossians 3:12-17 is a paragraph within the larger section of 3:1-4:6 which focuses on living out the Christian life. Paul begins by telling the Colossian Christians that if they have been raised with Christ, then "keep seeking the things that are above" (v. 1), as well as "Set your mind on the things above" (v. 2) because your life is "hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). Verses 5-11 illicit the commands to "put off the old self of the flesh" and "put to death what is earthly" (v. 5) Then Paul gives a sample list on account of which the "wrath of God will come."

That brings us to verses 12-17. Here Paul says that the Colossians are to put on the new self, clothed with the qualities of Christ as they love and forgive one another, are to be ruled by the peace of Christ, are to be thankful, and are to be richly indwelled by the message about Christ as they wisely instruct and admonish one another by means of various kinds of biblical music, singing with grace in your hearts to God, doing everything in Jesus' name with thankfulness to God.

Note that Paul exhorts the Colossians to be thankful, and to express that thankfulness back to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in verse 16. Believers who are full of thanks and gratitude to God for what he has done for them will find it easy to live in peace with one another as well as to bear with one another and to forgive one another (v. 12), and to have their hearts ruled by the peace of Christ (v. 15). This is precisely fitting for Paul to say here, given what he says in verse 16. This visible and outward demonstration of thankfulness towards God is to be offered in the congregation's singing to God (v. 17).

This brings us now to verse 16 where Paul exhorts them to, "Let the word of Christ richly indwell you" (*ho logos tou christou enoikeitō en humin plousiōs*). The "you" is plural, indicating that this is something to characterize the entire faith community of the Colossian church. Here again we have an imperative, just like the command in verse 15. The "word of Christ" (*ho logos tou christou*) *is the message that centers on Christ* and should likely be seen as an objective genitive. It is the message that concerns who Christ is and what Christ has done.

What Paul says is that God's people are to put the message of Christ at the very center of their corporate worship together as the gathered body of Christ. This is what it means for the word of Christ to dwell *richly*. As Moo states, what is in view is a "deep, penetrating contemplation that enables the message of Christ to have transforming power in the life of the community."[3]

That raises the question, "How is the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, and what does that have to do with musical worship?" This is pressing since Paul writes concerning the church's music next. So, how does that happen? Another way to put it might be to ask, "What should believers expect when they gather to worship and specifically, sing?" Is the music of the local gathered church just something to be done before or after the preaching? Is it just something we do because it would be a sacrilege if we didn't? Or, is there a grander purpose for the music of God's people? These questions are answered in verse 16 to which we now turn.

THE TEXT OF COLOSSIANS 3:16

The Greek text is generally stable, with three

variants in need of mentioning. The first concerns the unusual phrase "the word of Christ" (*ho logos tou christou*). All English Bibles translate this more difficult reading, for good reason. More than likely, a few copyists altered the reading to the more ordinary "the word of *God*" (*ho logos tou theou*) seen in A, C, and 33, and appearing in the margins of the NRSV, NASB, NJB, and NET translations. "The word of *the Lord*" (*ho logos tou kuriou*) is found in a few others (א*, I, 1175). As Comfort notes, "The documentary evidence strongly favors "the word of Christ," as does the general tenor of the epistle, which is aimed at exalting Christ."[4]

The second variant comes in the phrase (*en [tē] chariti*), and whether or not the article should be included (P^{46}, $א^{2}$, B, D*, F, G, Ψ, 6, 1505, 1739) or omitted (א*, A, C, D^{2}, 075, 33, 1881, *M*). Both readings are well-attested, and the difficulty of a firm decision is seen in the brackets used by the editors of NA^{28}. If omitted, it means "with gratitude" or "thankfulness," which is how almost all English Bibles translate it. If included, it could refer back to "the grace" in 1:6 (cf. 4:18) and would be translated "by the grace (of God)" or "in the realm of grace."[5] Moule notes that that context "favours 'gratefully'" and that "on the whole the easiest sense is "gratefully singing."[6] The external evidence slightly favors the presence of the article, while the context of Colossians 3:15-17 focuses on thanksgiving, and many commentators and most translations agree. Further, the phrase with the article (*en [tē] chariti*) finds its parallel in the phrase "with all wisdom" (*en pasē sophia*),[7] adding a grammatical argument in favor of the article.

The final variant in need of mention comes at the very end of the verse and concerns the dative in the phrase, "in your hearts *to God*" (*en tais kardiais humōn tō theō*). Most of the oldest MSS read *tō theō,* with the variant being *tō kuriō*, ("in your hearts *to the Lord*") found in C^{2}, D^{2}, Ψ*, and *M*, and is the reading found in the KJV and NKJV translations, and in the margin of the NRSV and NEB. It is likely a scribal conformity to the parallel passage of Eph 5:19 (*tē kardia humōn tō kuriō*), found in the *Textus Receptus*,[8] yet the widespread manuscript evidence is in favor of the *to God* reading.[9] The distinction in meaning is that one makes God the Father the object of gratitude/thankfulness while the variant makes Christ the object. This is subtle but notable distinction, though clearly for Paul both are deity and thus worthy of doxology.

Translation

With the text established, how do the English translations render verse 16? That depends largely on how the three participles, *didaskontes*, *nouthetountes*, and *adontes* ("teaching," "exhorting," and "singing") are understood. All three are parsed the same (masculine, nominative plural, present active participle), but what is their relationship to one another and to the main verb *enoikeitō* ("let the word of Christ *dwell*") What is their relationship to the three intervening datives *psalmois*, *humnois*, and *ōdais* (psalms, hymns, and songs)? English translations may be divided into four groups which highlight slightly different ways the three participles are understood. Let us now turn to these four groups.

Translation Group 1 (ESV, NET, NAB)

All of these translations see the participles as coordinate with each other, not imperatival, and move "singing" forward in the syntactical order.

English Standard Version (ESV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching* and *admonishing* one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

New English Translation (NET): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching* and *exhorting* one another with all wisdom, *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, all with grace in your hearts to God."

New American Bible (NAB): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *as* in all wisdom *you teach* and *admonish* one another, *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Translation Group 2 (HCSB, NIV)

These translations do not view the participles as imperatival, they do add "and" before translating the third participle "singing," and, like Group 1, move "singing" forward in the syntactical order.

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB): "Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, *teaching* and *admonishing* one another in all wisdom, ***and*** *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, with gratitude in your hearts to God."

New International Version (NIV, 1984): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly *as you teach* and *admonish* one another with all wisdom, ***and*** *as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Translation Group 3 (NRSV, RSV, NJB, NLT)

These translations view the participles as imperatival. The first two also add "and" before the translation of "singing" (like Group 2), and all four place "singing" with the datives "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," moving it forward in the syntactical order, before the three datives.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; *teach* and *admonish* one another in all wisdom; *and** with gratitude in your hearts *sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* to God.

Revised Standard Version (RSV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teach* and *admonish* one another in all wisdom, *and* sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB): "Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. *Teach* each other, and *advise* each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts *sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs* to God."

New Living Translation (NLT): "Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. *Teach* and *counsel* each other with all the wisdom he gives. *Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* to God with thankful hearts."

Translation Group 4 (NASB, KJV, NKJV, TNIV, NIV 2011)

These translations do not take the participles as imperatival, but rather, broadly speaking, as circumstantial participles (like Groups 1 and 2), and do not grammatically connect "singing" to "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

New American Standard Bible (NASB): "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom *teaching* and *admonishing* one another *with psalms* ***and*** *hymns* ***and*** *spiritual songs, singing* with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

King James Version (KJV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; *teaching* and *admonishing* one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, *singing* with grace in your hearts ***to the Lord*** (variant)."

New King James Version (NKJV): "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, *teaching* and *admonishing* one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, *singing* with grace in your hearts ***to the Lord***."

Today's New International Version (TNIV) and New International Version, 2011 (NIV, 2011): "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly *as you teach* and *admonish* one another with all wisdom *through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit*, *singing* to God with gratitude in your hearts."

GRAMMAR

As you can see, there is quite a bit of variation among the translations, and my analysis here does not even note the differences when it comes to the phrases "with all wisdom" (*en pasē sophia*) "with gratitude" (*en [tē] chariti*), and "in your hearts" (*en tais kardiais humōn*). In fact, other than the NIV 2011 and TNIV on which it was based, *there are no two identical translations above*. The major differences concern: first, whether the participles are imperatival or not; second, what the phrase "singing … to God" modifies; and third, whether the phrase "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" modifies the two previous participles before it (*didaskontes kai nouthetountes heautous*) or the following participle

(*adontes*). Grammatical analysis is needed in order to come to a decision.[10] Let us now turn to that analysis and specifically let us focus on three grammatical issues which must be answered.

First, are the participles imperatival,[11] modal,[12] (means or manner) or something else? Barth and Blanke conclude with confidence that these are all imperatival participles. They write, "The participles can hardly be translated as modals here. After the elucidation about sovereignty over the world, it would be difficult to agree on a statement according to which the dwelling of this word is brought about through human action."[13] Yet we should take seriously the word of caution raised by A. T. Robertson and Dan Wallace, who note that such a grammatical category should be reserved for truly independent participles and not those connected to a finite verb. In fact, Robertson flatly states, "no participle should be explained in this way (imperatival) that can properly connected with a finite verb."[14] Wallace notes, "This is an important point and one that more than one commentator has forgotten."[15] To be sure, these participles have an exhortative "flavor" to them, but that is because of their grammatical dependence on the main verb, *which is an imperative* (*enoikeitō*). As such, these three participles are not likely imperatival (contra RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT translations). Following the counsel of Robertson and Wallace, we look to other categories.[16]

It is best to understand the participles as modal participles,[17] or, more clearly, *adverbial participles of means* describing how the action of the imperatival finite verb is carried out.[18] This yields the translation, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you … by means of teaching and admonishing …" The term "modal" can be a bit misleading, since "modal" encompasses *both* manner *and* means, when there is usually a difference. The difference here is mainly one of terminology and not substance.[19] Here, the "message about Christ" is to dwell richly in the Colossian believers, and a primary way or *means* that this is done in the faith community is by teaching and admonishing (cf. Col 1:28 where the order is reversed). O'Brien notes, "As the word of Christ richly indwells the Colossians, so by means of its operation they will 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.'"[20]

The second grammatical issue which must be resolved is related to the first, and it surrounds the question of what the participial phrase *adontes … tō theō* ("singing … to God") modifies. Does it modify the two preceding participles *didaskontes kai vouthetountes* (teaching and admonishing), or the main verb, the imperative *enoikeitō* ("dwell")? This is how the HCSB, RSV, NRSV, and NIV (1984) translations take it. If this is correct, then "teaching and admonishing" is parallel to "singing," and both are ways in which the word of Christ indwells the community of faith. However, these translations are guilty of adding an extra and unnecessary *kai* ("and") before the participle "singing," though there is little justification for doing so, or even a textual variant to suggest copyists understood it this way. Further, while the first two participles are clearly coordinate and joined with *kai*, the absence of *kai* ("and") before *adontes* ("singing") seems to support the point that these three participles are indeed *not* to be understood as parallel to one another.

While that option is grammatically possible,[21] I suggest that there is a better way of understanding *adontes*. To be sure, as most Colossian scholars note, a firm decision is difficult here, since Paul's use of participles can sometimes be a challenge to pin down. Instead of seeing "singing" as parallel to the other participles and directly dependent on the main verb, it should be seen as modifying, and thus subordinate to, the participles "teaching" and "admonishing." Again, the absence of "and" before "singing" in the Greek text seems to support the point that these three participles are indeed *not* to be understood as parallel to one another. Moo agrees and sees them "loosely connected" and writes, "Paul wants the community to teach and admonish each other *by means of* various kinds

of songs, and he wants them to do this singing to God with hearts full of gratitude."[22] O'Brien is persuasive here, noting that the phrase "with grace/thankfulness singing in/with your hearts to God" likely expresses the manner in which the action of the two preceding participles is done. Specifically, "they may denote the attitude or disposition which is to accompany the previously mentioned instruction and admonition, that is, as the Colossians teach one another in psalms, hymns, and songs inspired by the Spirit, so they are to sing thankfully to God with their whole being."[23] This makes good sense of the passage, especially given the parallel with Ephesians 5:19 and as well as the third and final grammatical issue to which we now turn.

The third grammatical question is perhaps the most relevant to the present discussion: Does the phrase "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (*palmois, humnios ōdais pneumatikais*) modify the two previous participles before it "teaching and admonishing" (*didaskontes kai nouthetountes*) or the one following it "singing" (*adontes*)? The commentators and translations are quite divided on this issue (note the translations above), and some have discussed it while others have not. On the one hand, it makes a certain level of logical sense to put "singing" with what is sung, i.e., psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as many translations (ESV, NET, NEB, HCSB, NIV 1984, RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT) and commentators (Wilson, Bruce, Melick, Still) do. This yields the translation, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*." But to do so one must, as Wilson puts it, do a fair amount of rearranging of these phrases.[24] This is a defensible translation.

A better option is to take the datives "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" as datives of means and modifying "teaching and admonishing," not "singing." Following O'Brien, Moo, Sumney, Fee, and Lincoln, it should be understood that these three all-encompassing types of musical worship are an *essential means of teaching and admonishing*, such that the word of Christ richly dwells in believers. Therefore, I suggest that the NASB, KJV, NKJV, TNIV, and NIV 2011 better capture Paul's intention when they translate the passage as *"teaching and admonishing being accomplished in/with/by/through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."*

The reasons for this conclusion are several.[25] First, the two participial clauses "with all wisdom teaching" (*en pasē sophia didaskontes*) and "with thankfulness singing" (*en [tē] chariti adontes*) are symmetrically balanced with their prepositional phrases (both commence with *en*, "with") at the head of each clause and the participles immediately following. The alternative (followed by the ESV, NIV 1984 etc.) yields a significant overweighting of the final participial clause. Second, several translations such as the RSV, NRSV, NIV 1984, and HCSB unnecessarily insert "and" before "singing" but this is neither original to the hand of Paul nor is it necessary or preferable, as argued above. Third, the objection made by some writers (whether stated or implied) that teaching and admonition would not take place in such psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is simply not valid. One needs merely to consider the teaching and admonition in the psalter itself, not to mention NT hymns such as Philippians 2:5-11 to know that the musical worship of the people of God has always been didactic and exhortative. This has especially been the case in the Church's history, before the printed word became the norm. Such music was meant to function as a "vehicle not only for worship but also for instruction."[26] Sumney correctly asserts, "The teaching and admonishing that gives voice to the word of Christ comes to expression in worship through 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.'"[27] In short, *corporate musical worship is an essential means by which the people of Christ are taught and admonished*.

Finally, as Lincoln notes (as well as Moule), it is significant that this is clearly the sense given to the parallel passage in Colossians' sister letter Ephesians.[28]

Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, by teaching and admonishing one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, singing with grace in your hearts to God."

Ephesians 5:18-19: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

These texts are clearly parallel: they are the only places in the New Testament where *humnos* (hymn) occurs; the term *ōdē* (song) is only used here in all of Paul's writings; the three datives are only found together in the NT in these two Pauline texts; and both are preceded by a present tense participle and reflexive pronoun. In short, when faced with making an exegetical decision on Colossians 3:16, should not a parallel passage by the same author "break the proverbial tie" for us? These two passages are remarkably similar, and one should be used to help understand the other. These four parallels lead us to conclude that O'Brien, Lincoln, and Moo, among others, have the syntax and exegesis right. The Colossian and Ephesian churches are to instruct one another by means of all manner of musical praise. This is to characterize their worship. It should also characterize ours.

Moule is both helpful and exasperating when he writes, "On the face of it, it is not obvious how one instructs and admonishes with psalms etc.; but there is no denying that Eph. v. 19 leaves no choice but to 'speak to one another in psalms' etc.; and presumably the use of music and utterances of praise *may be didactic*."[29] I would agree that Ephesians 5:19 is clear. And, I would agree with Moule when he suggests that all things being equal, Ephesians 5 should be a reliable pointer to the meaning in Colossians 3.[30]

Yet such a statement is exasperating! Psalms "*may* be didactic"? "It's *not clear* how a psalm instructs and admonishes?" What of Paul's use of Psalm 32 in Romans 4? Psalms 2, 8, 45, 95, 102, and 110 in Hebrews? Why would Peter cite Psalm 16 in Acts 2? Of course they are didactic! Of course they instruct and admonish us! This is even further reinforced in the New Testament if we can agree to the *hymnic* nature of Pauline texts such as Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20. Further, the teaching and exhortative nature of music was part of Israel's history at least as far back as the exodus.[31]

THE MEANING OF COLOSSIANS 3:16 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Like the Ephesian believers, Colossian believers, and the Old Testament saints, our worship is to be characterized by all manner of musical praise that teaches and exhorts, such that we will be full of the word of Christ. How does this view of *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* in Colossians 3:16 affect our corporate worship? I conclude with six implications, which is by no means exhaustive.

1. It means that what is sung must have as its purpose to teach and admonish. Therefore, there are songs that we will do, and there are those that we cannot do.

This is where godly wisdom and pastoral vision must be applied. But one need only to consider the teachings in songs such as Wesley's "And Can it Be?," Luther's "A Mighty Fortress," John Newton's "Amazing Grace," Isaac Watts' "Jesus Shall Reign," Keith and Kristyn Getty's "Communion Hymn," "By Faith," and "In Christ Alone," Gateway Worship's "God Be Praised" and "O the Blood," Hillsong's "Cornerstone" and "Beneath the Waters," or Sovereign Grace's "Our Song from Age to Age," "Now Why This Fear?" "All I Have is Christ," and "O Great God," among so many others. There has never been a time where there is more theologically rich and biblical music for the Church to sing than now. Yet there has also never before been a

more pressing need for pastoral oversight of what is sung in the gathered worship meeting of the local body.

*2. It means that whenever we sing (and preach for that matter) we are teaching **something**.*

Those charged with choosing a local church's songs should carefully consider what that is. This also has implications for the role of (and need for) a true pastor of worship who meets the pastoral criteria of 1 Timothy 3 as well as possesses an appropriate level of musical competence and skill—a pastor whose teaching is primarily musical. Further, sometimes song choice can be more of a choice of what is "better" over what is "good." Lastly, this point also needs to be made to parents, especially if you consider the truth and gravity of Martin Luther's teaching that every home is like a little church. As parents, and fathers in particular (where present), we have a great responsibility to teach our children the word of God and its teachings by means of both the spoken and sung word.

3. It means that when we are taught and admonished by biblical songs, we are building a greater capacity to suffer well.

Good theology can bury its way into our souls when it is put to song. How many of us have been upheld by the truth of Horatio Spafford's "It is Well" or the more modern Matt and Beth Redman song, "Blessed Be Your Name" when faced with suffering and trials?

4. It means that if Christ-centered worship teaches and admonishes us to love and live out the word of Christ that richly dwells within us, then the other side of this is that Christ-less worship aids and abets drifting away from the gospel.

The word preached with accuracy feeds the believing soul and fuels perseverance and endurance. The word preached haphazardly and inaccurately does the opposite. So also with the doctrines taught in the songs that we sing. Again, rest assured that every song is teaching something.

5. It means that many churches and many pastors need to give thought to how this portion of the gathered worship can come in line with the preached word such that both aspects of the service seek to accomplish the same goal of teaching and admonishing.

Perhaps there are a number of pastors reading these pages who have neglected to see that a large segment of their church's gathered worship needs to be refined and redeemed. The act of singing in corporate worship needs to be seen as yet another way to pastor and lead God's people—via musical worship whose goal is the same as preaching and all discipleship, namely, that the people of God be full of the word of Christ.

6. It means that content is primary and there will and should be a variety of music with no one style mandated.

I have been in a church that split over music style, and it was ugly. It did not honor Christ. I would therefore argue, with most commentators, that "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" refers to a wide variety of types of music. This text teaches us that biblical worship should consist of music that focuses on content rather than style, since all types of music are represented and intended when Paul writes of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." There is freedom in Paul's words here, and we must see the differences between style, content, and our own preferences.

CONCLUSION

The God of the Bible loves musical worship. It is our delight to praise him as his redeemed people. Through Paul, he has commanded us to make use

of this means to teach and admonish one another, such that his people are full of the word of Christ. *As translators* let us rethink how this text ought to be translated; *as members* of local churches let us make diligent use of this medium; and *for those of us who are pastors* in our local churches, let us wisely shepherd our people through and by means of congregational worship.

ENDNOTES

[1] Terry L. Johnson, "Restoring Psalm Singing to Our Worship," in *Give Praise to God: a Vision for Reforming Worship* (eds., P. Ryken, D. Thomas, and L. Duncan; (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 271.

[2] F. M. Spencer, "The Singing of Praise a Duty," in *Psalms in Worship* (ed., John McNaugher; Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), 40. This can be found online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000008685315?urlappend=%3Bseq=46 or http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?u=1&num=40&seq=9&view=image&size=100&id=pst.000008685315.

[3] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 286.

[4] Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 632.

[5] C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), 125-26.

[6] Ibid., 126. So also BDAG, s. v. "χάρις." Jerry Sumney agrees (*Colossians* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008], 226). Within the NT, *charis* does not typically mean gratitude or thanksgiving when articular. Outside the NT, however, it does refer to gratitude or thanksgiving.

[7] Sumney, *Colossians*, 226.

[8] Comfort, *New Testament Text*, 632-33. See also all major commentaries.

[9] Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 195.

[10] Contra R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 266, who seems unaware of the sharp differences. See also Charles Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 230; Paul E. Geterding, *Colossians* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 146-47. Each of these commentators eschews any discussion of the matter. Wilson only writes that it makes good sense to put "singing" with the three datives, and merely follows the punctuation of the NA[27].

[11] For example see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 427.

[12] For example see Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 208-10.

[13] Ibid.

[14] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville; Broadman, 1934), 1133-34.

[15] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 650.

[16] Sumney too notes that these cannot be imperatival (*Colossians*, 223-24), and avers that they are temporal, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you *when you teach and admonish*." I think this is unlikely in that it too limits the application of the imperative.

[17] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288.

[18] See O'Brien, Moo among others.

[19] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 627ff.

[20] O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 207. Cf. E. D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 173; Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (New American Commentary 32; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 304; Todd Still, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon, Revised Edition, Volume 12* (eds., Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 334. Other suggestions have been made such as temporal, "when you teach and admonish" (Sumney, *Colossians*, 223-24), while others have not ventured to answer such as Moule, who raises the grammatical question while not positing (or discussing) a solution, other than to state the obvious that this is an anacoluthon.

[21]See M. J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 169-70.

[22]Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288; emphasis mine.

[23]O'Brien, *Colossians*, 210.

[24]Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, 266-67.

[25]O'Brien, *Colossians*, 208-09, more than any other, deals with this issue.

[26]A. T. Lincoln, "Colossians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 649. Cf. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 427; Moo, *Colossians*, 287-88.

[27]Sumney, *Colossians*, 225. Even if one disagrees with this line of argument and sees the two participial phrases as coordinate, and both modifying the imperative, there is still a close link between the church's teaching and singing (Still, "Colossians," 334). However, the specific emphatic thrust of the didactic and paraenetic importance of the church's singing is blunted, and must better explain the parallel in Eph 5:19.

[28]Lincoln, "Colossians," 649. James Dunn seems to agree concerning Eph 5:19 (see *The Epistles to Colossians and to Philemon* [New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 236).

[29]Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 125. Emphasis added.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Note Exodus 14 and 15. Chapter 14 is prose telling the reader the events at the Red Sea, while chapter 15 is the same account put to the genre of music. This was to teach and worship the God who had brought them out of slavery. Cf. Judges 4 and 5.

Meditation: Christ—The Mystery of God Revealed

Toby V. Jennings

Twentieth century atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell purportedly said that the one question he would ask God if, finally, he were to meet him face to face is, "Sir, why *did you* take such pains to *hide yourself*?"[1] In one sense—which will be examined later—Russell's query is not illegitimate. Russell was simply evidencing the inescapable reality that he is indeed an offspring of Adam and Eve and a member of the family of creatures who, like their original progenitors, believe the lie and suppress the truth—namely, "the knowledge of the mystery of God—Christ—in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Russell's query is no different, then, from that of any sentient being who can possess awareness of an invisible almighty deity only by faith in what that deity chooses to reveal about himself.

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The Colossian Christians were being persuaded by philosophers of their own day to ask similar questions about the invisible God. Fortunately, the invisible God, who both cares for them and called them to himself through the preaching of the gospel by Epaphras (1:7), also spoke to them by means of his appointed emissary, the apostle Paul, who himself directed the Colossians' attention to God's consummate self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul knew that only in Christ could the Colossians—or *any* offspring of Adam—regain possession of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that our original parents enjoyed by means of uninterrupted communion with the God who both created and *is* our life (3:4; cf. Acts 17:24-29). Paul proclaimed to the Colossians this God who, quite the opposite of Russell's assertion, took such pains *to reveal* himself. In order to present knowledge of the only true God—the God who, resisting the proud and giving grace to the humble, has "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (James 4:6; Matt 11:25)—the apostle knew no other message to communicate than Jesus Christ and him crucified, the

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identical message he declared to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:23; 2.2). The singular life-giving message of Jesus Christ as the mystery of God revealed is the message of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2.

Paul wants his newfound spiritual siblings to be secure for eternity in this life-giving communion with Jesus Christ through embrace of the orthodox (i.e., rightly viewed) understanding of the invisible God, namely, that he has willed to disclose himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul is aware of the distortions that are circulating among the Colossians as a result of some who were teaching and preaching "persuasive" (2:4) views of God derived from the fertile imaginations of their "fleshly minds" (2:18), rather than from that which "God willed to make known" and "now has been revealed, and was taught in all wisdom by Christ's appointed and divinely inspired apostles (1:26-29). Affirming, therefore, his God-willed authority to reprove error in the name of Jesus Christ (1:1-2), Paul constructs an intimately personal yet veritably engineered treatise of first, orthodoxy (chap. 1), then orthopathos (chap. 2), and finally the expected result, orthopraxy (chaps. 3-4).[2] The second chapter of the letter contains the fulcrum of Paul's message to this newly founded body of believers in Christ.

MYSTERY REVEALED

The cunning philosophers attempting to beguile the Colossians preyed upon their infatuation with *knowledge*. The frequency of Paul's use of some terms in this letter seems to indicate that the Colossians' fetish for *knowledge* (1:9, 10; 2:2, 3; 3:10) and understanding *mystery* (1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3) or *hidden* things (1:26; 3:3) might be similar to our own culture's "frankly idolatrous devotion to our own capacity to understand."[3] Nevertheless, Paul assures the Colossians that God in Christ alone provides for them "all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery;" for in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," as well as "the whole fullness of deity ... in bodily form" (2:2-3, 9). Jesus Christ is the unveiling of the *mystery*—i.e., undisclosed or hidden knowledge—that is God. This knowledge alone could satisfy the Colossians' seeking intellects and affections. No higher knowledge of the Power of the universe *can* be discovered, though one searches the entire tangible or philosophical expanse of that same universe.

The *mystery* to which Paul refers is not merely God disclosed to the created order, for he tells the affections-starved Colossians that the mystery is *Immanuel*—that is, Christ *in you*, the hope of glory (1:27). The implications of *Christ in us* are vast! Contemplate them; for they include, but are certainly not limited to notions pertaining to: the design and creation of a "living being" (Gen 2:7) in the image of Christ, who himself would add that same created human nature to his own divine nature for eternity; the definition of "life" as that which God alone possesses intrinsically (John 5:21, 26), and is now identified with the "hope of glory"—that which was hidden from ages and generations past, and is veiled still to all who are yet captive to dead affections (Col 1:26a; 2 Cor 3:14-16); and the boast-silencing, pride-crushing, awe-inspiring grace of God to enter into a covenantal relationship with the likes of us as we are brought into faith union with Christ (Rom 9:15-16; John 15:16). The multifaceted mystery of the invisible God is not some esoteric knowledge accessible only to an elite group of shamans or the like. Paul informs the Colossians that knowledge of the invisible God, who created and rules the universe, is available to all who will simply believe that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God proclaims to his fallen cosmos, "I AM."

The so-called knowledge with which the false teachers are attempting to seduce the Colossians cannot provide the attainment of fullness that it promises. Precisely to the contrary, the literally damned emptiness that is the inescapable end of all philosophy devoid of Christ is the destiny away from which the inspired Paul longs to divert his "faithful brethren" in Colossae. Their desire for knowledge must be directed to Christ, the

revealed mystery of God in whom alone they, or any seeker of so-called higher knowledge, can find not only objective but also personal fullness. Because the Creator of human beings has "set eternity in their heart" (Eccl 3:11), he has designed them to find ultimate fulfillment only in himself. Only "in him" can the infinite penalty for humanity's sin against him be satisfied. Only the offended God who will serve exclusively as Judge of his mutinous creation can forgive us "all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and [take] it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (2:13-14). Only by an infinite being can an infinite penalty be expiated; no finite creature qualifies to accomplish such a responsibility. *Fullness,* that is, attainment of the mystery, which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, can be found nowhere else than "in him," the incarnate second person of the divine Trinity, Jesus Christ.[4] For these very reasons Paul affirms for the Colossians—and for believers today—that "in him you have been made complete" (2:10). That is, the search for both objective and personal fulfillment concerning the mystery of the universe and of God is genuinely and consummately satisfied for anyone, who by faith alone affirms that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Christ. The human creature was designed and created to find consummate fulfillment and satisfaction nowhere else, nor *will* he find such fulfillment anywhere else; for the blindness that has come as penalty for sin can be overcome nowhere else except by Christ's atonement on the cross (2:13-14; cf. John 1:10-13). This cosmic truth is so inescapable that even the venerable Augustine would effuse rightly, "The thought of you [God] stirs him [mankind] so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."[5]

IN CHRIST ALONE

Paul's own encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus catapulted him from his staunch devotion to the half-truth of Judaism to an equally staunch devotion to the full revelation of God, as had been foretold in ages and generations past (1:26), in Immanuel—Jesus Christ. Paul was convinced by God the Son incarnate himself, therefore, that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3)—perpetually sought by God's estranged image bearers ever since mankind's eviction from the presence of those treasures (Gen 3:23-24)—could be re-acquired only by partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, which is Jesus Christ (Gen 1:9b; 3:22b; cf. Col 1:28; 2:2, 10; 3:4, 17, 23-24). The apostle communicates in perfect harmony with the entirety of the Scriptures the singular message of God to mankind: "I AM the LORD." The mystery and image of the invisible God (1:15, 26-27; 2:2; cf. Heb 1:3) are graciously and volitionally disclosed to humanity (and the entire created order [Eph 3:8-11]) in *theanthropos*—the God-man. In Jesus Christ, the God who created and sustains the universe proclaims consummately, "I AM the LORD."[6] All who will to hear will hear. To the "evil and adulterous" anti-humanists (in the truest sense), who disdainfully bear a grotesquely marred image of their Creator, precisely because they choose to believe the lie rather than the truth, no further sign will be given; for if these reject the "showing of himself" that God has already graciously provided "at various times and in various ways," surely "neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Matt 12:39; Heb 1:1; Luke 16:31). The apostle, then, has no other message for the Colossians (or for the Corinthians or for all of humanity, for that matter) than "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2).

THE INTEGRITY OF ORTHODOXY, ORTHOPATHOS, AND ORTHOPRAXIS

Paul fully understood the intrinsic relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. He understood, as New Testament scholar Richard Melick would articulate much later, that "orthodoxy without orthopraxy leads to *de facto* secu-

larism"—that is, irreligion governed by mere human wisdom.[7] Accordingly, Paul preached the "full knowledge" that the Colossians unwittingly sought, namely, the orthodoxy that the revealed God alone in Christ had provided not only the wisdom to ground vital living in accord with the image that humanity was designed to reflect, but also *life* itself.

At the theological center of his address, the apostle exposes three core faults (all noted in 2:8) with the empty *philosophia* that the Colossians were entertaining.[8] First, the "persuasive" (2:4) teaching is characterized as "the tradition of men." Although beneficial as far as it goes (2:23), its value cannot be assessed as anything more than the wisdom of the world that the apostle excoriates the Corinthians for entertaining. Mere creaturely wisdom is insufficient to ground universal and eternal verities. In both Colossae and Corinth, this hubris of the self-affirmed wise one is proven futile by objective truth—i.e., the revelation of the Almighty Creator God, who *is* Truth. Acceptance of *knowledge*, that is, assent to what is *true*, is not merely a function of the intellect. Such a crucially important endeavor, with eternal consequences, necessarily involves the whole human being, including one's *affections*. Here is where orthopathos necessarily intersects both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. People will be rescued from the guilt of their own sin by mere intellectual assent to the truth of their own evident failure from an objective standard of absolute perfection (1:28), for only fools believe themselves to be perfect in every way.[9] Truth is foolishness to dead affections (1 Cor 1:20-31; Rom 8:7-8).

Second, the teaching is "according to the elementary principles of the world." This phrase may be a technical term used by heretical teachers to contrast the superiority of either supernatural beings or an elite class of persons with special knowledge over beings with more elementary capacities. It could also be a nontechnical phrase, simply referring to foundational principles of rudimentary significance—e.g., rules, regulations, and routines for life imposed by the Mosaic law (cf. Gal 4:9-10)—perhaps in comparison to other higher precepts.[10] Either way, the one whose life has become hidden in Christ has been liberated from the penal constraints of the judaistic law (2:11-14). Such a one should not falter to re-enslavement to that from which he has been granted maturity (cf. Heb 6:1-3; 1 Cor 13:10). In the mind of the apostle Paul—as well as the Old Testament itself—returning to bondage to such elementary principles would constitute not only a departure from liberty and confession of the prophesied Messiah, but, in fact, a damning curse (Gal 3:10).

Third, the teaching is not "according to Christ;" that is, it is does not comport with the person and work of Jesus Christ nor does it secure its terminus in him. This danger does not necessarily get at a specific doctrine, but at both the affections and the practice of those who name the name of Christ. Here again, the inspired theologian iterates the intrinsic connection between orthodoxy, orthopathos, and orthopraxy. If one confesses, by the Holy Spirit, the orthodoxy that Christ is God incarnate, then orthopathic love for both that truth and the God of that truth will produce an orthopraxic life commensurate with that devotion.

THE HAUNTING TENSION OF RUSSELL'S LEGITIMACY

As noted above, Bertrand Russell's puzzlement is, in one sense, legitimate. Adam and Eve, the very first human beings created with the capacity for awareness of an invisible deity, enjoyed completely unobstructed communion with this invisible deity. He was not hidden from them. One may even argue that they enjoyed some form of corporeal interaction with him (Gen 3:8). We ought not be surprised by this mutually interactive *life*; for such living communion was the ultimate end for which the Creator made a creature in his own image in the first place.[11] As long as God's *magnum opus* depended upon him unequivocally, the many splendored, transparent, communal *life* with God that the creature enjoyed would continue unhin-

dered. However, the creature's self-assertive rebellion would not only dissolve the covenant of life enjoyed between God and his image bearer, but the consequences of the covenant's dissolution would be equally many splendored; better, many corruptive. Chief among the corruptive effects that the creature would experience, in accord with the *death* he would now be experiencing, would be his blindness—that is, his inability to "see" his perfect, holy, gracious, infinite-personal, invisible Creator-deity. Because of the cosmic insurrection volitionally engaged by God's crowned creation, the perfect "sight" possessed by the perfect creature in a perfect environment has now been perfectly darkened. Sin being its own punishment—in many senses—the "wisdom" of man (i.e., his "sight") has now been rendered foolishness (1 Cor 1:18; 1 Cor 2:16). The "natural man," therefore, apart from the instrumentation of the gift of faith, will now never "accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him"; in fact, he "is not even able [to do so]" (Rom 8:7).

So, in one sense, Russell cannot be faulted for functioning within the bounds of his ability; he is unable to "see" the invisible God. One must be careful, however, not to dismiss Russell's accountability to respond to the self-disclosure of the invisible God that *has* been made available to him in many ways (Rom 1:18-20; Heb 1:1-3). For this self-assertive rebellious rejection of the invisible God's amazingly gracious *not* hiding himself, every human being who rejects the revelation of God in Jesus Christ will find himself without excuse in the day that he does indeed finally meet the Triune God face to face.[12] As long as these rebellious ones continue in self-willed rejection of simultaneously the most gracious and the most sorrowful revelation of the invisible God in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as savior of the world, they will continue "always learning [yet] never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Just like Jannes and Jambres, who opposed Moses (2 Tim 3:7-8), their consciences are darkened to the hope of acquiring "knowledge" that could be theirs if they would but repent of the self-righteous hubris that blinds them to the mystery unveiled in Christ—the mystery of God revealed (2 Cor 3:12-16; 4.3-6). The apostle Paul elsewhere articulates his burden for these ones this way: "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom] which God predestined before the ages to our glory; [the wisdom] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:6-8).

CONCLUSION: FAITHFULNESS IN THE FACE OF PERSUASIVE HERESY

F. F. Bruce encourages,

> When Paul says in Colossians 1:15 that all things were created through Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible," he might have added, had appropriate Greek words been available in his day, "personal and impersonal." If it is asked whether the spiritual forces which Christ vanquished on the Cross are to be regarded as personal or impersonal, the answer is probably "both." Whatever forces there are, of either kind, that hold human souls in bondage, Christ has shown Himself to be their Master, and those who are united to Him by faith need have no fear of them.[13]

Bruce is echoing Paul's confidence that those who have been made complete in Christ also have been known by Christ and therefore have no need to fear any loss of that fullness because Christ, having begun a good work in them, will complete it (Phil 1:6). Those who faithfully proclaim, then, the knowledge of the mystery of God—that is, Christ—also need have no fear of "persuasive arguments" that inevitably fall short of revealing the mystery because they fail to possess the truth entailed in God's own disclosure of himself in Jesus Christ. Those who have been commissioned

to preach the gospel need only trust the invisible God who ordained the efficacious means of unveiling the mystery that is himself.

Marvelously, God has ordained the foolishness of preaching as the means for unveiling the mystery (1:23, cf. 1 Cor 1:21). Why? Because no truth can be discovered about a personal being unless that being wills to disclose it. The infinite-personal God *willed* to make himself known (Col 1:27). The corrupted, darkened, idolatrous, dead affections of the self-worshiping one—who believes the lie, rather than the Truth—*cannot* discover, by his own means, the mystery that is God. God is therefore pleased to employ the hubris-confounding medium of preaching to disclose to the creature the most important and ultimately sought knowledge: Himself. Again, through the message preached, the invisible God proclaims, "I AM the LORD."

Those who proclaim this good news need only concern themselves with faithfulness and accuracy of the message of Truth, despite the ever recurring appearance of erudite rejections of Truth. These "persuasive arguments" will never and can never find their grounding in any objective standard of truth. For objective truth can come only from One who is both omniscient and free from any means of subjective bias. Truth, therefore, *must* be revealed; it cannot be either devised or discovered. Such determinations of so-called truth, because they have no external grounding, are inevitably merely subjective, philosophical, socio-culturally, finite constructs. They cannot ever rise to the level of objective, absolute, infinite-personally determined *and revealed* Truth. This "true knowledge of God's mystery" can be found only in Jesus Christ. So declares the inspired apostle Paul to the Colossians.

ENDNOTES

[1] Jesus Christ *is* the mystery of God revealed. Because the testimony of countless witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ is true, sadly, Russell—and many like him—will have no excuse for rejecting their Creator in that day when they finally meet him face to face.

[2] These are general divisions with many areas of overlap, since the three divisions are so integral to one another in genuine Christianity.

[3] D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Evil and Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 202.

[4] H. Wayne House elaborates on the nature of the believer's life having "been made complete" by virtue of his or her union with Christ, in whom the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. H. Wayne House, "Doctrinal Issues in Colossians—Part 2: The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149: 594 (1992): 187-88.

[5] Augustine *Confessions* 1.1.

[6] Cf. Exod 3:14 with John 7:35; 8:12; 9:58; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; see also Deut 18:15 with Matt 17:5; and John 5:18-26; 14:8-11; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-18; 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-3.

[7] Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Colossians* (New American Commentary 32; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 183.

[8] The term *philosophia* (2:8) is a *hapax legomena* in the New Testament. The term may be a technical term employed by the apostle in specific polemic against the heresies being advanced—which heresies also may have used the term. One must be careful to note that Paul is not decrying philosophy itself, however, but rather *tes philosophia kai kenes apates*—literally, "the philosophy and empty deceit" of employing mere human wisdom—exclusive of consummate wisdom found in Jesus Christ—as instructive for any ultimately meaningful life. That Paul is not decrying philosophy itself is evidenced by his own affirming citation of philosophers known to his audiences (see, for example, Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Melick, *Colossians*, 172, 177; cf. 252-53; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "The Second Chapter of Colossians," *Review & Expositor* 70:4 (Fall 1973): 470. Concerning notions of this teaching that has been characterized as "the Colossian heresy," see F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems: Part 3: The Colossian Heresy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141: 563 (1984): 195-206.

[9] The only One who *is* perfect is obviously excepted here.

[10] C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), 92; J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles*

to the Colossians and to Philemon (3rd ed.; London: Macmillan & Co., 1897), 178; Bruce, "Colossian Problems," 204-05.

[11] See, for example, Gen 2:7; Exod 33:14-16; Jer 11:4; 30:22; Ezek 36:28; Matt 1:23; Col 1:27; Rev 21:3. See also Jonathan Edwards' helpful and necessary distinction between *chief* ends and *ultimate* ends in Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Ethical Writings, Vol. 8* (ed., Paul Ramsey; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

[12] Sadly, because Bertrand Russell succumbed to his Creator's righteous curse and died on February 2, 1970, his hubris has now been granted its opportunity. The consequences that he is now experiencing, as a direct consequence to the risk he took, are literally unimaginable. The living can only beg for rescuing mercy for others who today remain captive to dead affections.

[13] F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems: Part 4: Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141: 564 (1984): 299.

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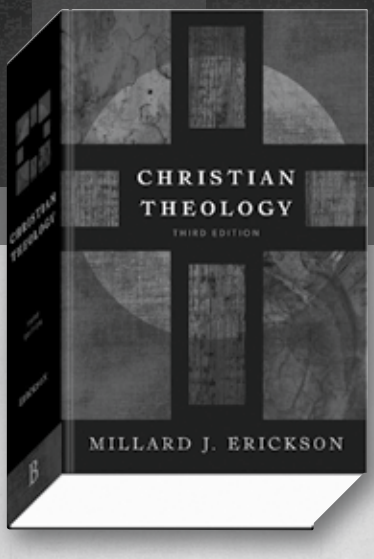

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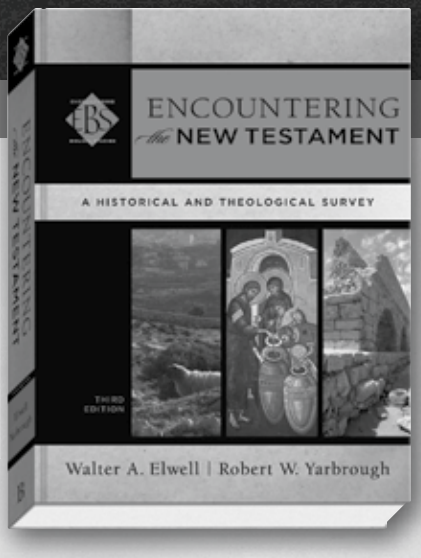

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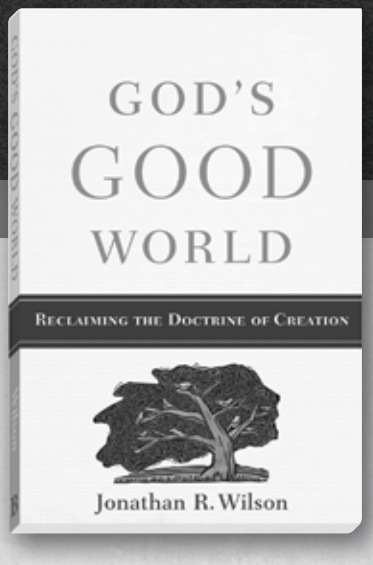

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Sermon: A Portrait of the Glorious Community of Faith (Colossians 3:12-17)[1]

Lee Tankersley

> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:12-17, ESV).

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What comes to mind when you think of the church? It is no doubt the case that mentioning the idea of the church to individuals can bring about diverse reactions. For some, to speak of the church is a reminder of something gone wrong. Whether it was a pastor who sinned grievously in some manner, a person who gossiped or slandered, or poor stewardship of money entrusted to the church, there is some reason why mentioning the church to some people is like pulling a scab off a wound. Something happened that left them thinking they would never be part of the church again.

On the other hand, for others, the mention of church is a reminder of something they are committed to but, sadly, it brings them no joy. After all, the meeting of the church together each Sunday often gets in the way of certain sporting events or other leisure activities, causing them to lose a crucial day in the weekend. Yet, for some reason these individuals are committed either out of duty or some kind of obligation. For the most part, they gather with believers on Sundays, are pretty regular in their attendance, maybe even sacrificially give of their resources, but yet the thought of the church does not elicit great joy. It's like brushing one's teeth—a necessary thing to which most are committed yet few (if any) get excited about.

SBJT 17.3 (2013): 68-73.

Still yet, for others, the mention of the church is like telling your dog that he's about to get a treat. It's a reminder of what—and more importantly, whom—they love. They're willing to alter their lives just to be able to be involved in this believing community, whether it means passing up a job opportunity in another town or being away from family. The church, for them, is one of their greatest delights. The thought of going through life apart from these people with whom they have linked arms and walked through joys and trials is almost too much to bear.

When I was growing up, I don't know that I would have been able to place myself in the last category just described. It wasn't until I was a part of this church, which I now know as my own, that I began to realize what a church community could be, and, to tell you the truth, it has literally changed my life![2] I am now at a place that if for some reason I could no longer serve as your pastor, I'd still want to be able to keep my family in order to be part of this church. And I know that I'm not the only one who thinks this way. I've watched as many people have made great sacrifices to be a part of this body of Christ and continually make sacrifices in order to fellowship with this group of believers. The Lord has simply lavished his grace upon us as a people, and I cannot thank him enough for bringing this church into my life.

Yet, I also realize that there are people who may have thought of the church in this last category, which I now thankfully do, but for some reason have moved into the categories of either despising the church or of thinking of the church as something that simply reminds them of numerous heartaches. There are local churches that at one time epitomized everything good and beautiful about the bride of Christ that are now simply gone. There are people who at one time sacrificed much just to be a part of a certain believing community who later voluntarily walked out the door and never came back.

Perhaps it is this reality that leads Paul (and the other biblical authors) to spend so much time instructing us on how to relate to one another as part of a local church. It's because, on the one hand, we desperately need one another, can become a portrait of something beautiful and delightful together, and can shine brightly together in this world, and, on the other hand, can so quickly end up on the other end of the scale, bearing hatred in our hearts toward one another, picturing disunity and malice, and can provide a false witness to the glory of Jesus Christ.

So, it should not surprise us that as Paul turns his attention to exhorting the Colossians in day-to-day practice that he focuses specifically on the Colossians laboring and living together as a community of believers in 3:12-17. And as we pay attention and heed Paul's exhortations in these verses, it will aid us in growing as a delightful community of believers and in preventing and fighting against those things that stand to destroy such a community.

If you want to sum up Paul's picture of what makes a thriving church community, I think it's found in verse 17 of our text. Paul closes this section of exhortations by noting in verse 17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." The idea of doing everything we do "in the name of the Lord Jesus" in light of the rest of this text and the rest of this book seems to be the idea of always acting in accord with the nature and character of Christ. That is, in everything we say or do, let's make sure that we are demonstrating the nature and character of Christ. That is our goal. But, how do we do that? I think the answer is by walking according to the exhortations we find in verses 12-16.

How do we live as a Christ-honoring community of believers? I want to mention four points from our text which will enable us to do so.

FIRST, IN ORDER TO LIVE AS A CHRIST-HONORING COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WE MUST LABOR TO DEMONSTRATE THE PEACE OF CHRIST IN OUR MIDST.

The exhortation to let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts doesn't come until the first half of

verse 15, but I think this is where these first few verses are heading. I think this for a couple of reasons. First, in the book of Ephesians (which has a number of parallel texts with Colossians), Paul begins his exhortations in that book by writing, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3, ESV). Does this not sound similar to what we read in Colossians 3:12-17? I think it does, and given this fact, we see that the goal of Ephesians and Colossians is that in the church, we are called to work hard at maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Second, the nature of the commands that Paul gives in verses 12-15a, if obeyed, would indeed bring about peace amidst a community of believers. That is, where these commands are obeyed, peace will be the result. And, given that Paul opens the letter (as he does others) with a declaration of peace (1:2), I think that his aim is for the Colossian church to be one characterized as a community of peace, where the gathering of believers together is a haven of peace.

But how do they get there? We see this in the opening verses of our text. Paul exhorts them first to "put on" those qualities that characterize the nature of Christ. He writes in verse 12, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." I don't think it's by mistake that Paul lists five of these qualities after listing five vices in 3:5 and in 3:8. He is countering those things which we must put away and put to death with five characteristics that we must "put on," as if putting on clothing.

Therefore, the kind of person that Paul envisions each of us being is a person characterized by these qualities. As those who have been called out of the world by God and then called together as his church, we must exercise first, compassion. That is, we should be characterized by a willingness to demonstrate tenderness and mercy toward others. We must be kind. We must be humble, ridding ourselves of arrogance that looks down on others. We must have meekness, not wanting to exalt ourselves above others. And we must have patience. This is what a covenant community of believers should look like. This is the New Testament's vision of what the church should be and how she should act in the world.

And, I would dare say that all of us would want to be part of a community of believers characterized by these qualities. Yet, that means that each one of us must labor to ensure that we ourselves are characterized by such qualities. This must be a focused and disciplined goal on the part of each one of us.

Yet, Paul is realistic as well. He knows that we are prone to failure. He knows that he's calling us to link arms together with people who will hurt us, even as we will hurt them. We will sometimes be careless with our words and offend. We will sometimes look past our aching brother or sister because we're focused on our own needs. Therefore, Paul reminds us that we must bear with one another. He writes in verse 13, "Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Paul knows that not only will we need to bear with one another as we walk together, and he also knows that there will be times when we have legitimate grievances against one another. What do we do when someone does us wrong? What do we do when our pain is magnified because the wound comes from someone we've drawn close to in our walk? Paul simply reminds us that we are to forgive. And he reminds us that we must forgive, *even as we have been forgiven by our Lord.*

We'll see this more particularly as we progress through the text, but we should note here as well that walking together in peace with other believers is always necessarily undergirded with the gospel. The only reason we will be able to live like this is because we recognize that we are not doing these things so that we can be right with God.

We're living this way because we've already been declared right with God. And the only way we'll find strength to forgive others when we've been wronged by them is by recognizing and remembering that we've been forgiven for much greater evil than anyone has committed against us.

So, Paul sets for us a vision of a covenant community. We are to be a people characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, who are willing to bear with and forgive one another. This is what unity and peace among a believing community requires. Where it is present, we delight and love the church. Where it is absent, we are simply mirroring those around us who have not died and been raised with Christ.

Yet, Paul continues. Next, he mentions an element that we must not simply assume, namely the reality of *love* in our midst.

SECOND, IN ORDER TO LIVE AS A CHRIST-HONORING COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WE MUST LOVE OTHERS GENUINELY.

After mentioning these virtues and characteristics that we must put on, Paul says in verse 14, "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." The greatest reality that must characterize those of us in this covenant community of believers is *love*. Every responsibility we bear before Christ stems from love. This is why Paul says that "above all" we are to put on love.

You see, if we demonstrate kindness, patience, humility, patience, and compassion and yet do not have love, it is worthless. If we say that we forgive one another and yet do not love one another, then everything is a mere façade. Paul tells us as much as he writes to the Corinthians in 13:3, saying, "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Now, imagine that. If you had a church full of people giving to each other what was theirs and some even laying down their lives for others, we would say, "This church is amazing." Yet, Paul says that those things can all be pointless if they are not driven by love. You can actually give away all you have and give your body to be burned and not be driven by love but perhaps by something like pride.

Love is a necessary characteristic of the Christian community. Everything we do is bound together in harmony by our love for one another. What this means is that we do not make it our aim to serve others in this body, though we need to serve one another. We do not make it our aim not to sin against others in this body, though we need to fight sinning against one another. We do not make it our aim to meet others' needs, though we want to do that as well. Rather, we make it our aim to genuinely love one another. This is our goal, and everything else (our service, care, and kindness to one another) must flow out of this.

This means, among other things, that we take opportunities to spend time together, hear one another joys and burdens, and see one another's hearts so that we might cultivate love for one another. We need to provide for ourselves opportunities to see and delight in our brothers' and sisters' love for Christ so that we might grow in love for them.

Yet Paul does not stop here. On top of our labors for peace that are driven by love, we also see that we must be characterized by *thankfulness*.

THIRD, IN ORDER TO LIVE AS A CHRIST-HONORING COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WE MUST LET THANKFULNESS RULE OUR HEARTS.

Now, perhaps among some of us gratitude has gotten a bad name. Soon after I was married, I began reading through John Piper's excellent book, *Future Grace*. Early on in that book, Piper has a chapter called, "When gratitude malfunctions." What he notes in that chapter is that we do not do things in the Christian life driven by gratitude *in the sense of trying to pay someone back*. So, for example, someone buys you lunch and from that point forward you walk around under the weight of feeling like you need to pay them back and buy them lunch. It's as if you are in debt because of their kindness.

However, this right warning by John Piper need not be confused with a call to throw out gratitude and thankfulness altogether. If you get rid of gratitude, you have to get rid of much of the Bible. Look at the prominence gratitude holds in our text. First, Paul ends verse 15 saying, "And be thankful." That's all he says. It's out there without qualification, almost as if it's just tacked on. But I don't think that's what's going on here.

During my entrance exams for seminary, I had to answer some questions in a room, armed only with a pen and paper. So, a number of us sat down in a room together, opened an envelope that had a few questions inside, and we started writing. The problem was, as I've mentioned, that I just had paper and a pen. This wasn't a "bring your laptop" kind of test. Well, the problem with writing out your answer (besides that your hand starts to cramping) is that if you forget something, you cannot just go back and insert it. And, it was only after I had finished answering the first question that I realized I had forgotten to write about an important detail.

I thought to myself, "What am I going to do?" I couldn't just put in some kind of footnote, the point was too important. I couldn't put one of those carrot top insert signs somewhere and write a brief few words. There was too much to write for that. So, I just decided to make my closing paragraph say, "But one of the most important things that I've not mentioned until now is …." And I just hoped that it didn't read like I'd forgotten it until then.

As I noted, you might think that Paul did the same thing as you read the text. It's as if he looked over his outline and saw that he had left out "Be thankful" in verse 12, so he wrote it in as an out-of-place add on at the end of verse 15. However, that notion is soon dispelled as you read on and realize that Paul ends every section with an exhortation to giving thanks. If verses 12-15 provide the first set of exhortations, then Paul ends by saying, "Be thankful." Verse 16 then turns their attention specifically to the gospel and Paul ends by saying that they are to do these things "with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Then, verse 17 summarizes everything, and it too ends, "Giving thanks to God the Father through him." Clearly, Paul is not just tacking on the idea of giving thanks. Rather, he sees it as a crucial element that must be consistent within a covenant community of believers who honor God in how they live.

But why? Why would thankfulness or gratitude be a repeated element among Paul's exhortations? I think Moo is right at this point, noting, "Believers who are full of gratitude to God for his gracious calling … will find it easier to extend to fellow believers the grace of love and forgiveness and to put aside petty issues that might inhibit the expression of peace in the community."[3] That is, if we are people who recognize that we are who we are and are in the place we are in because we have been chosen by God and loved by him (v. 12), have been called out of the world and united with other believers by God, and have been forgiven by God, then we will be the kind of people who love deeply, forgive quickly, endure others with patience for a long time, and walk in humility. That is, recognizing that we are who we are only by the grace of God and overflowing in thanksgiving because of that fuels our holy living together as a community. We love because we realize that we have first been the objects of God's love and thus abound in thankfulness.

And this brings us to our last and extremely crucial point. It is one that has been briefly mentioned (and mostly assumed) to this point, but I want to make it explicit:

FOURTH, IN ORDER TO LIVE AS A CHRIST-HONORING COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WE MUST SATURATE OURSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER WITH THE GOSPEL.

Paul writes in verse 16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Now, when Paul mentions the "word of Christ," I think he means the gospel. Most commentators agree with this, but let me show you one reason why I think this

is the case. Earlier in this letter, Paul mentions the "word of truth" in 1:5, and then immediately he defines it as "the gospel." So, for Paul, in Colossians, "word of truth" is his way of referring to the gospel. Similarly, then, I think we are to read the similar phrase "word of Christ" in 3:16, with the same understanding. That is, we should understand "word of Christ" as " the gospel."

So, what Paul is envisioning here, then, is a community of believers saturating themselves in the gospel. That is, a community of believers lives in peace with one another only to the extent that each one is constantly reminded about the gospel and lives out the gospel in their daily lives. Why is this so? Because apart from Christ we are sinners condemned under the wrath of a holy God, yet Christ came and lived a perfect life for us, died to pay the penalty for our sins, and was raised from the dead on the third day so that if we place our faith in him, then we will be forgiven of our sins and declared righteous on the basis of Jesus Christ and his finished work for us. We must meditate on that message again and again. It must be something we consciously apply to our minds and hearts on a daily basis and multiple times throughout the day. We must be a people obsessed with this message.

And it's important and crucial that we do this individually. However, in this section that focuses on living together as a community, the focus is corporate. Therefore, I want us to notice how Paul envisions us being saturated with the gospel, allowing it to dwell within us richly. He writes, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Paul envisions us hearing and delighting in the gospel as we are together and are taught and admonished. This is why in every sermon we want explicitly to declare the gospel and remind ourselves of it so that we might allow that word to dwell in us richly. But, Paul doesn't just envision the person who may handle the teaching load on a particular Sunday as applying the gospel. Rather, he envisions every member together lavishing the gospel of grace upon others in song.

What this means is that you carry a responsibility as you gather with your brothers and sisters in Christ to sing the gospel to them. Our singing is not just something we're doing because we've always done it. It's something that we do because Christ has commanded it, and one reason he's commanded it is because singing is a beautiful means by which the whole of the church can proclaim the gospel to one another—through song.

This also is a means to cultivating love among a believing community. As we remind one another of what Christ has done for us and the forgiveness we have in him, it powerfully draws our hearts together in love. This reminder will help us bear with one another and forgive one another. It will cause us to be thankful. It will unify us in peace.

So, as a community, everything we do is undergirded by the gospel. The gospel is why we are grateful and walk in thanksgiving. It is how we can love, and it is why we're able to put on the characteristics that characterize our Lord. Therefore, this morning, as those whose faith is in the crucified and risen Christ and who have been justified by faith, let us remember the gospel, sing of it, and strive to live lives that are characterized by our Lord himself. Standing in the gospel, let us "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." As we do, we will provide a beautiful picture of the glorious community of faith. Amen.

ENDNOTES

[1] This is a slight revision of a sermon preached at Cornerstone Community Church in Jackson, TN on May 29, 2011.

[2] Editor's Note: The church described is Cornerstone Community Church, Jackson, TN.

[3] Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 285.

Book Reviews

Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry. By Gregory Alan Thornbury. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013, 223 pp., $17.99 paper.

Thornbury, who has just completed fifteen years of service at Union University and now been appointed President of The King's College, aims in this book to rekindle some of Carl Henry's theology with a view to strengthening "classic evangelicalism." Compared with the evangelicalism of our day, which in Thornbury's view is insipid, awash in defeatism, confused in theology, and almost destitute of cultural influence, the evangelicalism that Henry led surged with faithfulness and genuine promise. Henry himself was one of several "giants" who led the movement. Today, however, when one surveys the evangelical landscape, "one gets the feeling that we're backpedaling quickly. We are more theologically diffuse, culturally gunshy, and balkanized than ever before … And how do we find our way back?" (32). By bringing to life some of Henry's thought, Thornbury hopes with this book to promote some of the strengths of our recent past. In other words, Thornbury does not aim simply to provide an evenhanded summary and evaluation of Henry the theologian, but by expounding what one might call the essential Henry to bring robust theology and passionate renewal to a movement that sometimes feels as if it has slipped past its "sell by" date.

After an opening chapter in which he lays out "The Lost World of Classic Evangelicalism," in five further chapters Thornbury successively attempts to show, from Henry, why "Epistemology Matters," "Theology Matters," "Inerrancy Matters," "Culture Matters," and (in a brief concluding chapter) "Evangelicalism Matters." The volume concludes with a selected bibliography of works by Carl F. H. Henry.

Thornbury draws attention to the fact that, although he refers to a number of Henry's works (but not to any archival material), in this book he primarily interacts with only three of them: volumes 2 and 4 of *God, Revelation and Authority*, and *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Funda-*

mentalism. These focus on the themes he chooses to address. Thornbury convincingly argues that Henry should be seen as an heir of "Reformation epistemology"—that is, a theologian in the heritage of the Reformation who begins with God and God's self-disclosure as the theologian confronts the challenges of modernity. The charge that Henry is himself hopelessly ensnared in the modernity he confronts, frequently leveled against Henry, Thornbury refutes in some detail. McGrath, for example, criticizes Henry's view of revelation, dismissing it on the ground that it is "purely propositional," reduced to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. But many of Henry's critics, including McGrath, have apparently proceeded by isolating a few passages that could be read to support their criticisms, without reading enough Henry enough to understand him or be fair to him. Thornbury wants to resuscitate the priority of God-revealed, cognitive, propositional theology, and he is almost as suspicious of evangelical postfoundational narrative theology as he is of the postliberal work of the Yale school. In my view, Thornbury occasionally resorts to antithetical thinking when a bit more nuance is called for. Nevertheless he is right to argue: "In some ways, one might say that Henry poses the following fundamental questions to evangelicals today: Is the truth the truth because God wills it to be the case? Is God a Deity who speaks in intelligible sentences and paragraphs? If the answer to those two questions is affirmative, then no other church tradition offers a better theological method than Protestant evangelicalism—a movement that at its origin radically committed itself to theological conclusions explicated in the Word of God alone" (57).

Thornbury is equally trenchant when he explains why theology matters and why inerrancy matters. On the latter, he demonstrates how much Henry interacts with Gadamer, Dilthey, and Heidegger and the turn to the "subject" in hermeneutics. While reading Thornbury's book, I was simultaneously reading Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*.[1] Ferry is a French philosopher whose survey of the Western philosophical tradition leads him to focus on some of the same figures as Henry. Both Henry and Ferry see Heidegger to be one of the crucial figures of the twentieth century. Ferry, however, holds that Heidegger's contribution brilliantly advanced the discussion toward (what is now called) postfoundationalism, making him one of Ferry's heroes; Henry sees Heidegger as a harbinger of the culture-wide loss of confidence in truth that exists as truth outside the human interpreter's act of interpretation. Simultaneously reading Henry on Heidegger and Ferry on Heidegger is a salutary exercise.

In his chapter on why culture matters, Thornbury briefly expounds Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*. Henry's book, of course, focuses on how evangelicals respond, or ought to respond, to social needs—a debate that has again risen to the fore. Thornbury, however, soon turns to the wider issue of how moral issues can be articulated in a culture that is increasingly secular—and here he engages in a fair bit of debate over natural law theories. He does not always make clear that they are natural law *theories* (plural): the approach to natural law espoused by Princeton scholar Robert P. George, with which Thornbury is sympathetic, does not appeal to most Thomists. The significant point to observe, however, is that in this chapter Thornbury, as he himself acknowledges, goes a long way beyond expounding Henry's thought. Henry becomes little more than the diving board off which he propels himself into the pool of cultural discussion that is Thornbury's real agenda. Some readers will inevitably feel that the book is pulling in two quite different (or, at least, not more than overlapping) directions.

What shall we make of this book? Certainly Carl Henry deserves a sympathetic and informed assessment at the hand of a new generation of scholars who have dismissed him too quickly and often unfairly. Thornbury's book contributes to that end, and so it has done something worthwhile. One could responsibly argue that Henry

paints with a large brush, but in his sweeping canvases he sees the opportunities and dangers developing in Western thought in the twentieth century and beyond more piercingly than most leaders of his generation. If he does not always handle the minutiae of technical argument with the nuance that today's critics prefer, they nevertheless have much to learn from this theologian-journalist who was simultaneously educator, scholar, philosopher, evangelist, fearless lover of men and women everywhere—a Christian who tried to understand his own times even while his vision was drawn to the future, a Christian who loved to encourage the younger generation swelling the ranks behind him, a Christian who was much more concerned for the fame of his Master than for his own.

D. A. Carson
Research Professor of New Testament
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: 3 Views of Romans 7, ed. Terry L. Wilder. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011, x+213 pp., $24.99 paper.

This volume is one in a series of books (*Perspectives on…*) that compares alternative views on various issues. The series is analogous, therefore, to InterVarsity's *Views* series, which does a similar thing. Overall, the volume is very successful, on several scores. Each author rightly recognizes the importance of relating Romans 7 to the remainder of Romans, though each does so somewhat differently. Each interacts irenically *with* the others; each clearly distinguishes his view from that *of* the others. Each has some distinctive emphases that do more than merely re-state traditional arguments, such as, e.g., Stephen Chester's interesting grounding of the discussion in the context of Augustine and Wesley, or Grant Osborne's nuanced view that Paul describes Christian existence, but not "the normal Christian life" (30), or Mark Seifrid's rigorous account of how Romans 7 relates to what Paul says about *nomos* elsewhere in Romans.

Grant R. Osborne promotes the view that Paul describes unregenerate experience in verses 1-13, and regenerate experience in the "struggle" of 14-25. Stephen J. Chester promotes the "retrospective" view that Paul describes his own past in light of his present believing experience. Mark A. Seifrid promotes the view that Romans 7 describes all humans (including, but not especially, Paul) confronted by law. Each author writes clearly and compellingly, while acknowledging that no view is without its challenges. Each of the chapters, and the interesting pastoral chapter by Chad O. Brand, is very well written, and the four authors cannot be faulted, but rather thanked. Taken as a whole, however, the volume has several liabilities.

First, the somewhat-curious title (*Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin*) appears to beg two questions: Whether the passage is about a "struggle" (two of the interpreters regard it as about defeat—not struggle) and whether the issue is "sin" or "law," since *nomos* appears 23 times in the chapter, whereas *hamartia* appears only 15 times (and *hamartanō* not at all). So the title begs at least two questions that the authors themselves debate, so perhaps the volume would have been more neutrally entitled *Perspectives on Romans 7*.

A second, and more substantive, imperfection in the volume is this: None of the three holds the redemptive-historical view of Chrysostom, Bornkamm, Schleier, Achtemeier, Moo, Johnson (et al.), that the "I" is Israel-at-Sinai (and therefore Paul also, insofar as he was a part of that covenant administration himself at one time), though Osborne mentions it as a fourth view in his summary (12-13). Many of us regard that view as solving the "entirely rhetorical" view of Kümmel et al., and as giving full weight to *nomos* as Israel's distinctive heritage (Rom 2 must control/influence later uses of *nomos*, and there Paul expressly distinguishes those who sin "under the law" from those who sin "without the law.") The volume would have been more thorough if the editor had included some representative of this fourth view,

such as Dennis Johnson's essay in the festschrift for Richard B. Gaffin.[2] In a book that acknowledges the existence of four views but only includes representatives of three, something is missing.

Third, with the possible exception of Seifrid, 7:1-5 is not given enough hermeneutical weight by the essays in this volume. There, Paul steps aside rhetorically from the rest of the letter written to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles to say "I am speaking to those who know the law."[3] Any attempt to universalize Romans 7 (Osborne's all believers, Chester's all unbelievers, Seifrid's all humans before the law) fails to appreciate that here, as at Romans 2 and Romans 9:4, *nomos* is Israel's distinctive reality, gift, curse, covenant, or experience.[4] Similarly, 7:1-5 establishes the redemptive-historical (I would prefer to say "covenant-historical") eras of belonging-to-the-law and having-died-to-the-law, two eras that are separated by the death of Christ. Any discussion Paul undertakes regarding *nomos* after verse five is a discussion that has already said that those who belong to Christ have died to the law; therefore whatever he says about *nomos* from then on probably discusses what *nomos* did to or for Israel. People who belong to Christ do not struggle with things they have already died to.

For these three reasons, then, the book slightly fails to introduce its readership to perspectives on Romans 7. A newcomer, approaching the question for the first time, would have only Osborne's brief summary (12-13) to alert that there is another, fourth view on the matter. Such a newcomer might arrive at a tentative decision to embrace one of the three views here without knowing that another exists. The book contains an excellent articulation of three of the four known views, and judicious and irenic criticism of each also. But it surely would have been strengthened by the fourth view, especially since that view appears to be gaining significant traction, and may even be the majority opinion of post-Kümmel scholarship.

An additional note comparing the verb-tenses of verses 1-13 compared to 14-25 is in order. Most interpreters have acknowledged that the reasoning of Romans 7 shifts between verses 13 and 14 (give or take a verse), and that the aorist is more prevalent in the first and the present is more prevalent in the second. However, while I concede that a rhetorical shift occurs here, it is far too simplistic to say that the first deals with "the past" and the second with "the present" on the basis of the verbs employed. As the chart below indicates, there is some shift in verb tense between the first thirteen verses and the last eleven. But the shift is not absolute, nor as thorough as people often suggest. While there are no aorists in the second section, of the twenty-six in the first section, only ten are indicatives; the others sixteen probably have only aspect and no time. Also, there are eleven present tense verbs in the first section, so the first section is actually more varied than is often suggested: Of its forty-eight verbs, twenty-two are *not* aorists. The second section, on the other hand, is dominated by the present tense; of its forty verbs, only four are not presents. So the aorist predominates (but barely, twenty-six to twenty-two) in the first section and the present profoundly predominates in the second.

Tense	**Total**	**Vv. 1-13**	**Vv. 14-25**
Present	47	11	36
Aorist	26	26	0
Perfect	5	2	3
Imperfect	5	5	0
Future	4	3	1
Pluperfect	1	1	0
All	88	48	40

Thus the difference is not nearly as stark, nor as interpretively suggestive, as is sometimes suggested.

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Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary. By C. L. Seow. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, 999 pp., $95.00.

C. L. Seow is Henry Snyder Gehman Professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is probably most widely known for his beginning Hebrew textbook (*A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* from Abingdon Press) and his commentary on Ecclesiastes in the Yale Anchor Bible. *Job 1–21* is the inaugural volume in a new commentary series from Eerdmans called "Illuminations." Professor Seow is the general editor for the series, and it promises to be a massive project, covering the canonical books of the Bible as well as the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books.

The commentary is lengthy—999 pages including the introduction, Job 1–21, and the indexes. The introduction, at 248 pages, deals with what one would expect: text and versions, language, structure, genre, provenance, theories concerning redaction history, rhetoric, and message. But over half of the introduction (110-248) concerns what Seow calls the "History of Consequences." This is essentially what most would call the "history of interpretation," but it has been expanded to include not only prior exposition of Job but also the philosophical and artistic impact of the book. Called by some "reception history," this is a new approach to biblical analysis. Seow thus describes how literature, music, and the visual arts through the centuries have represented Job. The history of interpretation is something of a niche interest in biblical studies, and I fear that this material will appeal to only a marginal group of readers. Nevertheless, the depth of research here is nothing short of staggering. Where else could one learn that Odo of Cluny (ca. 878-942) appealed to Job 39:10 in his discussion of the role of the military in Christian society (203-204) or find a catalogue of sixteenth-century musical compositions that made use of Job (222)? We should not be dismissive of Seow's efforts. For students of Job, it is surely worthwhile to learn that the book played a significant role in eighteenth and nineteenth-century debates over theodicy, as reflected in the works of Leibniz, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard (225).

In the more traditional areas of introduction, Seow is thorough and judicious. His analysis of the text and language of Job—the latter being a major problem with this book—carefully explains the data and describes its significance (1-26). For example, the orthography of Job is unusually conservative, spelling many words without the *matres lectionis*. The evidence of a Qumran fragment of Job, 4QpalaeoJob^{c}, and of the variant manuscripts and the versions, suggests to Seow that the *matres* within the Masoretic Text represent part of the history of the interpretation of the text. This evidence is also significant for textual criticism in Job (17-20). In another area, I found his discussion of the integrity of the book to be helpful (26-39).

On various points, as is inevitable, readers may quibble with Seow's interpretations. He dates the book to the early fifth century, suggesting, for example, that the Chaldean raiders who afflicted Job may reflect conditions around that time. He argues that the raid looks like a military operation (1:17), that Chaldeans whom Nabonidus brought to the area may have carried out raiding expeditions in Arabia and Edom, and that the author of Job, writing some decades later, may reflect the memory of this (39-46). Against this, Chaldeans are known to have lived in southern Babylonia from the ninth century. Job 1:19 does not require a sophisticated military operation, and indeed desert pirates probably did not function as a disorganized mob. One may also doubt whether imperial troops under Nabonidus carried out this kind of brigandage. In favor of Seow's position, Job 1:15 mentions the Sabeans, and only Nabonidus is known to have spent time in Arabia. But the text does not suggest that the Chaldeans and Sabeans were associated with each other. Seow has other arguments in favor of his dating of the book, some of them quite intriguing. Whether the reader agrees with him or not, none can deny that his argument is carefully researched and presented.

On a more substantive note, I must say that I disagree almost entirely with Seow's interpretations of the speeches of Elihu and of God (31-39, 97-104). But this requires far more discussion than a book

review can accommodate, and it is at any rate unfair to engage him fully on this matter before he has released his commentary on Job 22–42.

The commentary on Job 1–21 works through each chapter of Job individually. After an original translation of a chapter, Seow provides three areas of discussion: "Interpretation," "Retrospect," and "Commentary," and each chapter has a separate bibliography. The translation has no notes attached to it (in contrast to Hermeneia or the Word Biblical Commentary), and the look and feel is similar to the Anchor Bible. Unlike a number of recent commentaries, he does not include separate discussions on the form or structure of each text.

The "Interpretation" section discusses the overall meaning of the chapter and interacts with scholarship on broader issues concerning the function and significance of the text. For example, in the Interpretation for Job 4, Seow gives Eliphaz a more sympathetic reading than one normally sees, and he spends a fair amount of space countering those who interpret Eliphaz as a brittle conservative. Instead, he asserts that Eliphaz reasonably follows the teachings of traditional wisdom and to some extent takes on the mantle of a prophet (381-390). Each "Interpretation" section also includes a small sidebar, "History of Consequences," that summarizes responses to the chapter, especially focusing on the early rabbis and Christian teachers. Thus, the "History of Consequences" for Job 9 notes that Jewish interpreters accused Job of blasphemy, and that they did so as a polemic against Christians, for whom Job was a type of Christ. Against this, Ambrose of Milan argued that Job 9:5 signifies the end of the Old Testament (542).

The "Retrospect" section is generally quite short. It summarizes Seow's view of the chapter under discussion and sometimes adds a few observations gleaned from the history of interpretation. To some extent, this section fulfills the role of a section on "message" or "theology" that one sees in other commentaries.

The "Commentary" section is generally quite lengthy, and it works through the chapter discussing individual words and phrases from the translation. It is to this section that Seow relegates all of his analysis of textual, lexical, and grammatical issues. He discusses at great length the Hebrew text (and often the versions as well). Again like the Anchor Bible, he uses transliteration throughout—there is not a Hebrew or Greek letter to be found. Some will find this inconvenient, since those who do not routinely work with Hebrew in transliteration must do a mental conversion back to Hebrew characters. Indeed, the reader must be aware that a given transliteration may not be Hebrew at all. This problem is most severe where he is discussing a textual or lexical problem and cites data from multiple languages (Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Akkadian, Arabic, etc.), all in transliteration. On the whole, however, it is not difficult to follow. To give a brief example in full, the Commentary on 19:3 includes the following entry on 811 (the text in bold italics is from Seow's translation of the verse):

"***humiliate me.*** The Hiph. of *klm* is "to shame, humiliate, insult," though the humiliation here is by means of accusations, as in 1 Sam 25:7, Ps 44:10 (Eng 9), and Ruth 2:15 (cf. Klopfenstein 1972, 137-38)."

Seow's comments on a given word are phrase are generally much longer than the above. At times the discussion is complex, with an enormous number of citations of Hebrew and other languages. This material, in contrast to the "Interpretation" section, is intended for reference purposes and not casual reading. Throughout the "Commentary" section, Seow shows himself to have an exceptional mastery of the data in both the primary and secondary sources. He is a seasoned and careful scholar.

Although I have pointed out a few areas of disagreement, I happily confess that this commentary is a remarkable achievement. For the serious student of Job, it is indispensable.

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Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture. By David VanDrunen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010, 208 pp., $16.99 paper.

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought. By David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010, 466 pp., $30.00 paper.

Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective. Ed. Ryan C. McIlhenny. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012, 284 pp., $24.99 paper.

As a community called to be 'in the world but not of it' (John 17:14-16), disciples of Christ unavoidably wrestle to understand the relationship between Christianity and the broader culture. In his book *Christ and Culture* (1951), H. Reinhold Niebuhr famously categorized five different ways that Christians throughout history have interacted with culture. Within Reformed circles, this same discussion is often framed as a debate between a "two kingdoms" view and a "one kingdom" or neo-Calvinist view. Neo-Calvinists tend to emphasize more strongly the Christian responsibility to influence and even transform society by the living out of an explicitly biblical worldview in all areas of life, including education, politics, and vocation. This view generally corresponds to Niebuhr's category of "Christ transforming culture." The two kingdoms view, by contrast, corresponds more to Niebuhr's category of "Christ and culture in paradox," affirming the God-given responsibility of Christians to participate faithfully in society even while rejecting an unequivocal Christian mandate to transform society or "Christianize" all spheres of life.

This review examines two recent books from one prominent voice on the two kingdoms side of the debate, David VanDrunen, professor of systematic theology and Christian ethics as Westminster Seminary California. This review will also consider a third book, a collection of eleven essays in response to the two kingdoms position, edited by Ryan C. McIlhenny and including authors such as Cornel Venema and Nelson Kloosterman. This review will survey the basic argument of these three books as well as identify points of contention between the two camps, seeking to determine which areas of disagreement are less significant and which areas represent the more fundamental division between the two sides.

VanDrunen's basic argument in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* is that scripture reveals God as ruling all creation as king, but that his rule is administered by means of two distinct covenants that establish two different kingdoms. The members of one kingdom consist of all humanity—both believers and unbelievers—enjoying the benefits of God's gracious rule expressed in general providence and preservation, temporal blessings shared by all people commonly. This kingdom is a common-grace kingdom administered through the Noahic covenant established by God with all humanity, as revealed in Genesis 9. God governs this common grace kingdom by means of the natural law and general revelation that is written on every human heart by virtue of their creation in the image of God, a law which, though suppressed by sinful humanity to varying degrees, is nonetheless the common point of moral reference between all people, whether believers or unbelievers, living together within broader society.

According to VanDrunen, the members of the second kingdom consist only of true believers who are in Christ, having experienced new birth by the Holy Spirit, enjoying the benefits of God's gracious rule expressed in salvation and in the granting of eternal blessing and life. Believers are therefore members of both of God's kingdoms simultaneously. This second kingdom is a special-grace kingdom administered at one time in history through the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, but now administered solely through the new covenant established by God through Christ with his church, a covenant which fulfills the earlier spe-

cial-grace covenants. God governs this kingdom by means of the special revelation of scripture, which, though authoritative for all people, is not accepted as authoritative by non-Christians and therefore can only function as the common point of moral reference and doctrinal truth within the special grace kingdom of professed believers rather than within the common grace kingdom in which believers and unbelievers are mixed.

Living in God's Two Kingdoms is primarily a work of biblical theology, written at a popular level, aiming to establish the two-kingdoms argument, along with its implications for the Christian life in areas such as education, vocation, and politics. By contrast, in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, VanDrunen attempts a work of historical theology, written at a more academic level, with the goal of demonstrating that from Calvin to Kuyper, Reformed theology consistently and broadly "affirmed doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms and treated them as foundational concepts for their social thought" (1). VanDrunen acknowledges variations among Reformed thinkers on these doctrines during the first 400 years after the Reformation, but nonetheless identifies a common core of convictions shared by the majority of theologians, including Calvin, writers of early Reformed resistance theory like Knox and Beza, Reformed scholastics like Althusius, Rutherford, and Turretin, colonials like Cotton and Witherspoon, Americans like Hodge and Thornwell, and finally, Kuyper. According to VanDrunen, one key element in this shared two-kingdoms structure was an understanding of "the two mediatorships of the Son of God, over creation and redemption respectively" (76). This doctrine taught that the Son of God "rules the one kingdom as eternal God, as the agent of creation and providence, and over all creatures. Christ rules the other kingdom as the incarnate God-man, as the agent of redemption, and over the church" (177). An implication of this view is that broader human society in this age is rooted in creation, expressing God's preserving grace in a fallen world, but that civil society, unlike the church, is a non-redemptive social order.

After surveying the development and maintenance of the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine in the first 400 years of the Reformation era, VanDrunen then posits that during the twentieth century Reformed theology mostly rejected this traditional two kingdoms doctrine and embraced a view of Christianity and culture that might be described as a one kingdom view. According to VanDrunen, key figures in this rejection included Barth and early neo-Calvinists like Dooyeweerd. Important to note is that although VanDrunen believes he is accurately tracing the history of the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine, he does not see himself as merely siding with the earlier Reformed theologians over the later. Instead, the historical-theological argument of *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* is ultimately in service of the biblical-theological argument of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*. VanDrunen describes his larger project as "not to defend everything that has ever gone by the name 'two kingdoms,' but to expound a two-kingdoms approach that is thoroughly grounded in the story of scripture and biblical doctrine" (*Living in*, 14).

Two years after VanDrunen published these books, a group of theologians responded to his two-kingdoms arguments in *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, a book representing the neo-Calvinist approach. *Kingdoms Apart* is not merely a response to VanDrunen, though all eleven essays interact with him (in particular, his two books reviewed here) and only one of the essays also significantly references additional advocates of the two kingdoms view. Yet, the eleven essays also fall short of a point-by-point response to VanDrunen's arguments, with only minimal engagement with either the exegetical claims of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* or the historical claims of *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*. The most significant historical counterarguments to VanDrunen occur in essays by Cor-

nel Venema and Gene Haas offering an alternative understanding of Calvin's views of natural law and the two kingdoms, both which argue that Calvin does not have two completely separate realms in mind when he speaks of the two kingdoms and that though Calvin affirms the existence and usefulness of natural law, he also maintains its insufficiency apart from scripture.

Ryan C. McIlhenny begins the collection with an introductory essay in which he provides a basic definition of neo-Calvinism. According to McIlhenny, neo-Calvinism's central axiom is the sovereignty of God over all creation, expressed practically in four key principles: the cultural mandate, sphere sovereignty, the antithesis, and common grace. The cultural mandate of Genesis 1 is God's original commission for humanity to be agents of God's sovereignty by the ongoing cultivation of all aspects of creation. While the cultural mandate calls humanity to express God's sovereignty comprehensively, sphere sovereignty qualifies the universality of the cultural mandate with a recognition that God has ordained distinct but complementary and overlapping spheres of cultural authority, such as the family, the church, the state, and other cultural institutions, each intended to operate within God-ordained limits. The antithesis describes the reality that all humanity is divided into two distinct groups—the regenerate and the unregenerate—such that on ultimate issues of belief, there is no commonality between the two groups. The antithesis is then qualified by common grace which recognizes that, in spite of the fundamental antithesis, the two groups also share some universal common ground as humans made in the image of God, including partial agreement in some areas of truth and morality.

The ten subsequent essays explore various additional aspects of the neo-Calvinist position, some essays more historically oriented, others more strictly theological in orientation. While the essays do not agree on every point (cautioning us against interpreting neo-Calvinism as a monolithic position), numerous points of commonality among the writers emerge. Perhaps the most oft-repeated characterization of neo-Calvinism among the authors is its self-identity as the expression of a fully-integrated worldview which requires Christians to take responsibility for cultural engagement and participation in a distinctly Christian way. In contrast, the authors understand the two kingdoms conception as inherently dualistic, restricting the expression of the biblical worldview to the sphere of the institutional church. Cornel Venema describes VanDrunen as teaching that "all human life and conduct" is divided into "two hermetically separated domains or realms" (17). The implication is that Christians who participate in broader society should not use the Bible as their norm of personal conduct since obligation to biblical commands only relates to the church realm (32). Timothy R. Scheuers identifies VanDrunen as teaching that Christians should be active in society but in doing so they should "abandon their unique, scripturally informed perspective," participating "only as a respectable citizen, not as a Christian" (140, 143). Such a view calls for Christians to "live a compartmentalized life," in contrast to neo-Calvinism's emphasis on the "comprehensive lordship of Jesus Christ" (127). Therefore, neo-Calvinism integrates worldview and "world activity," whereas VanDrunen is seen to sever this relationship (128). McIlhenny believes VanDrunen's position makes it difficult to justify the existence and unique mission of Christian colleges and other bodies of Christian learning outside the institutional church (268). Nelson Kloosterman agrees, seeing the two kingdoms paradigm as incompatible with the vital vision for Christian education which has characterized the Reformed tradition during the last one hundred years (81).

Related to the charge of dualism is Kloosterman's critique of VanDrunen's description of the "dual mediatorship" of Christ, which Kloosterman sees as providing the "doctrinal underpinning of Two Kingdoms" (87). As noted earlier, VanDrunen argues that this concept is a long-

standing Reformed doctrine which sees Christ as both the providential ruler over all creation and the redemptive ruler over the church, even while distinguishing these two mediatorships. Kloosterman affirms the distinct creational and redemptive roles of Christ but believes the two-kingdoms approach invalidly separates and isolates the two roles without also integrating them as "the differentiated-yet-unified work of Christ" (87). In maintaining both integration and distinction, Kloosterman argues that a neo-Calvinist view "presents a wholesome biblical alternative to Two Kingdoms Christology" (88).

Another area of broad consensus among the authors in *Kingdoms Apart* concerns natural law within the neo-Calvinist scheme. In agreement with VanDrunen, neo-Calvinism affirms the existence of a natural law on the ground that "all humans are image-bearers [with] the ability to grasp creational truths" and express "a universal moral sense" (xxxiii). But unlike neo-Calvinism, VanDrunen is perceived only adequately to present a *positive* vision of natural law, "dismiss[ing] … Calvin's negative assessment" (62). In the words of Scheuers, the two kingdoms perspective makes "natural law and Scripture two separate, non-overlapping, independent sources of wisdom and knowledge," with natural law functioning as "a wholly sufficient guide for life in God's Kingdom" (134, 135). According to Kloosterman, two kingdoms advocates "divorc[e] the content of natural law … from the person and work of Jesus Christ" (92). In contrast, neo-Calvinism holds to a "much closer relation between the natural and special revelation of God," including giving "a priority to special revelation as a more clear and full disclosure of God's will as Creator and Redeemer for human conduct in every area of life" (18, 19). Because of natural law's sin-induced "insufficiency" for "obtaining a full apprehension of God's will for human conduct," Venema argues that neo-Calvinists—like Calvin but unlike VanDrunen—give "an indispensable and foundational role to special revelation in the discernment of God's moral will for human conduct in all areas of human society and culture," not just within the institutional church (22).

Neo-Calvinists see themselves not only as the rightful heirs of Calvin but also as those accurately maintaining the "two cities" paradigm of Augustine. The neo-Calvinist emphasis on the radical antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate corresponds to Augustine's two cities, the city of God and the city of man (or Satan). Branson Parler posits that "VanDrunen sees Augustine's thought as similar to the Two Kingdoms perspective" (185). But Parler goes on to argue that Augustine and VanDrunen cannot be reconciled (195). Interestingly, Parler also argues that Augustine and Kuyper cannot be reconciled either, because like VanDrunen, Kuyper "suppose[s] that humans can be disordered with respect to humanity's ultimate end but still be properly ordered toward penultimate ends" (174). Yet, in McIlhenny's telling, Kuyper's distinction between mankind's ultimate and penultimate ends seems to correspond generally to his distinction between the antithesis and common grace, respectively (xxxv). Since McIlhenny sees Kuyper as the founder of neo-Calvinism and identifies Kuyper's pairing of antithesis with common grace as two of the fundamental tenets of neo-Calvinism, a tension is introduced within *Kingdoms Apart*. On one hand, Kuyper is the exemplar of the neo-Calvinist alternative to the two kingdoms, and on the other hand, Kuyper, like VanDrunen, is critiqued for promoting "a near-dualistic view of common and special grace" (180) and is acknowledged to have "developed a doctrine of the Two Kingdoms—or more, precisely, the twofold kingship of the Son of God" (164), a view which sounds strangely similar to the two kingdoms view of VanDrunen.

In *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, VanDrunen provides a plausible resolution to this tension, arguing that Kuyper fits "squarely and comfortably in the Reformed natural law and two-kingdoms traditions" in that he emphasizes the antithesis between the two groups of humanity on

matters of ultimate and eternal concern while highlighting the common grace shared by all humanity on matters of penultimate or temporal concern (314). Contrary to the claim of *Kingdoms Apart*, VanDrunen also clarifies that the two-kingdoms paradigm is *not* the same concept as Augustine's two cities, though the two ideas are compatible (371). VanDrunen argues that Calvin also made this distinction between two cities and two kingdoms, such that the two-kingdoms paradigm addresses the question of how God rules the world rather than the question of man's ultimate orientation toward God as addressed by Augustine's antithesis. "Calvin perceived a difference between these kingdoms but not a fundamental antithesis. The antithesis lay elsewhere" (71). Like Augustine and Calvin, VanDrunen *does* believe that "a fundamental antithesis exists between believer and unbeliever in their basic perspective and attitude toward God, morality, and eternity" but he also believes that "alongside this antithesis God … ordained an element of commonality in the world" (*Living*, 29). Instead of rejecting or obscuring Augustine's two-cities antithesis, VanDrunen, like Kuyper, pairs the antithesis with common grace. In fact, according to VanDrunen, "in this dual reality of antithesis and commonality lies the origin of the two kingdoms," allowing affirmation of the antithesis of Augustine in reference to a Christian's membership in the eternal kingdom while simultaneously affirming the common grace of Kuyper in reference to a Christian's membership in the temporal, civil kingdom (ibid.). Even in clarifying the compatibility of antithesis in ultimate matters and commonality in penultimate mattes, VanDrunen nonetheless leaves the reader somewhat unsatisfied in regard to just how one goes about determining which matters are ultimate and which matters are penultimate and whether this distinction can always be clearly or simply made.

Kingdoms Apart not only overstates the incompatibility of VanDrunen and Augustine, it also overstates the claims that VanDrunen advocates the sufficiency of natural law apart from Scripture and promotes a radically dualistic vision of the Christian life in which Christians participating in broader society should forego their Christian identity and belief system. Concerning natural law, in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, VanDrunen fully embraces both Calvin's positive *and* negative assessments of natural law, along with "the consequent necessity of supernatural revelation" (105). Concerning radical dualism, in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, VanDrunen repeatedly specifies that the distinction between the two kingdoms is *not* a complete division between the two realms, and therefore Christians should "express their Christian faith through [cultural tasks]" (13), seeking to "live out the implications of their faith in their daily vocations" (14-15). VanDrunen also believes that Scripture addresses matters such as education, work, and politics and "thus provides Christians with a proper perspective on them and clear boundaries for participating in them" (31). In contrast to the radical dualism of which he is accused, VanDrunen states unequivocally, "Christians are Christians seven days a week, in whatever place or activity they find themselves, and thus they must always strive to live consistently with their profession of Christ" (162). Therefore, both VanDrunen and neo-Calvinists affirm a fundamental unity between a Christian's participation in different spheres of life. The difference between the two camps concerns VanDrunen's greater emphasis on identifying distinctions within the unity—careful, scripturally warranted distinctions that are not equivalent to dualistic divisions as "dualism-phobia must not override our ability to make clear and necessary distinctions" (26). This same difference is evident when examining Kloosterman's charge that VanDrunen radically separates the work of the Son of God in creation and the work of the incarnate Son in redemption. Throughout *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, VanDrunen argues for a historically Reformed distinction between the two mediatorships of the Son without an extreme separation or a denial of their "higher unity" (301). VanDrunen and neo-Calvinists agree that the two mediatorial works of Christ are fundamentally integrated, differing only on how properly to understand and state the

accompanying distinctions between these two roles.

While charging VanDrunen with radical dualism is unwarranted, critics are right to question the coherence of VanDrunen's presentation of the individual Christian's integration of life in the two kingdoms. Apart from theological education in the local church and pastoral training in institutions that directly serve the local church, VanDrunen places the realm of education fully in the common grace kingdom shared by believers and unbelievers. As VanDrunen explains in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, in the common kingdom, he *does* affirm the validity and importance of distinctly "Christian" education (*Living in*, 184-186), even while simultaneously calling it into question since he see education as largely focused on fields of study which are not distinctively Christian and whose "moral requirements … [and] standards of excellence … are the same for believers and unbelievers" (168). While VanDrunen does not condemn "Christian" schools, he nonetheless states that Christians should "not seek a uniquely Christian way to perform … and order [the activities and affairs of the common kingdom, affairs such as education]" (170). VanDrunen undergirds this claim by making a distinction between the subjective motivations, presuppositions, and worldview of believers and the objective standards of evaluation believers follow when participating in common cultural activities like education, objective standards he sees as shared by all people (167-168). But, as VanDrunen himself acknowledges, worldview presuppositions often affect the standards of evaluation adopted within the world of education (179). So, like VanDrunen's distinction between the ultimate and the penultimate, drawing a clear line of distinction between subjective presuppositions and objective standards in the task of education is often difficult to accomplish—as VanDrunen again acknowledges (175). VanDrunen also recognizes that presuppositions in education have more influence in some disciplines compared to others, suggesting that the effects of differing presuppositions "might be felt more intensely in the humanities, which deal more directly and regularly with the evaluation of human conduct and the interpretation of life's meaning than do, for instance, the natural sciences" (181-182). Such acknowledgements seem to suggest that perhaps VanDrunen has drawn his line of distinction between the two realms too precisely, particularly in reference to spheres of activity like education. Contrary to VanDrunen, because of the impact of worldview presuppositions within many of the academic disciplines which deal more directly with metaphysical questions of inquiry and not merely physical ones, Christians should embrace with less hesitancy than VanDrunen the idea of distinctly "Christian" education beyond the confines of the local church. VanDrunen makes a similar mistake in also placing the institution of the family fully in the common grace realm, inadequately recognizing the impact of the biblical worldview on the more "objective" aspects of how Christians live as families, such as "child-rearing methods" (155). VanDrunen's treatment of areas such as education and family are precisely the areas which his critics highlight in their disagreement, demonstrating that some of the disagreement is undoubtedly due to VanDrunen's lack of both clarity and convincing coherence.

Some of VanDrunen's differences with neo-Calvinists as surveyed up to this point have proven to be less significant than may have first appeared. A more substantial difference involves the question of the ongoing validity of the mandate given to Adam in Genesis 1-2. As one of the authors of *Kingdoms Apart* recognizes, "How one interprets the opening chapters of Genesis and their place in the larger canon goes far in determining an approach to the issues of natural law and the Two Kingdoms" (228). Concerning Adam's mandate, neo-Calvinists generally believe that because of Christ's accomplished work of redemption, Christians in this age now resume Adam's work, whereas VanDrunen holds that "the Lord Jesus Christ … has completed Adam's original task once and for all" (*Living*, 15). Such statements lead neo-Calvinists like McIlhenny to conclude that for VanDrunen "the cultural mandate is no longer relevant for Christians today" (xxii), while Scheuers is also convinced that VanDrunen believes "no legitimate cultural man-

date remains" (129, n. 9). Within the same book, Parler comes to the opposite conclusion, portraying VanDrunen as believing that humanity in this age is "well on the way" to "attain[ing] perfect obedience to the original creation mandate" (179). The best explanation for these contrary readings is VanDrunen's own recognition of both continuity and discontinuity between Adam's mandate in Genesis 1-2 and Noah's mandate in Genesis 9, distinguishing between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace, respectively. While sinful humanity cannot take up Adam's role in the covenant of works (discontinuity), in the Noahic covenant, mankind *is* called to "obey the cultural mandate as given in modified form" (continuity) (*Living*, 164). This revised cultural mandate, rather than being a part of the Adamic creation covenant (covenant of works), is the mandate of the Noahic *fallen* creation covenant (a covenant of grace).

In making this distinction, VanDrunen assumes the full validity of the traditional Reformed concept of a covenant of works, including the idea of a probationary period of testing for Adam in which he would work to earn his salvation by perfect obedience, after successful completion of which he would enter into eternal life in a new heavens and new earth (*Living*, 43). Adam failed to achieve the perfect obedience required by that covenant, and his descendants were thereafter also unable to provide such perfect obedience. But Christ, the last Adam, did provide the perfect obedience required and fulfilled the covenant of works, receiving the reward of eternal life, a reward also given to those "in Christ" by grace through faith. VanDrunen then concludes that to advocate for Christians to take up Adam's cultural mandate (as neo-Calvinists do) is to pervert the doctrine of justification by grace through faith by implying that our cultural tasks in some way "contribute to atoning for sin," a version of works-righteousness (*Living*, 51). But this seems an unnecessary conclusion to make about neo-Calvinists, especially since none of the authors in *Kingdoms Apart* come close to advocating such a view. VanDrunen's conclusion assumes the full validity of the covenant of works concept, but if one rejects the concept or perhaps rejects part of it (such as rejecting the idea of a probationary period for Adam even while accepting humanity's inability to take up Adam's task), then the cultural mandate is not necessarily connected to the doctrine of justification in the way which VanDrunen proposes. As well, since VanDrunen himself maintains the ongoing validity of the cultural mandate in its revised, Noahic form, the difference between the two camps seems less serious than a fundamental disagreement over the doctrine of justification.

While VanDrunen does believe that the Noahic revised cultural mandate remains in force, he also believes the Noahic covenant should be understood as a common-grace covenant in contrast to the special-grace covenant inaugurated with Abraham, a theological position VanDrunen shares with his former professor, Meredith Kline, but also with others within the Reformed tradition (*Natural Law*, 413). Since VanDrunen understands humanity's mandate as the Noahic mandate and not the Adamic mandate, and since the Noahic covenant is preservative, expressing common grace for all creation, unlike the Abrahamic covenant of redemption and special grace for a particular people, therefore the revised cultural mandate of the Noahic covenant aims for preservation rather than redemption and is designed to extend preserving grace to all people but not saving grace. This highlights a key difference between VanDrunen and neo-Calvinists since neo-Calvinists understand the cultural work of Christians also to be redemptive work. VanDrunen, in contrast, believes a Christian's cultural work is important but not redemptive. As well, though neo-Calvinists share with VanDrunen an embrace of both antithesis and commonality, only VanDrunen also grounds antithesis (Abrahamic special-grace kingdom) and commonality (Noahic common-grace kingdom) in these two covenants.

Related to the distinction between redemptive versus merely preservative cultural work are the differing ways in which VanDrunen and neo-Calvinists understand the relationship between the

inauguration and the consummation of the new covenant. VanDrunen sees the inauguration of the new covenant to be already realized in the church but not yet realized in all culture and creation, with the in-breaking of the kingdom of God begun solely in the church. In his view, the redemption of broader culture and the natural world will *only* commence at Christ's return, Christians thereby not tasked to *redeem* culture and nature in this age. In contrast, neo-Calvinists generally believe that the inauguration of the new covenant in this age includes the beginnings of the redemption of culture and the natural world, bringing the kingdom of God to these spheres. Therefore, according to McIlhenny, "the Adamic human race perverts the cosmos; the Christian human race renews it" (xxiv). Christians now are entrusted with a comprehensive responsibility to "call back (or buy back, as in *redeem*) the created order to its original state as God intended," "reclaiming God's creation from the totalizing effects of the fall," culture work becoming kingdom work (xxvi, xxviii). De Graaf claims that "both the state and the church belong, then, to the redemptive work of Christ" (115), the civil order now "restored again through Jesus Christ" (122), allowing the "kingdom of God [to] come to manifestation" in both the church and state (123). VanDrunen labels this neo-Calvinist vision as "an eschatological burdening of cultural work," in contrast to his own limiting of the purpose of cultural work to common grace and preservation rather than eschatological redemption (*Natural Law*, 384).

Venema seems to perceive that in proposing this view, VanDrunen does not believe that "Christ's work of redemption involves the comprehensive reordering and renewing of the entire created order" (27). But in reality, the key question for VanDrunen is not *whether* Christ comprehensively redeems the cosmos, but *when* he redeems it. VanDrunen finds it noteworthy that many neo-Calvinists, following Dooyeweerd, portray "the Christian ground motive as creation-fall-redemption," with no clear differentiation between inaugurated and consummated redemption (*Natural Law*, 353). Emphasizing a three-act rather than a four-act conception can create a blurring of the lines of distinction between inauguration and consummation, particularly concerning the question of whether Christ's redemption of all culture and the natural world begins in the inaugurated "already" through his Church or whether Christ begins this universal transformation only in the consummated "not yet."

While VanDrunen is right to advocate for greater discontinuity between inaugurated and consummated redemption than do neo-Calvinists, he overstates his case when he unqualifiedly claims that in the consummation the physical creation (apart from human bodies) will be completely replaced rather than renewed (64-66). He uses this argument to refute the neo-Calvinist contention that Christians will bring "worthy cultural artifacts" from the old creation into the new (67). But VanDrunen's rejection of this view as unwarranted speculation does not also require the rejection of additional physical continuity beyond the two creations. For instance, Romans 8:21 seems to imply additional continuity when it states "*the creation itself* will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

As this review has demonstrated, the debate represented in these three books is an important one, with implications for multiple areas of theology, including questions of Christology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology. While VanDrunen and his neo-Calvinist counterparts are closer in some of their views than might initially be expected, these two sides also exhibit fundamental and abiding differences regarding their understanding of Adam's mandate, the mission of the church, and the underlying covenantal structure of scripture.

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All Life Belongs to God. By Erkki Koskenniemi. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012, x+64 pp., $10.00 paper.

This extremely slim book by an adjunct professor of New Testament at the Universities of Helsinki and Easking, Finland and at Åbo Akademi University, sheds light on an enormously weighty subject: what does it mean to be human? In many ways, this is the key question that lies at the heart of the whole debate about abortion that has raged in the West for the past forty years or more. And the way forward is by going back, back to some core documents at the heart of Western culture: the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. Koskenniemi reminds us that Graeco-Roman culture, a significant part of the context in which the Christian Scriptures of the New Testament were written, was pervaded by as brutal a callousness as any that is regnant in the world today. Common to the Greeks and Romans was child exposure or abandonment, that is, refusal to take care of the child in the first ten days of the child's life (3). The reasons for this varied: fear by a father that the child was not his; if the child appeared to be unhealthy; if the child was a female (this ancient practice of gendercide parallels what is happening in modern nations in Asia [vii–viii]; if the omens at the time of birth were not favorable (4–7).

Jewish texts like Psalm 139:13–16, Jeremiah 1:5 and Ezekiel 16:4–7 present a very different picture. There, God indicates his concern for the unborn and how he even compares his care of Israel in her early history to the taking care of a child that has been abandoned to death (10–11). While, therefore, "the Old Testament does not include a clear ban on exposure," these texts indicate that Jews practiced a different ethic with regard to the newly born than their pagan neighbors. A number of Jewish pseudepigrapha explicitly develop this ethic, like 1 Enoch 99.5, which condemns as sinners those who "abort their infants" and cast out their newborn. Similarly the Alexandrian Jewish exegete Philo "unambiguously condemns exposure … and regards it as murder" (14).

Similarly, while the New Testament does not directly condemn exposure—though Kooennniemi perceives a hint in Ephesians 6:4—a number of very early Christian texts did. The *Didache*, for instance, specified that evil actions in the way of death included abortion and exposure (2.2, at pp. 18–19). Building on such convictions, early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr, who had to respond to pagan accusations that Christians were cannibalistic and ate babies when they celebrated the Lord's Supper, argued that "to expose newly-born children in the part of wicked men" and was "sin against God" (*Apology* 27.1, at pp. 21–22). The anonymous *Letter to Diognetus*, a pearl among early Christian apologetic writings, similarly said that while Christians have children like their Graeco-Roman neighbors, "they do not expose them once they are born" (*Diognetus* 5.7, at p. 23). With the advent of the imperial church after the Constantinian revolution, much changed for the church, but on this issue of child exposure, there is clear continuity with the pre-Constantinian era (29–34). From the perspective of Basil of Caesarea, for example, whom Koskenniemi rightly regards as extremely influential in subsequent generations, intentional child exposure was tantamount to murder (30).

Now, why did early Jews and Christians take a position so at odds with Graeco-Roman culture? As with reasons for child exposure, the reasons for the Jewish and Christian position are various: there was the conviction that human beings are truly human while still in the womb (35–36); Jews and Christians held a high view of family where to be childless was regarded as shameful (36–38); then there was the firm belief that sexuality existed first and foremost so as to produce children (38–39); finally, child exposure is unnatural and against divine law (43–44 and 48–52). Did Jews and Christians expose their infants despite admonitions like those above? The evidence is slight, but as Koskenniemi argues, if there were regular warnings against this sin, then we can expect a few

Jews and Christian did indeed do it (16).

This is an important work, for, as the Finnish author shows, there is a clear parallel between contemporary arguments to safeguard the unborn with ancient Jewish and Christian arguments against child exposure. As Koskenniemi powerfully concludes: "A human being, including one newborn, even unborn, is a masterpiece of God, and no one has the right to destroy it" (60).

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The Revival of Particular Baptist Life in Ireland 1780–1840. By Crawford Gribben. Dunstable, Bedfordshire, UK: Fauconberg Press, 2012, 20 pp. (available at fauconberg@SBHS.org.uk).

This small booklet, originally given as a lecture by Crawford Gribben, currently Professor of Early Modern British History at Queen's University Belfast, at the Grace Baptist Assembly in May 2011, is extremely helpful in understanding how the Irish Baptists emerged from the doldrums that afflicted them for much of the eighteenth century. Their churches had begun well in the previous century, but what Gribben calls a "heady cocktail of congregational isolationism … with theological ambiguity and increasing wealth" led to a precipitous decline (8). Rescue, by God's grace, came through two preachers, both English: the remarkably godly Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) and his friend Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), the theological mainspring behind the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Pearce's six-week trip to Dublin and its environs in the summer of 1796 and Fuller's later trip in 1804 proved to be catalysts of prayer and church-planting, as Gribben ably documents. Amazingly in the forty years after 1814, when the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland (later simply the Baptist Irish Society) was formed, "Particular Baptist churches [were] planted at the remarkable rate of almost one per annum" (17). The geographical locus of these churches also began to shift from Dublin to the northeastern counties that later constituted Northern Ireland. This advance was accomplished in the face of significant challenges, for, as the nineteenth-century preacher C. H. Spurgeon once put it: "They who wear soft raiment will never win Ireland, or Africa, or India, for Christ" (18).

Albeit a relatively small community, Irish Baptists have played an important role in the advance of the Gospel in places as diverse as Ontario, Peru, and India, and Gribben's booklet is a helpful study of how God revitalized this Baptist community. Let us hope that it will be a spur to a deeper study of Baptist life in the emerald isle.

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Four Views on the Apostle Paul. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Edited by Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, 236 pp., $17.99 paper.

In line with the Counterpoints series, *Four Views on the Apostle Paul* is an attempt to provide the reader with a sense of the wide variety of viewpoints on Paul and his theology. The volume achieves its goal in part simply by choosing a radically diverse group of scholars: Thomas R. Schreiner (Reformed view), Luke Timothy Johnson (Catholic view), Douglas A. Campbell (post-new-perspective view), and Mark D. Nanos (Jewish view). A diverse group indeed! Each contributor was given the task to answer four questions regarding Paul's views on: 1) salvation, 2) the significance of Christ, 3) his theological framework, and 4) his vision for the churches.

Schreiner argues that Paul's theological framework consists of the "already/not yet" fulfillment of the Old Testament's promises in Christ. Indeed,

Christ is at the center of Paul's theology, for Paul views Jesus as Lord of all, and his cross as central for salvation. All humanity needs salvation, for God's wrath against sin will finally be displayed on the Day of Judgment. Yet, God graciously sent his son to die as a substitute for all who believe in him (2 Cor. 5:21). Not everyone will be justified (defined in forensic terms), but only those who have faith in Christ (*pistis Christou* as an objective genitive). For those who are believers, in Christ, they comprise the true Israel, the new temple, and the body of Christ.

Johnson argues that there is no "center" to Paul's theology, but that Paul's framework derives from his own experience, the experiences of his readers, and the early church traditions already in place. Like Schreiner, he acknowledges the centrality of Christ, whose death is seen as a sacrifice, a demonstration of God's love, and Jesus's own faithfulness to God (*pistis Christou* as a subjective genitive). Salvation is deliverance from the power of sin and participation in the life of God, although salvation is mainly oriented toward the present, for Paul's primary concern was with "building a saved community," not "saving one's [individual] soul" (89).

Campbell focuses on Romans 5-8, for he contends it most clearly expounds Paul's gospel. Paul's framework stems from his Trinitarian convictions. In other words, God had revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, and Paul's mission was to participate in this trinitarian life, which explains the centrality of Paul's "in Christ" formulation. It is not proper to ask what people need to be saved from, for this distorts the solution. Rather, one should focus on the priority of God's electing grace, for only then does one see the problem in its proper light. God's election indicates his universal mission of love, and all humanity, who at one time were caught up in Adam's sin, are now caught up in the grace of God in Christ.

Nanos argues that Paul's perspective was fundamentally a Jewish one. Even after his Damascus road experience, which was not a conversion but only a calling, he taught believing Jews to observe Torah. His negative statements toward the law are explained by his resistance to believing Gentiles coming under the law, not by a problem with the law itself. His opposition to circumcision did not indicate opposition to Torah observance in general, for circumcision was only the initial rite for proselytes to Judaism. Thus, Paul's churches were a subset of the synagogues within Judaism, and unbelieving Jews were in danger not of eternal condemnation but only of missing out of Israel's end time proclamation of salvation to the nations.

Although this summary is brief, one can readily see how divergent the contributors' views on Paul are. Space allows for a few observations concerning what this volume can teach us about the importance of one's interpretive method in approaching Paul. First, what letters a scholar deems to be authentically Pauline significantly influences his reading of Paul. For instance, Schreiner and Johnson agree that all thirteen letters in the New Testament that bear the name of Paul are genuinely Pauline. It is no wonder, then, that, even though Schreiner is Protestant and Johnson Catholic, they find significant agreement. On the other hand, Campbell—and to an extent Nanos as well—does not hold to Pauline authorship of all thirteen letters, which leads him to a radically different interpretation of Paul. For instance, Campbell alleviates Johnson's perceived tension in the Pauline literature regarding the role of women in the church by suggesting that Paul did not write 1 Timothy (103). Or again, Campbell's emphasizes Romans 5-8 to the extent that one wonders whether his Pauline "canon within a canon" has not actually limited Campbell's ability to see God's retributive justice earlier in the letter (1:18; 2:15-16; 3:5-6) or elsewhere (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:13-16). In other words, the parameters one sets on the Pauline corpus determines in large part the way one reads Paul.

Second, *Four Views* demonstrates how one's cultural assumptions can influence the way one interprets Paul. Of course, no interpreter can lay aside his biases entirely, but the goal is to be as objective as possible in one's interpretation. Again, Schreiner

and Johnson model this approach well by grounding their statements in a variety of texts. In a sense, Campbell and Nanos also evidence a desire to read Paul with the historical and cultural background in mind. Nevertheless, Campbell, like many post-Holocaust interpreters of Paul, reads Paul in light of the Holocaust, arguing that (what he calls) the "Melanchthonian" reading of Paul (i.e., that Paul was fighting legalism, and that Jews must believe in Christ to be justified) must be wrong because it puts Judaism in a bad light (113-14). Campbell, while providing no textual evidence for his assertions, thinks such a reading is "ghastly" and "harsh" (207), and that "Paul just could not have been this nasty and misguided" (208). Similarly, Nanos, as a Jew himself, does not think Paul considered the wrath of God to be stored up for unbelieving Jews. Accordingly, he reinterprets Paul's anathema in Galatians 1:8-9 not as an eschatological curse but as a curse only for the present (61). But surely this underestimates what for Paul was the serious problem of another gospel. Nanos also thinks Romans 11 shows that Paul considered even unbelieving Jews to be in a covenant relationship with God (192-93). But this is unlikely, since Paul wished himself to be cursed by God for the sake of their acceptance (9:3; cf. 1 Cor. 9:20, 22). It is likely that Nanos does not think Paul considered unbelieving Jews to be under God's wrath because Nanos himself is an unbelieving Jew. In short, this volume teaches us that if we are to read Paul aright, we must read him on his own terms.

In conclusion, *Four Views* is a good introduction to the wide array of Paul's interpreters. With few footnotes, it is not overly technical and suits well the individual seeking an entrée into the various views on Paul. And, although Campbell calls Schreiner's views on Paul "Arian" (55), the contributors by and large exhibit the model of respectful interaction intended in the volume.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The French edition appeared a few years earlier, with the title *Apprendre à vivre: Traité de philosophie à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Plon, 2006).

[2] "The Function of Romans 7:13-25 in Paul's Argument for the Law's Impotence and the Spirit's Power, and Its Bearing on the Identity of the Schizophrenic 'I,'" in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church* (Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.; Lane Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington, eds.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 3-59.

[3] Paul even disrupts the ordinary word-order: *ginōskousin gar nomon lalō*, "To those who know the law I speak," suggesting he is not speaking to others about other concerns.

[4] Elsewhere I suggest that the covenant at Sinai was no bargain for the Israelites, even though it was distinctively and exclusively made with them. See my "Getting Out and Staying Out: Israel's Dilemma at Sinai," *Pittsburgh Theologial Review* 3 (2011-2012), 23-37.