

# DEVELOPING A DISPENSATIONAL MISSIOLOGY

Papers Presented at a Symposium of  
The International Society for Biblical  
Hermeneutics

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*Developing a Dispensational Missiology: Papers Presented at a Symposium of The International Society for Biblical Hermeneutics*

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# Preface

Dispensationalism is more than eschatology. It is a school of thought that results from the consistent application of plain grammatical-historical hermeneutics throughout the entirety of Scripture. Since the Bible is our authoritative source for information on missiology, it would stand to reason that the plain reading of Scripture would result in a dispensational missiology that is unique from other theological systems. That is what this volume is about.

These papers were presented at a symposium of the International Society for Biblical Hermeneutics. The authors come from a dispensationalist perspective and address topics in missiology from the supposition of grammatical-historicism. Not all dispensationalists will agree with every aspect of this book and that is fine. We hope that this volume will get the conversation going on how to serve God in a fashion that accurately reflects upon His Word.

In the first chapter, Thomas Fretwell demonstrates that the dispensationalist understanding of the future Davidic Kingdom is an appropriate groundwork for a vision of a socially just and ecologically sustainable world. As attempts to cure the world of injustice and ecological catastrophe continue to fail, the church should live responsibly while looking forward to a day when the Davidic King will establish his Kingdom. About the Kingdom, Fretwell writes, “The extent of his restorative rule will include the created order and the animal Kingdom — which is a fantastic response to many today who advocate extreme climate policies or even Green eco-theology.”

As a follow-up to Fretwell’s chapter, Paul Miles has contributed a piece that focuses on postponement theology as a safeguard from trends of critical theology in evangelical missiology. Miles traces the history of critical theology and demonstrates that it is built on a kingdom-now framework. Since dispensational postponement theology sees the kingdom as yet future, it serves as a safeguard against critical

missiology. Miles proposes that “all conservatives need to be prepared to defend orthodoxy in the face of critical theology... dispensationalists are at an advantage when it comes to responding to these trends since dispensationalism has a biblical view of the kingdom offered, rejected, and postponed.”

John Williams brings an important question of evangelism into the discussion of dispensational missiology. A common strawman argument against dispensationalism is that dispensationalists supposedly believe in multiple modes of salvation. Some dispensationalists, especially from Post-Acts 2 perspectives, hold that view, but Williams does a fine job of comparing the gospel message as it is presented by John and Paul, clarifying that “the saving message of the Gospel of John and the apostle Paul’s epistles are the same saving message, the message of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone.”

The next two chapters will likely be the most controversial as Jacob Heaton and Luther Smith examine the Great Commission. Heaton examines the original audience and result of the Great Commission and concludes that the commission was for the apostles, not the church, but with the clarification that “it is not inappropriate to say that to some degree the Church takes on the great commission, but only after confirming the original audience of the apostles.” Smith comes to a similar conclusion but with a slightly different method. He begins with an overview of the history of missions before diving into Matthew 28:18–20. Smith proposes Ephesians 2:8–10 as a Church Age alternative to Jesus’ commission, writing, “Considering Ephesians 2:8–10, we honor the legacy of those who labored in this vocation of missionary work and maintain the integrity of the message of the Scriptures the way the human authors intended.”

Christopher Cone has submitted a chapter that integrates hermeneutics into dispensational discipleship. He builds an internal case for literal grammatical historical hermeneutics to show that the Bible itself prescribes the method by which it should be understood. Cone

concludes, “because the method for handling His word accurately is communicated very early in His revealed text, no discipleship process can be effective without an appropriate emphasis on understanding God as He has designed us to understand Him.”

In the final chapter, Greg Muller brings an expository treatment of 2 Timothy 3:14–4:4, where he identifies Timothy as a theological minority, a status with which the modern dispensationalist can certainly identify! Paul’s call to continue in the Scripture is as relevant today as it was then. As Muller puts it, “God has provided guidance to avoid theological defection or secular moral deterioration through Paul teaching Timothy to preach and continue in the Scripture.”

We pray that this volume will be edifying to the broad community of dispensationalists as we all seek to refine our missiology in light of God’s Word.



# 1

## **Davidic Kingdom Theology: The Premillennial Vision Of A Socially Just And Ecologically Sustainable World**

*Thomas Fretwell*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The theological position called premillennialism affirms that there will be a future Kingdom age after Jesus returns where he will rule for a thousand years. This millennial kingdom is a distinct era from the eternal state. Although theologians have varied opinions on specific details relating to the function, nature, and fulfilment of this Kingdom, those who place it after the return of Christ are comfortably categorized as premillennialists. Whilst this paper will not seek to engage with many of these points of difference, it will be offering a distinctly premillennial framework for the future Davidic kingdom age. This model will seek to provide a robust and comprehensive theology for the church in order to aid understanding and facilitate preaching the message of the Davidic King as a useful component in a uniquely dispensational missiology.

However, before continuing with this task it is important to properly contextualise the topic. The issue of the millennium has been controversial at times throughout church history. Whilst this author believes that premillennialism is the orthodox position affirmed in the pages of scripture and by the early church, this does not invalidate the reality that the other millennial views have some very able defenders in the body of Christ. Within premillennialism itself there are two views that affirm a future kingdom, yet differ on issues such as the rapture, the tribulation, and the reign of Christ from the throne of David. These are respectively known as historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. It is not the purpose of this paper to really engage the main points of contention between these two except to state that this framework will follow the dispensational interpretation. In particular the focus of Davidic Kingdom Theology will be to present a metanarrative of history that maintains the integrity of the covenantal promises to Israel. This means affirming both their future national salvation as well as their restoration to the Land whilst simultaneously denying that these promises can in any way be fulfilled spiritually through the church.

These beliefs are what make dispensational theology distinct from other interpretive methods. The other millennial views, amillennialism and postmillennialism, will both differ on these points. Largely this difference is a result of distinct exegetical methodologies that utilise different hermeneutical principles to understand the biblical text. Classical dispensationalism has always adhered to what is simply known as a “literal” hermeneutic. As Ryrie notes, “this means interpretation that gives every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.”<sup>1</sup> Although many caricatures exist concerning the term “literal”,

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<sup>1</sup> Ryrie, Charles. *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007) Pg. 91

which seek to portray this hermeneutic as simplistic and wooden, the real intent is to promote a method that takes the text seriously and consistently, considering the use of language and historical context of words. This allows for many figures of speech when the context calls for it. The more scholarly term for this would be grammatical-historical exegesis. The point of contention between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists is that non-dispensationalists are not consistent in their hermeneutic and at times they stray away from the straightforward meaning of the text into allegorical or spiritual interpretations that deny the literal meaning of a text. It is this inconsistency that dispensationalists take issue with.

However, many dispensationalists such as Feinberg and Vlach have noted that this may be an oversimplification of the hermeneutical landscape. Feinberg rather states that “the difference is not literalism v. non-literalism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics.” Vlach summarises that the real difference rests on how interpreters understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Typically, non-dispensationalists assert that the New Testament has interpretive priority over the Old and therefore feel at liberty to “reinterpret” or “redefine” certain promises — always those concerning national Israel. Dispensationalists rather believe that the starting point for each text must be the text itself and this allows the Old Testament to maintain its inspired authoritative nature whilst allowing progressive revelation to complete and expand details without changing them.

## **THE FOCUS OF ATTACK**

This consistent literal hermeneutic causes adherents to affirm the ongoing place and purpose for Israel in the plan of God to one degree or another. Thus, premillennialism and its doctrine of a future

earthly kingdom is frequently assailed by its critics. For example, Christian reconstructionist David Chilton, writes:

“The notion that the reign of Christ is something wholly future, to be brought in by some great social cataclysm, is not a Christian doctrine. It is an unorthodox teaching, generally espoused by heretical sets on the fringes of the Christian church.”<sup>2</sup>

A more specific target of contemporary critics against the dispensational form of premillennialism that is around today, is focused at attacking the support given for modern Israel. The belief is popularly known as Christian Zionism and is a much-maligned perspective today. Christian academics from all traditions seem to relish the opportunity to show their disdain for dispensationalists. Palestinian-American theologian Mubarak Awad is typical:

“Zionism deviates from the heart of the New Testament. New Testament Christianity proclaims, “for God so loved the world...”, while Christian Zionism proclaims, ‘for God so loved modern Israel’.”<sup>3</sup>

Naim Ateek, the founder of Sabeel and the father of Palestinian Liberation Theology has said that Christian Zionism is “one, if not the most dangerous, biblical distortions that is challenging us today”, and its supporters are “contributing to the oppression and killing of many innocent Palestinians by Israel”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chilton, David, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 19087) Pg. 494

<sup>3</sup> Awad, Mubarak. “Their Theology, Our Nightmare”, in *Introduction in Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2008) Pg. 59

<sup>4</sup> Ateek, Naim. Christian Zionism: The Dark Side of the Bible. *Cornerstone* 30 (Winter 2003) Pg. 1-2

Unfortunately, such statements are not confined to Palestinian Theology. A vast segment of the western church has come to embrace Palestinian Liberation Theology largely due to the popularity it has amongst Anglican academics. The most vociferous being the former Reverend Stephen Sizer. He has often courted controversy with his anti-Israel activism. He has published two books that seem to make it their mission to attack Christian Zionism — and it soon becomes clear that his target is dispensationalism, which he sees as the fount of all evil. His major work published by InterVarsity Press is titled *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* The books present a covenantalist antizionist theology that portrays dispensationalism and Christian Zionism as a dangerous heresy. The fact that a leading UK Anglican such as John Stott has endorsed his work surely helped spread his theology to a wider audience. Stott writes:

“I am glad to commend Stephen Sizer’s ground-breaking critique of Christian Zionism. His comprehensive overview of its roots, its theological basis and its political consequences is very timely. I myself believe that Zionism, both political and Christian, is incompatible with biblical faith. Stephen’s book has helped to reinforce this conviction.”<sup>5</sup>

To make that charge that this view is “incompatible” with the Christian faith is extremely cavalier for a man of Stott’s stature. It is also indefensible — church history has a steady stream of Philo-semitic restorationist theologians who hold to early forms of proto-Christian Zionism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Sizer, “Sixty Academics Endorse Christian Zionism Book,” November 13<sup>th</sup> 2013, <http://stephensizer.com/2020/02/sixty-academics-endorse-christian-zionism-roadmap-to-armageddon/>

<sup>6</sup> I Have used “proto-Zionist” here as usually the classification Christian Zionist is applicable to the support of the modern state since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, theologically the distinctives were in place well before that.

Whilst this section has simply detailed some of the criticisms that are offered by those from liberation theologies as well as amillennial and postmillennial theologians, who themselves differ on certain issues, we can see one common thread. They all unite in their attack on dispensational theology especially its eschatological views that are born out of a consistent literal interpretation of scripture. Palestinian theologian Philip Saa'd writes that

“Though these streams of theology are different in terms of hermeneutic, they have one thing in common which unites all the adherents...a strong rejection of dispensationalism and of a literal interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>7</sup>

Before we move forward now and present a case for the premillennial vision of Davidic Kingdom Theology it will be beneficial to look at the cultural expressions in our world today that seek to build their own version of the Kingdom from a purely humanistic view. This will hopefully highlight the importance of the true message of the Kingdom as a fully orbed worldview as well as a fruitful evangelistic methodology.

### **Globalism, Social Justice, and Environmentalism.**

This triad of cultural trends are fed to us daily through almost every medium of communication available. They operate with the same authority as creeds, are believed in the same way the faithful believe their creeds, and to violate them is to risk excommunication, or in today's language, to be cancelled. For all intents

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Saad, 'How Shall We Interpret Scripture about the Land and Eschatology? Jewish and Arab Perspectives' in Wesley H. Brown and Peter F. Penner, editors, *Christian Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2008) Pg.114

and purposes, they operate like a secular religion. This may illicit charges of scaremongering, but the similarities are too many to ignore. The dream given is for a utopian vision of the world made possible by adhering to a set of cardinal doctrines. In order for this to happen though — all people must play their part — and if coercion and persuasion does not work — then legislation must be used. What has been fascinating to observe is the way these seemingly separate concerns have merged into a vehicle for achieving the same secular utopian vision. Globalism is really a form of utopian imperialism and has been in operation since the Tower of Babel and modelled by many of the imperial empires that followed in history. The world has seen many empires seek global dominance; the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, and the Ottomans to name just a few.

As Dr. Boot from the Wilberforce centre notes:

“the seeds of modern globalism were planted in the Enlightenment era as cultural elites began turning away from Christianity and the vision of the protestant nation state and started formulating globalist manifestos, emulating the ancient Greeks.”<sup>8</sup>

Such secularised models of uniformity demand that beliefs which cannot be embraced universally must be rejected — more than that they must be fiercely resisted. This does not leave room for the outworking of the Christian faith in public life and is the motivation behind why most people try to push faith to the “private sphere” of life, usually with the unstated intent of eradicating it completely. Hazony in his book *The Virtue of Nationalism* has stated it well:

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<sup>8</sup> Boot, Joseph. *Ruler of Kings: Toward a Christian Vision of Government* (London: Wilberforce Publications, 2022) Pg.73

“Under a universal political order...in which a single standard of right is held to be in force everywhere, tolerance for diverse political and religious standpoints must necessarily decline. Western elites whose views are now being aggressively homogenized in conformity with the new liberal construction, are finding it increasingly difficult to recognize a need for the kind of toleration of divergent standpoints that the principle of national self-determination had once rendered axiomatic. Tolerance like nationalism is, is becoming a relic of a by-gone age...the teaching and practice of traditional forms of Judaism and Christianity will become ever more untenable.”<sup>9</sup>

Globalism envisages a world that is governed by a conglomerate of world leaders under a single political and legal entity which also asserts a uniform ethical morality upon people. In such secularist globalist utopias, the state takes the place of God and obedience (or maybe we could say worship) of the state is the key to utopia. Therefore, it is justified for the greater good to utilise the power of the state, both political and militarily, to reach this end. Such globalist pretensions have been infiltrating western civilisation for hundreds of years. Philosophical thinkers like Rousseau wrote works like *The Social Contract* (1762) which strongly argues that a political revolution was needed to free humanity from inequality and corruption. As such he was really arguing for a totalitarian state that operated as “father” — and in his own words makes all citizens “children of the state”. His idea paved the way for other thinkers who would contribute to political philosophy such as Karl Marx who offered the communist vision of utopia. Much of today’s political discourse is simply a rehash of Rosseau’s original ideas. Such ideological thinking even found its way into the church through thinkers like Immanuel Kant — who elevated reason to the preeminent position in

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<sup>9</sup> Hazony, Yoram. *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018) Pg. 48–49

political thought. He posited that such reason would surely lead to the peaceful utopia. In his work *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* he argued that in order for states to co-exist with each other [utopian vision] they must “renounce their savage and lawless freedom, adapt themselves to public coercive laws, and thus form an international state which would necessarily grow until it embraced all people of the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

The most contemporary expressions of such political ideologies are seen in a number of ways in today’s world. Positioning itself as the world authority who must steer society towards a better future, the World Economic Forum has taken the Mantle from Rousseau and others. The WEF is basically a global organisation that links the world’s richest private companies together and facilitates their interactions with the governments of the world. The forum is best known for its annual meeting in Davos Switzerland which brings together global leaders to consider the challenges of the world! Their purpose as a global supranational body is seen in their mission statement:

“The Forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas”<sup>11</sup>

The Davos agenda for 2021 was “The Great Reset” — so what is this? Quite simply, it is the belief that the major infrastructures of the world (social, political, economic, industrial, environmental) need to be reset. The WEF founder has argued that the covid crisis represented a rare window of opportunity to “reimagine and reset our world”<sup>12</sup>. What he means by this is an opportunity to establish

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<sup>10</sup> Kant, Immanuel. “Perpetual Peace” in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans, H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) Pg. 105

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/about/world-economic-forum>

<sup>12</sup> Schwab, Klaus. Covid-19: The Great Reset (Switzerland: Forum Publishing, 2020) Pg. 244

a globalist government that can shape society in their own image. He has stated it quite clearly, now is the time “for global leaders to shape the future state of global relations, the direction of national economies, the priorities of societies, the nature of business models and the management of a global common interests.”

A number of themes involved in the great reset that are typical for such humanistic visions can be found in the agenda. Most strikingly, we see an attack on nationalism and individual state sovereignty. Schwabb defines global governance as “the process of cooperation among transnational actors aimed as providing responses to global problems.”<sup>13</sup> He says, “it encompasses the totality of institutions, policies, norms, procedures and initiatives through which nation states try to bring more predictability and stability to their responses to transnational challenges.” He goes on to argue that we need more global governance and less nationalism when he says:

“The more nationalism and isolationism pervade the global polity, the greater the chance that global governance loses its relevance and becomes ineffective, Sadly, we are now at this juncture. Put bluntly, we live in a world I which nobody is really in charge.”<sup>14</sup>

The unspoken conclusion from such a statement is that this needs to change so they put themselves in charge. A typical route to tyranny that often masquerades as benefiting the public good. History is replete with examples of such double speak. Another observation related to this quote is that it clearly portrays the secularist worldview at play in such ideological visions as it leaves no room for either Satan’s role in this world system as the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) or for the sovereignty of God in history.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Pg. 114

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## Social Justice

Another popular concept in the world today is this broad term “social justice”. Unfortunately, this term — and the ideological worldview behind it, have made inroads into the church due to the constant call for justice found in the scriptures. Yet the use of the same word does not mean that the way it is used is uniform. In fact, in modern ideologies the word justice has been refined completely to the point that many have not noticed this sleight of hand. Allen has provided two contrasting definitions to help illustrate this. He describes the traditional understanding of justice typically derived from the Judeo-Christian worldview as:

“Conformity to God’s moral standard, particularly as revealed in the Ten Commandments and the royal law: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (James 2:8). There are two kinds of justice. (1) Communitive justice is living in right relationship with God and with others. Giving people their due as image-bearers of God. (2) Distributive justice is impartially rendering judgement, righting wrongs, and meting out punishment for lawbreaking. Distributive justice is reserved for God and God-ordained authorities, including parents in the home, pastors in the church, and civil authorities in the state.”<sup>15</sup>

He then summarises ideological social justice as:

“Deconstructing traditional systems and structures deemed to be oppressive, and redistributing power and resources from oppressors to their victims in the pursuit of equality of outcome.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Allen, Scott David. *Why Social Justice is not Biblical Justice* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2020) Pg.24

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Pg. 43

This second definition is what is meant by the term in popular culture today. These two divergent definitions cannot co-exist as, although both the biblical worldview and the secular worldview are talking about “justice”, the meaning is drawn from two totally different worldview frameworks, one of which is hostile to the Christian faith. Ideological social justice draws its framework from the multi-disciplinary field known as critical theory. Social justice race activist and Critical theory populariser Robin DiAngelo states:

“Our analysis of social justice is based on a school of thought known as Critical Theory. Critical Theory refers to a body of scholarship that examines how society works, and is a tradition that emerged in the early part of the 20th century from a group of scholars at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany”<sup>17</sup>

This framework seeks to divide the world into groups that are based on power differentials. It is a binary narrative where one group is oppressed, and the other are the oppressors. The oppressors keep their position by the exercise of hegemonic power — which is usually defined as controlling the ideological narrative to keep one group oppressed. Oppression can be found in any situation where there is not absolute equality of outcome. The outcome that social justice advocates are looking for is liberation from any oppression as they define it. This critical theory liberation framework is what underlies much of the discourse in popular culture as it can be defined to meet a number of oppressions. Critical Race Theory applies the binary narrative to different people groups, at the top of the oppressor pyramid is the white male who is responsible for exercising hegemonic power over other minorities. Everything in the discussion in race

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<sup>17</sup> Robin DiAngelo, Ozlem Sensoy. *Is Everyone really Equal? An Introduction in Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York: Teachers College Press 2017) Pg. 25

is interpreted through this framework which leaves no room for other perspectives and as such is inherently divisive. CT is also applied to gender and sexuality with the advent of Queer Theory as an offshoot. The same oppressed and oppressor narrative is used. The modern phenomenon known as “identity politics” is the outworking of Critical Theory. The important point I want to draw out is by creating such a framework and applying it to all cultural issues it serves to push each perspective further apart and removes the middle ground of reasonable debate. This will create a situation where the government needs to step in and adjudicate, of course choosing the side of the oppressed the state is now seen as the ultimate liberator. This brings us back to a reality where the global government and world leaders are the supreme authorities and gatekeepers of society. This government also agrees that Christianity in itself is an oppressive system which oppresses some of the minority groups in the identity politics hierarchy — therefore the rights of Christians need to be curtailed and suppressed in order to reach the equality of outcome utopia.

## **Environmentalism**

One final area worthy of discussion is to note how these secularist frameworks still have an apocalyptic doomsday scenario in their worldview. The issue of climate change and the end of the world is a constant theme from those advocating for these views. Apocalyptic pronouncements come through at an ever-increasing rate. Dire warnings of imminent destruction are the message from everyone, from celebrities to scientists. Climate change legislation is a wonderful tool in bringing government resources under one roof. Eco collapse is also a great way to instil a measure of fear and panic in a population, so they are more likely to agree with whatever solution is proposed by the global governances. This fear factor has

been given a name; “eco-anxiety” is now impacting the daily lives of many people. A landmark survey done in 2021 on 16–25-year-olds revealed that nearly 60% said they felt extremely worried about climate change, with 45% saying it negatively impacted their daily lives.<sup>18</sup> Researchers also explained this was partly caused by the feeling that governments are not doing enough. It is not hard to imagine how governments could respond. Insisting that they do not have the power to enforce green legislation so the answer is to give them more power — something a fearful populace will readily do for some sense of security.

Whilst much more needs to be said about this from a biblical perspective I have here tried to demonstrate the current cultural trends that our society focuses on. These trends seem to be moving into a direction that is unsettling and many people are desperate for answers. It is at this juncture that I believe the message of the bible speaks. I shall now briefly outline a theological framework that answers many of these issues from within a biblical perspective.

## DAVIDIC KINGDOM THEOLOGY

Whereas the world seeks to unite and solve the world’s problems, history teaches us that such efforts are doomed to failure. The corrupt nature of man is ignored or denied, and this means that it is a deception to think that one group of fallen leaders can usher in an age of peace and prosperity for all. What we do see is that power, greed, and corruption turn these envisaged utopias into regimes that inflict unimaginable cruelty upon others.

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<sup>18</sup> Tosin Thompson, Young People’s Climate Anxiety Revealed in Landmark Survey. *Nature* (22 September 2021) Accessed: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02582-8>

## The Davidic King

The framework of Davidic Kingdom Theology (hereafter DKT) is built around the Davidic King. It posits that the saga of redemption history has been revolving around this person predicted in the scriptures. From the original messianic promise in Genesis 3:15 to the eventual establishment of his Kingdom in Revelation. This ruler will be the only person who can every truly establishment a universal global government. All human attempts at this have failed — because they lack a sufficient ruler and suffer the inevitable realisation that mankind is fallen and corrupt. The Davidic King is the answer to this perpetual problem of humanity. There is a coming King who has not only the authority to rule the nations but also the power to do so. So, the initial element of DKT is to establish the credentials of this ruler and the nature of his reign. Interestingly, the announcement of his first advent is often linked with his future kingdom and rule. The prophet Isaiah speaks of this aspect:

For to us a child is born,  
 to us a son is given,  
 and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called  
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace  
 there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne  
 and over his kingdom,  
 establishing and upholding it  
 with justice and righteousness  
 from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this. **Isaiah 9:6**

This theme is also the focus at the angelic annunciation to Mary:

<sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." **Luke 2:31–33**

These representative texts clearly describe the promised Messiah as the one who will one day rule the Kingdom of God. It is not coincidental that the infancy texts portray themselves as identifying the one who will fulfil the many Kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament. We see the reign of this future King described in Isaiah 2:

Now it will come about that  
In the last days  
The mountain of the house of the Lord  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,  
And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.  
3 And many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
For the law will go forth from Zion  
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
4 And He will judge between the nations,  
And will render decisions for many peoples;

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,  
And never again will they learn war.

The vision these texts portray is of a future geo-political world ruled over by the King from Jerusalem. The nations of the world flock to Jerusalem to hear from Him. He renders decisions and rules over them. His government and Kingdom are upheld in perfect justice and righteousness. Here we see that these characteristics are only achieved because they are found in the Davidic King.

### **The Threefold Foundation for Davidic Kingdom Theology Covenantally Rooted**

The theological framework presented here is built upon a triadic structure. The initial concern is to ground the belief in a future Kingdom ruled over by the Messiah in scripture. One of the key features of this model is that it allows for the covenantal promises to Israel to be upheld. Although it posits Christ as the hermeneutical centre, it does not follow the lead of theologians who use this as a way to “reinterpret” or “redefine” the promises to Israel. The future Kingdom pictures a redeemed Israel amongst the nations ruled over by the King of Israel. Such a belief is rooted primarily in the covenantal faithfulness of God as displayed through His promises to the nation. These original promises find their origin in the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, Genesis 15:18, and Genesis 17:1–5. The promises include personal ones to Abraham, national ones to his descendants — that they would be a great nation and would be given the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance. There is also the universal aspect in that through Him all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The second major covenant is the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7:12–16 and 1 Chronicles 17. This covenant amplifies the Abrahamic covenant in that it promises that the Davidic line will be eternal, and that his throne and His kingdom would be established forever. It is agreed by theologians of all stirpes that there is obviously historical fulfilment in Jesus with this covenant. He is the royal descendant of David and being divine He is eternal in nature — therefore He is eternally fit to reign as the Davidic King. The point of contention centres around the question of when and how he fulfils the reigning aspect of the covenant. For many, Christ is fulfilling this now with His present session on the right and of His father's throne and thus the Kingdom is purely spiritual in nature. This brings us back to the problem highlighted in the beginning — that of a consistent hermeneutic. For to hold a purely spiritual kingdom view, one must spiritualise every prophetic confirmation of a future reign. We have already read such passages as Isaiah 2, to that we could add many others that will be looked at in the next section. The details are too precise to allow for such spiritualisation nor does it properly take into account the confirmation of this promise in Luke 2:31–33.

Finally, the New Covenant also adds to the foundational structure. Although, this covenant amplifies the blessing aspect and subsequently it has been understood solely in soteriological terms, there is still much that is to be fulfilled eschatologically that relates to the national salvation of Israel and their final restoration. It must be remembered that the New Covenant was made primarily with Israel and included these future national promises (Jeremiah 31:27–33). This awaits its final consummation in the Kingdom.

### **Prophetically Confirmed**

The second major foundation after the covenants is the repeated confirmations and visions of this future Kingdom contained in

prophets. The great British clergymen Bishop J.C. Ryle said it well, and his comments are all the more significant given that he wrote this prior to 1948 when modern Israel was established in their homeland.

“But time would fail me, if I attempted to quote all the passages of Scripture in which the future history of Israel is revealed. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah all declare the same thing. All predict, with more or less particularity, that in the end of this dispensation the Jews are to be restored to their own land and to the favour of God. I lay no claim to infallibility in the interpretation of Scripture in this matter. I am well aware that many excellent Christians cannot see the subject as I do. I can only say, that to my eyes, the future salvation of Israel as a people, their return to Palestine and their national conversion to God, appear as clearly and plainly revealed as any prophecy in God’s Word.”<sup>19</sup>

This vision of a future earthly reign that includes Israel and the nations is simply too large a topic to dismiss or even to understand solely in spiritual terms. We have already seen Isaiah’s grand vision of Messiah ruling from Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah confirms this for us:

Behold, *the days are coming*,” declares the LORD,  
“When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;  
And He will reign as king and act wisely  
And do justice and righteousness in the land.  
“In His days Judah will be saved,

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<sup>19</sup> J.C.Ryle. *Are you Ready for the End Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), pg. 183.

And Israel will dwell securely;  
And this is His name by which He will be called,  
'The LORD our righteousness.' **Jeremiah 23:5–6**

There are multiple other texts in the prophets that add to the overall picture of this earthly future Kingdom (Zechariah 14, Micah 4:1–4, Isaiah 60–62)

### **Eschatologically Fulfilled**

This is the third and final leg of the stool. The themes we find promised in the covenants and confirmed in the prophets are fully consummated in the NT and the future Kingdom age. Many have argued that we do not see any concern for material realities like “the Land” in the NT — thus they conclude that these promises have been annulled in one way or another and with this comes a rejection of premillennialism entirely. However, although the NT does not provide the same amount of detail, (why should it being that the OT has already provided this) it does confirm the same covenantal promises. We see the throne of David affirmed at Jesus birth (Luke 1:31–33); we see Jesus affirm the OT Kingdom when he promises his disciples that:

“you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” **Matthew 19:28**

Another pivotal text in the NT that confirms the national promises to Israel in the New Covenant is found in Romans 11:

<sup>26</sup> and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,  
“The Deliverer will come from Zion,

He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

<sup>27</sup> “This is My covenant with them,

When I take away their sins.” **Romans 11:26**

Paul seems to emphasize this point by his selection of Old Testament quotations. He first quotes a verse from Isaiah 59:20. The context is crucial; Isaiah 59 is an eschatological chapter dealing with the second coming of Christ in judgment at the end of the age, to repay those whose deeds are wicked. This same chapter describes Jesus as a “redeemer” who will come to Zion (location) and remove the sins of Israel (ethnicity). The next verse (Isaiah 59:21) links these events, the salvation of ethnic Israel to the New Covenant. This is supported by the second Old Testament quote that Paul selects from Jeremiah 31:33–34 where he explicitly ties the salvation of Israel to the New Covenant.

Now it is true that, through the grace of God, the gentiles have been blessed to share in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant and experience the benefits of salvation and the indwelling Holy Spirit which are available to all people today through the gospel and this is what we celebrate through communion. But Paul here is highlighting that there is more to the New Covenant than individual salvation; the fullness of the New Covenant includes the national regeneration of Israel. Not only this, but the New Covenant also includes the fulfilment of the Land promises originally given to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant.

Paul, in Romans 11, has now explained that part of this consummation involves the national salvation of Israel and the restoration of the nation to the land. Paul used these scriptures from the Old Testament to demonstrate that this is a theme which runs through the Bible and these scriptures have provided a chronological sequence for their fulfilment. They therefore provide a fitting overview of God’s redemptive plan for the nation of Israel.

## CONCLUSION

These three foundations are the theological basis for Davidic Kingdom Theology packaged as a comprehensive metanarrative of scripture. When understood like this we can use it to engage the major questions of culture that we see in corrupted humanistic kingdom models.

The Davidic Kingdom will be the only truly just and fair society ruled over by the only truly righteous King in all history. The extent of his restorative rule will include the created order and the animal Kingdom — which is a fantastic response to many today who advocate extreme climate policies or even Green eco-theology. Equally, we can proclaim the foundational element that in order to become a citizen of this future Kingdom you first have to find peace with its future King — thus it is also a wonderful vehicle for transmission of the gospel message.

# 2

## Dispensational Kingdom Postponement Theology As A Safeguard From Secularized Trends In evangelical Missiology

*Paul Miles*

### INTRODUCTION

On the surface, the term *social justice* sounds nice. After all, what would be the alternative? Social injustice? Nobody wants injustice. As with many Leftist terms, the term itself is not disagreeable. Everyone agrees that black lives matter; biblicists would even go a step further in proclaiming that black eternal lives matter. But the term *black lives matter* is not a response to the view that black lives *don't* matter; it is a call for an anti-biblical Marxist society. Likewise, the term *creation care* sounds biblical, until its advocates deny Christ's substitutionary atonement for mankind and call for men to redeem the world through environmental activism. The true mission of the church—if not orthodoxy itself—is at stake when secular justice syncretises with Christianity, but the postponement theology of dispensationalism provides a safeguard that could protect the pews from falling prey to this disturbing trend in missiology.

This is not to say that dispensationalists should reject the importance of environmental or social concerns (see Thomas Fretwell's chapter about that!); however, there are deviant missiologies that neglect biblical commands and replace them with anti-biblical mandates of so-called justice. Such missiologies are often built on a framework that sees the church as being on a mission to build a spiritual kingdom on earth. This kingdom-building work is typically defined in terms that are grounded on the antibiblical foundations that the secular world calls "justice." Dispensationalists derive a future, literal, and earthly Messianic kingdom by turning to the Scriptures and accepting them for their plain sense. A conclusion from the grammatical-historical reading of Scripture is that Jesus came to Israel and offered to establish His kingdom on earth, but He was rejected, and so He postponed His kingdom to a future day. This doctrine of kingdom postponement is a hallmark of dispensationalism and is sufficient to defend a distinctly dispensational missiology from the errant missiological trends of secular justice in evangelicalism that rest on a kingdom-now framework.

## **THE ROOTS AND RAMIFICATIONS OF JUSTICE MISSIOLOGY**

### **From Frankfurt to Intersectionality**

The Bible teaches that humans are a unique creation with intrinsic value (Gen. 1:26–27) and commands humans to work the earth responsibly (Gen. 1:28–31; 2:15–17), so it is no surprise that Christianity has improved the quality of life around the world for the past 2,000 years. This is not modern social justice. Social justice in its current and most popular manifestations is the practical side of critical theory. Critical theory is an advancement of Marxism that

goes beyond Marx's economic theory of the bourgeoisie oppressing the proletariat in economic terms and sees a social element of group oppression. Critical theory was developed in the 1920s and 1930s in the Frankfurt School of the Weimar Republic against the backdrop of the failed attempt of Marxism in the Soviet Union and led to the failed National Socialist experiment in Germany. National Socialism harboured some influential critical theorists and sent others into diaspora. After the National Socialist German Workers' Party went defunct, the philosophers continued to develop critical theory, especially in the fields of social science and environmentalism.<sup>1</sup> Modern proponents of critical theory summarise the notion:

As a critical theory the critique of political economy entails the recognition of suffering as the hidden truth of the relations of economic objectivity. Critical theory, therefore, is a critique of a world that is 'hostile to the subject', no matter that it is the social individual herself who endows the reified world with a consciousness and a will, not just in the economic sphere but in society at large, body and soul.<sup>2</sup>

In so many words, critical theory explains suffering by dividing the world into the oppressors and the oppressed. It is built on a Marxist worldview, not a biblical one.

As critical theory identifies oppressed groups, specialised fields of critical theory emerge. Feminist theory is a field of critical theory that specialises in women as an oppressed group. Queer theory is a branch of critical theory that specialises in the oppression of those

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<sup>1</sup> For a chilling study of National Socialism's lasting effect on modern ecological frameworks, see Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust* (Taos, NM: Trust House Publishers, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld, and Chris O'Kane "Introduction Key Texts and Contributions to a critical theory of Society" in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School critical theory* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2018), vol. 1, pg. 4.

who are non-heterosexual or non-gender binary. Critical race theory is a branch of critical theory that specialises in races, so it can be further divided into Asian critical race theory, Latino critical race theory, Black critical race theory, and others. The constant identification of new oppressed groups contributes to an important advancement in critical theory called *intersectionality*. Intersectionality deals with how people can be in multiple oppressed groups simultaneously. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* in 1989 to address legal challenges for Black women,<sup>3</sup> but intersectionality has since proven to be a constant work-in-progress, a global academic movement to identify and engulf new critical groups to go beyond the intersection of Black women to include many racial and ethnic groups, genders, nationalities, sexual orientations, disabilities, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> One proponent describes intersectionality:

Intersectionality shows how systems of oppression and discrimination are multiple. The most marginalised people, therefore, fall under multiple minority groups. Writings from feminist and womanist thinkers were critical in the development of thinking (contesting categories of identity and exploring issues of marginalisation) which later came to characterise queer theory.<sup>5</sup>

The call for intersectionality has contributed to the specialisation of individual fields of critical theory. Latino critical race theory intersects with feminist theory and becomes Chicana feminism. Feminist

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<sup>3</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of race and Sex: A Black feminist critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, feminist theory and Antiracist Politics” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, 139–167.

<sup>4</sup> For a history of some important developments through 2013, see Devon W. Carballo, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, Barbara Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a theory,” *Du Bois Review* 10:2 (Fall 2013), 405–424.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Greenough, *Queer theologies* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 24.

theory, Queer theory, and Crip theory (the critical theory of disability) can form a unique intersection, for example, in the book entitled, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.<sup>6</sup> There is seemingly no limit to the possibilities of numbers and types of intersections in critical theory.

Practical applications of the Marxist ideologies of critical theory and intersectionality come to fruition in fields such as economics and ecology. The history that traces Marxism to modern ecosocialism can be abridged from the words of one advocate:

Most basically, Marx argues that the mode of production generally produces particular legal formations such as the liberal property and contract regimes... class conflict constitutes the central feature of the organization of production for both capitalism and all other modes of production. ...despite classical liberalism's superficial emphasis on political equality and on economic freedom of choice, the reality of the classical liberalism historical era was marked by widespread and multifaceted systems of economic-, social-, and political-based subordination. ...Under historical classical liberalism conditions, such class-, race-, and gender-based subordination also had crucial intersections with environmental devastation. ...the ecofeminist school holds that all forms of domination under hegemonic liberalism are intrinsically interlinked—i.e., as undergirded by such normative dualisms such as masculine over feminine, white over non-white, society over nature, etc., where women, non-whites, and the environment are “othered” and thus subordinated.<sup>7</sup>

As a fundamentally Marxist ideology, one might anticipate that ecosocialism would be inherently atheistic, but there are some clarifications to make on this point.

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<sup>6</sup> Alison Kafer, *feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas F. Stump, *Remaking Appalachia: Ecosocialism, Ecofeminism, and Law* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2021), 53–54, 56–57.

## Paganism Contra Biblicism

Much of the ecology debate between atheists and conservatives boils down to the debate between the biblical worldview, which draws a clear distinction between the Creator and creation, as contrasted to the atheist worldview that sees a continuity of being between nature and a common source. Consider, for example, a quote from the atheist, Niel deGrasse Tyson:

We are all connected; To each other, biologically, to the earth, chemically, and to the rest of the universe, atomically. That's kinda cool! That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It's not that we are better than the universe; we're part of the universe. We're in the universe and the universe is in us.<sup>8</sup>

Notice the continuity. According to Tyson, all life shares a common origin in the primordial soup whence life evolved. Moreover, we share origins with all matter since we were together in the Big Bang. This concept has been labelled "Continuity of Being," and is similar to Pagan myths and Eastern philosophy, as opposed to the biblical view of "Creator/Creation Distinction." As such, it should come as no surprise that Marxism, being founded on atheism, aligns more properly with Paganism than with Christianity.

Ecosocialism often carries undertones of pluralistic spiritualism to fight Christianity, which is characterised as a Western Religion.<sup>9</sup> For example, one ecowomanist calls for an Afrocentric approach that is rooted in traditional West African Paganist concepts, such as *Nyam* "the enduring power and energy possessed by all life" or *Da*, "the

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<sup>8</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, "We Are Star Stuff — Cosmic Poetry." Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QADMMmU6ab8>

<sup>9</sup> On this point, the dispensationalist is wise to point out that God inspired men from the Middle East, not Europe, to write the Bible.

energy that carries creation, the force field in which creation takes place,” or *Ache*, “a regulated kinship among human, animal, mineral, and vegetable life.”<sup>10</sup> Recognising that this could lead to Whites appropriating African culture, the same author proposes that “White ecofeminists can reclaim their own pre-Christian European cultures, such as the Wiccan tradition, for similar concepts of interconnectedness, community, and immanence found in West African traditions.”<sup>11</sup>

Atheism, Marxism, Ecosocialism, critical theory, Crip theory, Queer theory, *Nyam, Da, Ache*, Wicca, Ecofeminism, social justice, eco-justice, etc. are all Pagan ideas. Introducing them to Christianity is nothing short of syncretism.

## FROM ANTI-BIBLICAL THEORY TO ANTI-BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

### The Perfect Storm of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The previous section considered the philosophical origins of current justice movements. A philosopher may sit in his think tank all day and dream up wonders, but it is nothing more than a dream if it does not somehow penetrate society. The Queer theologian, Chris Greenough, ascribes the popularity of Queer theory to the activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

The rise of queer theory must not be viewed solely as a development rooted in the transformative brilliance of the 20th century’s critical

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<sup>10</sup> Shamara Shantu Riley, “Ecology Is a Sistah’s Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism” in *Ecofeminism: feminist Intersections with Other Animals & the Earth*, Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. Second ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 102.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

thinkers. Queer theory developed alongside hard-fought activism from second-wave feminism and the gay and lesbian liberation movements... The theory which began to germinate in academic settings was nourished by the social and political climate of the day.<sup>12</sup>

The history of critical theory can be seen as a series of developments since Marx. An early, but key development was the reformation of Marxism into critical theory at the Frankfurt School. This development contributed to the philosophical basis of National Socialism, but after that failure, critical theory went through some revisions on philosophical grounds. Another development of critical theory was the popularisation of the ideology through activism that is most associated with the Baby Boomer generation. The example above is specific to Queer theory, but similar movements for other groups were prevalent as well.

It happens that this history relating to Marxism aligns chronologically with some changes that were happening in evangelicalism around the same time. The battle over fundamentalism at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in certain lines of orthodoxy being drawn in the sand. These lines were defended for a generation or so until a new evangelicalism arrived on the scene. In the late 1950s, evangelicals started to build the bridge back to liberals, which opened a door to the aberrant social gospel of progressive Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

The parallel dwindling of classic fundamentalism into neo-evangelicalism came to a head in the 1960s. By the time intersectionality emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, neo-evangelicalism was a perfect target for the new Marxism. So how did it come to be that critical theories syncretised into evangelical Missionology?

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Greenough, *Queer theologies*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> For the history from a dispensationalist's perspective, see Gary Gilley, *The Social Justice Primer: In search of the message and mission of the church* (Springfield, IL: Think on These Things Ministries, 2019), Kindle location 169–195

## Syncretising Theory into Theology

Critical *theologies* are nothing more than syncretisms of Christianity with critical *theories*. A theologian can take a “theory” that is a subdiscipline of critical theory and change the word “theory” to “theology” and it becomes a critical theology. Queer theory is syncretised to become Queer theology, feminist theory is syncretised to become feminist theology, Crip theory is syncretised to become Crip theology, and so forth. These critical theologies do not serve to seek the grammatical-historical sense of the biblical text, but rather to usurp Christianity in the name of liberation. In the words of Greenough:

The activism, resistance, and protest from feminist and lesbian and gay groups paved the way for social justice for marginalised groups. Against this backdrop, feminist theory, womanist theory, feminist theology, and gay and lesbian theologies interrogated traditional Christian understandings of gender and sexuality, exposing its patriarchal and heteronormative power structures. Queer theory exposes heteronormative assumptions within society and culture. Queer theologies undo traditional theology by deconstructing it, by critiquing the patriarchy and heteronormative assumptions at play in its production. Queer theologies liberate Christianity from the bondage of patriarchy and heteronormativity.<sup>14</sup>

Marxism developed into critical theory, which then syncretised into critical theology. Since intersectionality transformed critical theory, it should come as no surprise that it also transformed critical theology.

Queer theology, feminist theology, and theology of race may seem to be unrelated, but they have all become intertwined through

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<sup>14</sup> Chris Greenough, *Queer theologies*, 29.

the hermeneutics of intersectionality, such that one Queer theologian has observed “that questions of sex and questions of race are always inextricably related.”<sup>15</sup> The sin of racism is anti-biblical; so are the aberrant views of gender roles and sexuality that Queer theory and feminist theory promote, but Queer and feminist theologies have managed to penetrate further into mainstream Christianity in recent years through their attachment to Black theology, which has come to the forefront through the Black Lives Matter Movement and related movements. As one “African American queer lesbian womanist scholar” puts it, “The disenfranchisement of women intersects with the disenfranchisement of Black men, of poor people, etc.; the disenfranchisement of Black lesbian women intersects with the disenfranchisement of transgender women, and so on.”<sup>16</sup> Every group that can claim oppression has a doctrine that can be built under the umbrella of critical theology.

A related concept to critical theology is liberation theology, which describes missions to relieve social ailments, typically with an emphasis on poverty. Liberation theology is derived experientially, not biblically. Consider, for example, the words of Curtiss Paul DeYoung, a Professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University:

liberation theology is grounded in the daily life of impoverished people. Scripture is interpreted using the lens of people’s experience. It is a lived theology rather than an abstract one. It is not a theology for the oppressed, offered to them by the institutional church. Liberation theology is not a theology that calls those who are not oppressed to go and serve the poor. Rather, it is a theology that emerges from the life experiences of people who are poor and oppressed. Liberation

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<sup>15</sup> Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer theology* (London, SCM Press, 2011), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), xx.

## 2. DISPENSATIONAL KINGDOM POSTPONEMENT THEOLOGY

theology is a theology of the oppressed. To fully understand liberation theology it must be lived (rather than learned or acquired in an academic setting). Perhaps a better way to understand it is to think of it as a new way of doing theology. Liberation theology is deeply rooted in the reading and application of the Bible by the poor themselves (often using the passages of Scripture noted earlier, especially the exodus narratives). This reading and application are done in a community setting and thereby avoid the limiting factor of individualism. The experience of poverty and oppression is a life text read alongside the Bible...

Since liberation theology emerges from the grass roots as poor and oppressed people reflect on their life experiences and biblical texts, there is a diversity of ways in which liberation theology takes root. With common themes, each location has its own distinct emphases. In portions of Africa, notions of African healing have influenced the shape of liberation theology, especially given AIDS and other diseases. Asian forms of liberation theology are often molded in a multireligious context in which repressive state governments are at work. Ecological issues are also central to some forms of liberation theology in Asia. Always, though, oppression and poverty are central, as in Korean Minjung liberation theology (theology of the common people), which has become a significant social justice theology in South Korea.<sup>17</sup>

There are at least three things for the dispensationalist to take away from this quote. First, liberation theology comes from interpreting experience. Any time that a liberation theologian approaches the biblical text, he does so through the lens of his own experience

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<sup>17</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, "Christianity: Contemporary Expressions" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess, eds. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 65–66.

rather than seeking authorial intent. Second, the emphasis changes based on where the liberation theologian serves. The hermeneutical shortcoming here is apparent even from outside the field of biblicalism. E. D. Hirsch—who is a literary critic, not a biblicalist—rose an excellent objection to the tendency for people to allow a text to change meanings:

A doctrine widely accepted at the present time is that the meaning of a text changes... Of course, if any theory of semantic mutability were true, it would legitimately banish the author's meaning as a normative principle in interpretation, for if textual meaning could change in any respect there could be no principle for distinguishing a valid interpretation from a false one.<sup>18</sup>

Liberation theology's hermeneutics of mutable meaning falls on this point. Third, ecological issues are inseparable from several manifestations of liberation theology. The significance of this third point is worth expounding.

### **The Intersection of Critical Theology and Eco-Theology**

The merge of antibiblical eco-justice with Christianity, which formed modern eco-theology is typically traced to a lecture delivered in 1966 by a medieval historian named Lynn White Jr. The text of the lecture was published as an article entitled, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."<sup>19</sup> While White identified as "a churchman,"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" *Science* 155:3767 (March 10, 1967), 1203–1207.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1206.

he also accepted the narrative of evolution and shamed Christians for their attitudes that “Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”<sup>21</sup> White summarises his conclusion:

We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology—hitherto quite separate activities—joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.<sup>22</sup>

White praised the beatniks of those days because they “show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.”<sup>23</sup> It seems that from the beginning of the movement, Christian eco-justice has had roots of atheism and eastern philosophy;<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> That Eastern philosophy has emerged to the surface again in a recent call for Asian Christians to participate in interfaith dialogue “for the development of contextual intersectional or liberationist ecotheologies which may redress this inequality” with practitioners of traditional religions, Buddhists, Confucians, and Daoists. See Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung, Tanya Riches, *Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis Religions* 11:7 (2020), DOI:10.3390/rel11070341.

indeed, Christian eco-theology is dominated by panentheism (“God *in* all”),<sup>25</sup> which is softer than pantheism (“God *is* all”), but even non-dispensational evangelicals<sup>26</sup> have identified this as a problematic doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

The relationship between social justice and eco-justice is not as distant as it may seem, as one eco-theologian relates the two:

Practices of social justice hitherto associated with humanitarian mission—practices like charity, simplicity, economic fairness, political solidarity, and compassion—turn out to be indispensable for rightly perceiving the natural world and doing justice to creation. We have to practice loving the weak and suffering with the oppressed, say ecojustice theologians, in order to understand how God loves creation.<sup>28</sup>

social justice theologians likewise embrace eco-justice theology. The Brown theologian, René Padilla, says that the church’s mission is *misión integral*, which he defines as “the mission of the whole church to the whole of humanity in all its forms, personal, communal, social,

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<sup>25</sup> As a notable exception, the socio-ecologist, Brian Snyder, modifies some panentheistic ecotheologies for a novel ecotoxicological perspective from the Creator/creation distinction (which he calls dualism), not in opposition to the former, but as “an alternative means of arriving at the same place.” See Brian F. Snyder, “Christian Environmental Ethics and Economic Stasis” *Worldviews* 23 (2019), 154–170.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Oliver D. Crisp “Against Mereological Panentheism” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11:2 (2019), 23–41.

<sup>27</sup> Some ecotheologians would disagree on the importance of an orthodox understanding of God. Laura Ruth Yordy makes the shocking statement, “The anxiety about pantheism, nature-worship, or other sorts of paganism overshadows the concern about creation. But why, in a culture as nature-despising as our own, should nature-worship be of such concern? It is almost as if we hesitate to feed the starving children in Afghanistan lest we make them fat.” Laura Ruth Yordy, *Green Witness*, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68.

economic, ecological, and political.”<sup>29</sup> Another Brown theologian, Robert Chao Romero, goes as far as to call *misión integral* “Brown soteriology—a Latina/o view of salvation.”<sup>30</sup> The connection between social justice and eco-justice is evident in feminist circles as well (often with a presupposed low view of Scripture):

Although Lynn White’s (1967) critique of Christianity’s anthropocentric dominion over nature is probably the first and best-known, feminist and ecofeminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983, 1992), Carol Christ (1997, 1979), Charlene Spretnak (1982), and Elizabeth Dodson Gray (1979) advanced beyond White’s, offering significant critiques of monotheistic, patriarchal religions that worship a sky god and remove spirituality and the sacred from the earth, placing Hell beneath our feet and Heaven in the sky, deifying men, and valuing men’s associated attributes over the values, attributes, and bodies of women, children, non-human animals, and the rest of nature.<sup>31</sup>

The call for eco-justice goes hand-in-hand with the call for secular justice of all sorts, be it related to race, gender, poverty, or whichever oppressed group or groups the critical theologian happens to be thinking about.

Eco-justice and justice missiology (specifically, missiology with a liberation slant) are inseparable from critical theology and justice

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<sup>29</sup> Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla, eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires: Kairos Ediciones, 2004), 9; quoted by Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social justice, theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Greta Gaard, “Toward New EcoMasculinities, EcoGenders, and EcoSexualities,” in *Ecofeminism: feminist Intersections with Other Animals & the Earth*, Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. Second ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 268.

missiology. This concept may seem counterintuitive at first until one considers that critical theology is nothing more than critical theory that is forced into Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Wherever critical theory goes, critical theology goes. Since critical theory calls for environmental and social activism, justice missiology does likewise.

## **RESPONDING TO THE FALSE GOSPEL OF CRITICAL THEOLOGY**

### **A Call for the Conservative Voice**

This volume is a collaboration of work to develop missiology from a dispensationalist perspective. There is a line of defence against justice missiology that is specific to dispensationalism, but before delving into that, it is worth refuting some points in justice missiology on grounds of orthodoxy that dispensationalists share with non-dispensational brothers and sisters in Christ.

Everyone is born spiritually dead and on a path to hell. Justice missiology keeps people on this path by distracting the church from evangelisation, thereby preventing the unbeliever from hearing, understanding, and believing the Gospel. While we hold that dispensationalism is vital to a proper understanding of Scripture, the doctrine of salvation takes precedence, so this section will appeal to broader conservatism and point out some serious errors in critical theology for our non-dispensationalist brothers and sisters in Christ to join us in the stance for the Gospel.

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<sup>32</sup> Jenkins puts his syncretistic missiology transparently when he writes, “The reach for grace allows ecojustice to integrate the practical functions of both secular strategies, and to do so from within hallmark practices of Christian identity and ecclesial mission.” Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 66.

## Heterodoxy and Christus Victor

The aforementioned concept of a Brown soteriology should raise concerns with evangelicals. The notion that salvation is not an eternal rescue from hell, but rather a temporal rescue from oppression and pollution is a clear demarcation from biblical Christianity. It is not unique to Brown soteriology at all; it is the fundamental soteriology of critical theology. Such views are often grounded in a short-sighted theory of the atonement. Rather than seeing Christ's work on the cross as relating to men's salvation from hell, critical theologians will often accept a Christus Victor view of the atonement. Instead of seeing Christ expiating sin for men to be saved from hell through faith in Christ, the Christus Victor theory sees Christ's task on the cross as removing the curse (which is often described mythologically rather than literally) so that man can live more comfortably on earth. This perspective gained traction after the release of a book that Gustaf Aulén wrote in 1931, which contained such descriptors as:

The victory of Christ over the powers of evil is an eternal victory, therefore present as well as past. Therefore Justification and Atonement are really one and the same thing; Justification is simply the Atonement brought into the present, so that here and now the Blessing of God prevails over the Curse.<sup>33</sup>

This is the view of the atonement that fits best with justice missiology.

Justice missiology shifts the church away from the biblical mission of evangelism to a secular mission of healing the planet. This

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<sup>33</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, A.G. Herbert, trans. (London: S.P.C.K., 1975), 150.

shift would be bad enough as it inhibits people from *hearing* the Gospel, but the theology also prevents people from *understanding and believing* the Gospel. For example, the eco-theologian, Willis Jenkins, exposes his view of the atonement by writing:

Inhabiting the reconciliation accomplished by Christ, human relations with all creatures are restored and redeemed. When Christ sets the captives free, he frees them to restorative service in a land damaged by sin. The Christian mission to all the earth means becoming physician and healer to the earth, priests and ministers to all creation.<sup>34</sup>

Notice that the mission is not proclaiming the message of salvation through faith, but rather the mission is to repair the environment through works. This is a works-based religion that shifts the responsibility of restorative work from Christ to men, but it also neglects entirely the real problem of sin and its consequences. This is the message that Jenkins and others preach and it is nothing short of a false gospel.

### **An Example in Evangelical Missions**

In 2020, almost 90 years after Aulén's book originally came out, America was being ravaged by critical race theory in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. One of the biggest evangelical organisations in the world, Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), was submitting to critical theology. The doctrinal and missional drift into social justice caused some internal strife in the organisation, prompting several staff members to write a 179-page document entitled, *Seeking*

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<sup>34</sup> Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 89.

*Clarity and Unity*<sup>35</sup> in November 2020. The document circulated internally before being released to the public in May 2021. Cru has since then withdrawn the document from its website.<sup>36</sup> The bulk of the social justice concern is related to critical race theory as Cru staff accepted the anti-biblical agenda of BLM,<sup>37</sup> but the presence of Queer theory and related issues in Cru are also covered in the document.<sup>38</sup> The background of *Seeking Clarity and Unity* is worth bringing out here, because it is a testimony to how widespread critical theology has become within evangelicalism. Each missionary has a team of supporters behind him, so each critical theologian within Cru represents a team of evangelical supporters who are backing his theology. Fortunately, there is still a core of Cru staff that have not fallen for critical theology.

The authors of *Seeking Clarity and Unity* respond well to Christus Victor and social justice:

If you hold to this Christus Victor view of the atonement, where salvation and sanctification are inseparable from participating in “kingdom building,” then what you are really saying is: we are not saved by faith, but by ongoing “allegiance” to Jesus and his kingdom... So, what is this new gospel we are hearing? It sounds like: Jesus destroyed the powers of sin and Satan on the cross, and we respond by giving him

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<sup>35</sup> Scott Pendleton, et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity* (Cru, 2020). Available online at <https://languagendreligion.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/seeking-clarity-and-unity.pdf> (accessed August 19, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> In the *Christianity Today* article, “Cru Divided Over Emphasis on race” (published on June 3, 2021), Curtis Yee gives the history of the document and links to a page on the Cru website that is not functional, presumably because the document has been withdrawn. It is still available online elsewhere. See Yee’s article at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/june/cru-divided-over-emphasis-on-race.html> (accessed August 19, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Scott Pendleton, et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity* (Cru, 2020), 4, 6, 9, 29, 40, 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 12, 24, 35, 40, 45, 47, 50, 56, 59, 73, 74, 75, 92, 93, 95, 97, 98, 101, 103, 104, 110, 122.

allegiance as king, which we demonstrate by building his kingdom in the world, primarily through feeding the poor, liberating the oppressed, and razing social structures of injustice. In a sense, this new gospel was inevitable because it is the only gospel that can support and justify the social justice agenda.<sup>39</sup>

Not only does justice missiology prevent the church from doing the tasks to which God has appointed her, justice missiology stands in direct opposition to the true message of salvation! The social justice agenda is not the biblical gospel. This should be apparent regardless of where a conservative stands in the classic debate between dispensationalists and covenant theologians. It does not take a dispensationalist to realise that Christ died for the sin of mankind so that anyone who believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

That said, an additional and distinctly dispensational line of reasoning can be developed by refuting the kingdom theology of justice missiologists from a postponement theology perspective.

## THE KINGDOM IN JUSTICE MISSIOLOGY

### **The Kingdom of Christus Victor and Justice Theology**

We are not speaking out against acts of kindness or responsibility, but we are rejecting missiologies that distract the church from her purpose, especially those justice missiologies that build a spiritual kingdom upon anti-biblical foundations. This is not just a matter of semantics. Justice missiology embraces a long-term and full-scale

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 20.

ecological reformation of the church. In the words of one eco-justice advocate:

Christians who journey with creation-awareness and eco-justice intention are contributing to the ecological reformation that promises to: a) shift the axis of Christian theology, ethics, and liturgy, and transform our human vocation, b) reshape and reconstruct the churches' theology, worship, mission and witness to meet the twenty-first century, and c) within our new historical context of real biophysical limits and a threatened earth, seek human rights and otherkind's well-being together. That is a comprehensive, long-term agenda—much bigger than dealing with an environmental issue or changing some lifestyle habits.<sup>40</sup>

Justice missiology is not as doctrinally-unified as other new religious movements, but the overwhelming tendency is for the justice missiologist to position his justice mandates onto a kingdom-now framework, such that the Christian grows a spiritual kingdom through Social and eco-justice. This is a theological weak point where the dispensationalist, in particular, is poised to respond, but first, some explanation is due.

The kingdom-now framework of justice missiology often goes back to the *Christus Victor* view of the cross; in the words of Gustaf Aulén, “The central idea of *Christus Victor* is the view of God and the Kingdom of God as fighting against evil powers ravaging in mankind.”<sup>41</sup> This in turn becomes a justice missiology as the Christian grows the alleged spiritual kingdom through activism. Since this sort of missiology stems from a heretical view of the cross, it comes as no

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<sup>40</sup> Dieter T. Hessel, “The Church’s eco-justice Journey” in *eco-justice—The Unfinished Journey*, William E. Gibson, editor (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 272.

<sup>41</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, ix.

surprise when soteriological issues come out in the kingdom-building work of justice missiology.

Brian McLaren summarised some conversations that led to his apostasy in his book, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. One character is a former pastor named Neo. It is revealed later in the book that Neo is a universalist,<sup>42</sup> but in an earlier conversation, Neo redefines Christ's redemption from a soteriological sense to a missiological social justice sense:

If in the third millennium Christ enters Buddhist culture, he will spark an outbreak of real Christianity—just not Western European Christianity. And if Christ enters Islamic culture, he will spark an outbreak of real Christianity, but again, it won't be Western European Christianity. That to me is the missionary challenge of the third millennium: not eradicating Buddhist or Islamic or tribal cultures but blessing them with Christ—letting Christ enter them and drive the evil from them... and in that way redeem them.<sup>43</sup>

There is a particular attraction to this idea, as the dispensationalist would agree that a form of Christianity that is specifically a “Western European Christianity” should be suspect. The dispensationalist reads the Bible for the authors' intention, which often involves shedding the reader's cultural lenses and understanding the original cultural context. Western European culture has nothing positive to add to the text, but by the same token, neither does Islamic or Buddhist culture.

What does Universalism have to do with the kingdom of God here? Neo explains:

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<sup>42</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 122–133.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–108.

Jesus, it seems to me, had a different way—radically different. He wanted to send his people into the culture with a mission—not in service to the culture in the sense of helping the culture achieve its own ends but in a kind of divinely subversive way, *culte* infiltrating *culture* with the kingdom of God, not trying just to serve it as a civil religion would, but more like trying to redeem it for a higher agenda, God’s agenda.<sup>44</sup>

Notice again that redemption is spoken of in terms of purpose now rather than payment of sin on the cross (1 Tim. 2:5, 6; 2 Pet. 2:1) or release from the destination of hell (Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:15). Redemption is understood, among other things, in terms of social justice in this scheme. In Universalism, nobody will be separated from God for eternity, but Neo still draws a distinction between church and non-church. Rather than drawing a church/kingdom distinction as dispensationalists do, he sees a church/kingdom overlap. As a universalist, Neo cannot define the church in dispensational terms, as there is no unique people group that is redeemed among others. Instead, he sees the kingdom as broader than the church and the church as a catalyst for kingdom growth:

The church exists... to be a catalyst of the kingdom. In other words, it doesn’t just exist for its own aggrandizement. It exists for the benefit of the kingdom of God, something bigger than itself. Of course the church must grow, numerically and spiritually, but that growth matters so the church can become more and more catalytic for the kingdom of God, for the good of the world... the church exists for the world—to be God’s catalyst so that the world can receive and enter God’s kingdom more and more... God’s kingdom is a reality that both inhabits history

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 107.

and transcends it... [The kingdom] is where the historical and the eternal come together.<sup>45</sup>

The Christus Victor view of atonement is properly considered heresy and is, therefore, to be rejected by all orthodox conservative Christians. The connection to the kingdom is a particular accent that can help the dispensationalist respond to the Christus Victor view of the atonement. By extension, postponement theology can help dispensationalists identify problems with the related missiologies that tell Christians to redeem cultures through kingdom-growing works of social justice.

### **A Crip theology from Christus Victor to Justice Kingdom-Building**

So far, this chapter has taken concepts from different theologians to explain justice missiology and the kingdom-now theology that it is based on. Perhaps it would be helpful to take an example from a single author who brings this all together in one work.

Shane Clifton is a Crip theologian who lays out his case in a fashion that parallels other critical theologians. He begins with the Christus Victor theory of the atonement, which redefines the kingdom and shifts the purpose of the cross away from paying the penalty of sin:

As the incarnate Son, Jesus proclaims the good news of the kingdom of God, the defeat of evil, the overcoming of poverty, captivity, and sickness— a message most fully embodied on the cross where Jesus offers satisfaction for human sin. But satisfaction is not to be understood as divine retribution inflicted on the Son. Rather, it is the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice of the Son and Jesus' choice to submit

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 121.

## 2. DISPENSATIONAL KINGDOM POSTPONEMENT THEOLOGY

to evil and transform it into a good. And this is the key point: the cross is a symbol of transformation because the evil done to Jesus is not reciprocated but answered with love and forgiveness.<sup>46</sup>

Since the Crip theologian denies the biblical view of the penalty of sin, it comes as no surprise when he casts the Gospel aside and proposes that Jesus did not teach about salvation from hell after death, but rather a salvation unto a more meaningful life now:

Jesus teaches and then embodies a solution to the problem of evil: the divine choice to submit to the injustice and suffering of the cross, and transform the evil done to him into a good by responding with love and forgiveness... What is important is the recognition that the life and teachings of Jesus are not abstract transactions focused on whether or not a person gets to heaven, but, rather, that they are intended to make a difference in human history. It does so by orienting people to meaning, the meaning of the story of Jesus, which gives life purpose. And this purpose is achieved by exercising virtues (charity, hope, faith, forgiveness, mercy, and so on) in the formation of a new community (the church), which is a vessel of the good news of the kingdom of God (God's just rule) for the wider world.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of the book, the Crip theology understanding of faith has become so misconstrued that it bears little similarity to actual Christianity:

If faith in God is the knowledge born of religious love, then what it believes and trusts in is the gospel of Christ, the good news that the

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<sup>46</sup> Shane Clifton, *Crippled Grace: Disability, Virtue Ethics, and the Good Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 42.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

kingdom of God will be established in the power of the Spirit, that God's love can and will prevail over deathly and disabling evil in all its manifestations. Thus faith enables us to trust in the love of God, to love others in return, and to live out of the gift of that love by refusing to accept that life is meaningless.

In a Christian context, the object of faith is Jesus Christ. The message and life of Jesus establish the vision of the good life for believers, as well as the virtues that enable a person to achieve it.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than seeing Jesus's miracles as authenticating His messages (including the offer of the kingdom), Crip theologians appeal to Christ's miracles to justify a current kingdom-building social justice mandate. For example, Clifton proposes that "Taken as a whole, the meaning of Jesus' message, healings, and exorcisms is the good news of the coming kingdom, which, as already noted, is an attack on evil in all its manifestations."<sup>49</sup> By treating Christ's life and ministry as paradigmatic, the Crip theologian claims that:

...it is not the miraculous and supernatural that are in view but, rather, his modeling of the love of God and neighbor. As has already been stated, the standout feature of Jesus' ministry is his promise of the coming kingdom of God, categorized by the embrace of people society normally excludes: the poor, women, sinners, children, the meek, the sick and disabled. The cures of Jesus are not described as miracles (a modern word), but as signs that reconstitute the people of God.<sup>50</sup>

Since Jesus' work is described as an example for Christians, and since His kingdom offer is reframed to be an exemplary attack on evil,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 75.

the critical theologian ends up with a redefined task for the people of God that rests on a kingdom-building mandate that cannot coincide with postponement theology.

By this point, Crip theology has crossed several lines of demarcation that can be addressed adequately from any conservative theological position, but postponement theology is a uniquely dispensationalist concept that responds to the kingdom program upon which the missiology is built.

### **Samples from across the Justice Missiology Spectrum**

The dependence on a kingdom-now framework is not unique to Crip theology. Justice missiology usually depends on a redefinition of the kingdom into a current form that is growing through justice work. That justice missiologists see kingdom-building as a current mandate is evident, for example, in the following sample of statements:

Jesus acts through us to bring his kingdom to bear in every space of hurt so that God's kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven. He sends us out in mission integral to serve as agents of God's reconciliation, redemption, and justice.<sup>51</sup>

...there remains a basic difference between the reproductive *rights* movement, concerned with women's and men's freedom to choose their parental roles, and the reproductive *responsibilities* movement, concerned with raising consciousness regarding the universally important small family goal. Perhaps as the environmental crisis continues to deepen and the danger to God's kingdom on earth becomes increasingly evident, these positions will flow together. Both are based, after all,

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church*, 43.

on vastly strengthening women's rights, education, and opportunities around the world.<sup>52</sup>

Such queer theologies are concerned to unmask allegedly revelatory or natural idolatry not so that personal capitalism may flourish (that you can do what you like if you have the power and resources to do it) but to herald in a new order, the "kingdom of God" or, more simply, a church where women priests can properly represent Christ and Mary. Of course theologians are not able to make this critique from any foundationalist standpoint, replicating the problem that queer theory aims to unmask, but from within a complex tradition which they must both criticize and learn from.<sup>53</sup>

Through the exegetical work that Glen Stassen primarily undertook, we became convinced that Jesus drew most heavily for his version of 'Kingdom of God' on materials in Isaiah, especially the redemptive/restorationist themes of Isaiah 40–66. In choosing to anchor his preaching mainly in this part of Isaiah, Jesus was authentically connected to his Jewish roots but, perhaps like all prophets, selectively appropriated those aspects of the tradition that he wanted to highlight... Stassen and I identified seven 'marks' of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching, citing passages in the Synoptic Gospels that allude to, cite or parallel passages in Isaiah. These seven purported marks of the Kingdom are deliverance (salvation), justice, peace, healing, restoration of community, the experience of God's active redeeming presence, and joyful human response... To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what

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<sup>52</sup> Carol Holst, "Forging Common Ground on Population Issues" in *eco-justice—The Unfinished Journey*, William E. Gibson, editor (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 187–188.

<sup>53</sup> Gavin D'Costa "Queer Trinity" in *Queer theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, Gerald Loughlin, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 270.

it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ. This is also the primary task of the Christian Church.<sup>54</sup>

The corporate presence of the Christian community in the world reflects foundational commitments to social justice, often conveyed through the symbol of the kingdom of God. Christian scholars contend that emulating the passion of Jesus for justice in the kingdom of God involves concrete actions in such areas as healthcare reform and ensuring access to healthcare for all persons, as well as requiring justice in health-related realms such as environmental and economic justice.<sup>55</sup>

...environmental practices model a new order, the rule of the Kingdom, and thus, at least proleptically, initiate the universal shalom of a new earth. In this case, stewardship redemptively transforms nature, efficaciously realizing Christ's restoration of all things.<sup>56</sup>

Using a feminist hermeneutic, I argue that the story [in Luke 7:36–50] is an exercise in erotic performance art that intends to liberate readers into a new relationship with Christ that is body- and pleasure-affirming... Jesus' and the woman's amorous performance art signals that excessive desire for the well-being of another's flesh is the grounds for salvation and forgiveness in God's new order of being. "The kingdom of God is among you," says Jesus in Luke 17:21. God's new order is not "out there" waiting to arrive; it is "here and now" as modeled in this parable of erotic intimacy.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> David P. Gushee and Cori D. Norred, "The Kingdom of God, Hope and Christian Ethics" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31:1 (2018), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Courtney S. Campbell "Death and Dying" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess, eds. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 572.

<sup>56</sup> Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 89.

<sup>57</sup> Mark I. Wallace, "Early Christian Contempt for the Flesh and the Woman Who Loved Too Much in the Gospel of Luke" in *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, Margaret D. Kamitsuka, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 38, 42.

May we begin beating our swords into plowshares now, and the kingdom will begin to be not simply something we hope for when we die but something we see on earth as it is in heaven, the kingdom that is among us and within us.<sup>58</sup>

Any constructive theological project that takes seriously women's and genderqueer people's bodies and sexualities is deeply eschatological. That is to say, the vision of how and what the world ought to be and how and what God's future holds forms the basis and inspiration for much of liberated, feminist, queered embodiment. Especially in a colonized context, an eschatological vision is necessary to discern what liberation, decolonization, and hope might look like... eschatology is... about the promised reign of God in all human experience and in all creation... This "here and now" eschatology fits well with a liberation, feminist, and queer understanding of eschatology. It roots our Christian hope in what God is doing to create a more just and liberated world. Nevertheless, precisely because justice is a major part of what we are hoping for, a sense of the timing and pacing of the eschaton is key.<sup>59</sup>

Literature that promotes Social and eco-justice from the perspective of critical theology is littered with kingdom-now language. Critical theologians must have a form of the kingdom today that they are building through their activism. To reject, as dispensationalists do, kingdom-now theology in favour of postponement theology is to kick the legs out from the chair upon which justice missiology sits.

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<sup>58</sup> Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 355–356.

<sup>59</sup> Rebecca M. M. Voelkel, *Carnal Knowledge of God: Embodied Love and the Movement for justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 79–80.

## **RESPONSES FROM DISPENSATIONAL POSTPONEMENT THEOLOGY**

### **The Specificity and Sufficiency of Postponement Theology in Responding to Justice Missiology**

Dispensational postponement theology contends that Jesus offered to establish on earth the literal, earthly, Messianic kingdom, which is described in the Old Testament, but when Israel rejected this offer, Jesus postponed the establishment of the kingdom to a future day. Alternative views include those which say that Christ came and, in one way or the other, reframed the promised kingdom into a current spiritual reality. Such systems demand a non-literal understanding of the Old Testament terms of the kingdom and an alteration of Christ's intentions while He was on earth. The aforementioned threats to evangelical missiology frequently sit on a kingdom-now framework, so a theology of kingdom postponement is beneficial to developing and defending a dispensational missiology.

Dispensationalists derive the doctrine of the kingdom and its offer and postponement from consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutics, as applied to both the Old and New Testaments. Christ's offer of the kingdom was contingent on Israel's repentance. Instead of repenting, Israel rejected her Messiah and His offer. After Israel's leadership ascribed Christ's miracles to Beelzebul, Jesus removed His offer, thereby postponing the kingdom to a future day when Israel will accept Her Messiah. Because of this postponement, the future 7-year tribulation will serve to push Israel to repentance, after which Christ will establish His millennial Messianic kingdom on earth. Postponement theology sets dispensationalism apart from other forms of conservative theology and serves as unique and sufficient grounds for rejecting the social justice agenda of critical theology because the kingdom has not yet been established.

This section will explore three biblical topics where dispensationalists disagree with justice missiologists over the nature of the kingdom. The first topic is the curtailed curse in Isaiah 11:6–10. The dispensationalist sees this passage as describing the future Messianic kingdom while the eco-justice theologian sees it as descriptive of current environmental activist efforts. The second topic is the kingdom offer and postponement. Dispensationalists see Jesus offering to establish His literal kingdom on earth, then postponing it upon Israel's rejection; social justice theologians sometimes see Jesus offering a kingdom, but typically agree that His kingdom has been established or inaugurated rather than postponed. The third topic is the miracle-working ministries of Christ and His disciples. Dispensationalists see Christ's miracles as authenticators of His kingdom offer (among other things), while social justice theologians tend toward a more anthropocentric purpose with Christ's example carrying over for today.

### **The Curtailed Curse in Isaiah 11:6–10**

The dispensationalist reads Old Testament prophecy and accepts that God will fulfill His promises as He described them. When one reads the Old Testament plainly, it is evident that when Messiah comes, He will reduce the curse on the land and animal kingdom which began at Adam's fall in Genesis 3 and which was intensified after the global flood in Genesis 9. Since eco-justice theologians insist that the kingdom is already, they spiritualise the Messianic kingdom in ways that replace the Messiah and His promises with themselves and their own deeds.

One passage that describes the state of nature in the kingdom is Isaiah 11:6–10:

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,

The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze;  
Their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.  
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
"For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord"  
As the waters cover the sea.  
"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,  
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;  
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,  
And His resting place shall be glorious."

Notice that Isaiah 11:6–9 describes a renewed environment, followed by vs. 10, which attaches the environment to the day when the Root of Jesse "shall stand as a banner to the people." The grammatical-historical interpretation is clearly eschatological; this passage describes the future Messianic kingdom. Since dispensationalists see that day as yet future, they see the redacted curse as yet future; since eco-theologians see the kingdom as already, they see the curtailed curse as already, but with the caveats that the Old Testament description cannot be taken literally and the responsibility falls on the Church to reduce the curse.

An example of an eco-justice missiology that emerges from an inaugurated view of Isaiah 11 is apparent in a sermon entitled, "The Reconciliation Of Creation: Especially Cows," in which Margaret B. Adam expositis Isaiah 11:6–9a:

Isaiah is not aiming at realism here [in Isaiah 11:6–9a]. Realism claims that some creatures must destroy other creatures. Human

animals use realism to defend the need to treat nonhuman animals as products. Isaiah names the brokenness that disrupts all creaturely flourishing, not just human flourishing. And he points to the fullness of creation freed from normative abuse. Even if the peaceable kingdom seems impossible now, it's clear that industrial farming does not reflect or anticipate that kind of flourishing...

But, where is this reconciliation? Where are the signs that systemic sin is undone? Why does zero-grazing seem a sensible strategy for large-scale farms? Why is it still so hard to eschew all animal products? Part of the answer is: I don't know... The other part of the answer is that Christian ethics directs us to live into that for which we hope. The ethical response to systemic brokenness is to embrace that already/not yet transformation with expanded imaginations and critically-examined practices.

First, we can demonstrate, by our actions, that we don't need to abuse other creatures for our own pleasure. It is not necessary to purchase cow milk when there are ample alternative milks on the store shelf... Second, learn about what happens on dairy farms. Do a little research on industrial farming. Visit a local small farm. Compare conditions on larger and smaller farms. Meet some cows... Third, make connections with other people asking similar questions. Share concerns, insights, and experiences. Eat together. Challenge each other to adopt more peaceable creaturely interactions.<sup>60</sup>

Since this theology departs from the soteriological doctrine of reconciliation, whereby Christ provides salvation from hell (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–20), the missiology shifts from proclaiming Christ's reconciliation with sinners to becoming friends with cows. This

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<sup>60</sup> Margaret B. Adam, "The Reconciliation Of Creation: Especially Cows," a sermon delivered at Hertford College Evensong. Available online at <https://www.becreature-kind.org/blog-posts/2017/7/24/the-reconciliation-of-creation-especially-cows> (accessed May 15, 2022).

missiology sits on a framework of “that already/not yet transformation,” which supposes the kingdom to be already inaugurated. If the kingdom is postponed, as the dispensationalist says, then the missiology collapses.

A problem with an “already” understanding of this passage is that since Isaiah 11:6–9 is not fulfilled in a plain sense, inaugurated interpreters are left to guess in what sense it is fulfilled. There is not and cannot be a consensus from spiritualised hermeneutics.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, eco-justice theologians hold to interpretations that could not have been held by the Scriptures’ original audiences since they propose that the ecological crisis began in the West with the Industrial Revolution. Earlier Christian interpreters could not have understood this, much less Isaiah’s original audience. While dispensationalists do not always agree on every detail of Scripture, certain concepts are readily apparent and will certainly surface from a grammatical-historical perspective. Among these concepts is the

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<sup>61</sup> John Sawyer tracks the history of interpretations of Isaiah. He notes that Eusebius of Caesarea supposed that Isaiah 11:6 is fulfilled by “the church of God, where noble people who have been decorated with worldly honors and awards are gathered together with the poor and the commoners,” while others “understand the wild beasts as referring to the barbarians and Greeks (Eusebius) or Jews (Cyril) transformed by the teachings of Christ.” Other commentators have proposed that “a little child shall lead them” is a reference “to Christ, already mentioned in Isaiah 9:6 (Jerome) and frequently described as a shepherd (Henry), but Calvin thinks instead of communities so obedient that their leaders will not need force or violence to restrain them (Calvin: cf. Cyril).” Verse 9 refers to the holy mountain, but this is often spiritualized as well, so that the interpretation of “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD” is left to the mercy of the interpreter. Sawyer continues: “Christian commentators from all ages relate it to New Testament texts about the disciples going forth to all nations (Matt 28:19; cf. John 6:45) (Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.13.8) and predictions that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’ (Phil 2:10) (Cyril). John Wesley’s sermon entitled ‘The General Spread of the Gospel’ (1783) is an exposition of this verse (Sermons 2.481–499).” John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Through The Centuries* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2018), 84–85.

Old Testament description of the partial restraining of the Edenic curse in the Messianic kingdom.<sup>62</sup>

That the original audience understood Isaiah 11:6–10 as a promise to curtail the curse is evident even to non dispensationalists. A glaring example would be the Jewish commentators who see Isaiah 11:6–9 as reference to the future Messianic kingdom while rejecting the legitimacy of Jesus Christ altogether.<sup>63</sup> Even liberal theologians will agree with the dispensationalist about what the text here is saying, even if they disagree with the text itself. J. M. M. Roberts has

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<sup>62</sup> The dispensationalist, Donald Cameron, collected statements from other dispensationalists on the restored animal kingdom. These theologians came from different backgrounds, but were in significant agreement because of their grammatical-historicism: “Dr Ironside comments: [Isaiah 11] Verses 6 to 9 are not to be take as symbolic. The actual fulfilment of the conditions of the animal world will be the natural outcome of the presence and authority of Christ.’ There is a shorter prophecy in Isa 65:25–26 about restored animal life. Dr Scroggie writes in a similar vein: ‘In that period, the blessings are material as well as spiritual; the lower creation and nature also participate in the new order of things, which certainly is not true of the Christian Age.’ William Kelly puts these matters into perspective: ‘Indeed the mighty and blessed transformation which the Lord will cause for the lower creation is but part of the still grander prospect which the reconciliation of all things opens (Col 1:20); when the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, even the universe, shall be headed up in the Christ, the heir of all things’ (Eph 1:10). Evolution will play no part—were there to be evolution—a purely hypothetical situation. To be consistent, this would make the carnivorous even more efficient raptors rather than peace loving! Only He who imposed the curse can and will remove it.” Donald CB Cameron, *The Millennium: Restoration after Retribution* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 2014), 156–157. He cites HA Ironside, *The Prophet Isaiah* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1952), 50; W Graham Scroggie, *Prophecy and History* (London & Edinburgh, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, nd), 98–99; and William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah* (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1975 reprint), 274.

<sup>63</sup> For example, see Andor Kelenhegyi, “The Beast Between Us: The Construction of Identity and Alterity through Animal Symbolism in Late Antique Jewish and Christian Tradition” PhD Dissertation, Central European University, Budapest, 2017, 219–220; cf. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael Pisha 12:1; Sifra Hukkotai 1. Interestingly, Samuel White’s commentary from 1709, which claims to approach Isaiah literally, mocking contains, “The *Jews* are so simple as to ground their Hopes of their Imaginary Messiah, still to come, upon this and other such like Expressions, the literal Completion of which they still expect.” Samuel White, *A commentary on the prophet Isaiah, wherein the literal sense of his prophecy’s is briefly explain’d* (London: Arthur Collins, 1709), 89.

written a commentary on Isaiah from a theologically liberal perspective, wherein he rightly notes a connection to the pre-fallen world, but unfortunately writes off the Genesis account as a myth, such that the reliability of Isaiah and other biblical authors<sup>64</sup> are diminished. This is in contradiction to the grammatical-historicist's insistence on biblical inerrancy, but then Roberts recognises that from the original audience's perspective, "the expectation of a return to that mythological golden age of peace and security between humans and animals under the messianic rule of God's ideal king is not surprising."<sup>65</sup> A key disagreement between the dispensationalist's and Roberts' perspectives is that while they agree with what the author meant, the dispensationalist *agrees with the biblical author* while Roberts diminishes it to a similar status as other Ancient Near Eastern texts.<sup>66</sup>

An even more condemning quote comes from within the eco-theology Movement itself. Gene Tucker, who generally agrees with Lynn White,<sup>67</sup> brings out some natural conclusions to a plain interpretation of Isaiah 11:6–9:

In the context of the announcement of a new Davidic king (11:1–5), these verses proclaim a transformation in the natural, cosmic sphere. Natural enemies in the animal world will live together in peace, even changing their diets. On the one hand, as so frequently in the prophetic literature, the poem stresses the relationship between justice, mercy, peace, and harmony in the natural order (cf. also Hos 1:18 and Ezek 34:25). Who does not long for a world without fear and violence? But

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<sup>64</sup> Roberts mentions Lev. 26:6; Ezek. 34:25–26; Hos. 2:18. J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Peter Machinist, ed. (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2015), 180. doi:10.2307/j.ctvgs0919.21 (accessed February 2, 2021).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–182.

<sup>67</sup> Gene M. Tucker, "Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment" *Journal of biblical Literature* 116:1 (Spring 1997), 3–6.

on the other hand, the lines suggest that the world may have been created good, even very good, but not quite good enough. The text presumes a negative evaluation of the world as it is, filled with predators and prey, violence and death. One message of the passage, to put it bluntly, is that there will come a time when the world will be made safe for domestic animals and for children.

It is a serious problem for the affirmation of a good creation. Such visions, wonderful as they are, when linked with the sense of a fallen humanity and an earth that is cursed, pave the way for the apocalyptic rejection of this world as it is. So, does creation need to be redeemed?<sup>68</sup>

Notice how Tucker appears to agree with the dispensational interpretation of Isaiah 11:1–5 (cf. Hos. 1:18; Ezek. 34:25). The disagreement is not what the text of Isaiah seems to say, but whether or not one should accept the plain meaning. Beginning with Genesis, Tucker argues that the ground was not corrupted at the fall, but rather that humanity's relationship to nature became detached and ambiguous.<sup>69</sup> His rejection of a literal approach to Genesis coincides with his rejection of a literal approach to Isaiah. Tucker's article never offers a reconciliation of Isaiah 11 with his eco-theology, but seems to sweep the issue under the rug.<sup>70</sup>

The grammatical-historical interpretation of the Scriptures reveals that the curse will be partially reduced in the days of the Messianic kingdom. Isaiah 11:6–9 states this promise quite plainly. The doctrine of kingdom postponement is an argument that can protect dispensationalists from succumbing to eco-justice Missiologies.

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<sup>68</sup> Gene M. Tucker, "Rain on a Land," 11–12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–9. His conclusion is based on a division of the text into a Priestly and a Yahwist source, which tends to be another point of contention with dispensationalism's high view of Scripture.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

## The Kingdom Offer and Postponement

The doctrine of eschatology is a continental divide between Dispensational Postponement theologians and justice Inauguration theologians: the separation between “already/not yet”<sup>71</sup> and “not yet/not yet” may seem small at first, but the missiologies eventually trickle into different oceans.

Jesus told Israel, “Repent,<sup>72</sup> for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). This is what dispensationalists call the offer of the kingdom. The dispensationalist, Stanley Toussaint, elaborates, “Very often the dispensationalist school of interpretation will refer to ‘the offer of the kingdom’ to Israel. By this is meant the contingency of the coming kingdom to Israel in the first century based on Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as its Messiah.”<sup>73</sup> Jesus continued to offer the kingdom and Israel continued to reject the offer until her national leadership eventually attributed to Beelzebub the works which Jesus did by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–32). After this rejection, Jesus no longer spoke of the kingdom as being “at hand.” Jesus has postponed the kingdom and will eventually establish it after Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Critical theologians often pick up on the kingdom offer, but they redefine the kingdom. For example, Rebecca Voelkel builds her

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<sup>71</sup> It is interesting that the already/not yet tension of Inaugurated theology has a parallel with Queer theory. José Esteban Muñoz is a Queer theorist who opens his book: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain.” José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>72</sup> The repentance mandate has been a source of confusion, some say that repentance is a change of works, while others say that it is a change of mind. In the end, Israel changed neither mind nor works, so it is something of a moot point here.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley Toussaint, “The Kingdom and Matthew’s Gospel” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, Stanley Toussaint and Charles Dyer, eds., 22.

Queer liberation theology on an already/not yet framework of inaugurated eschatology. What is particularly interesting is that she sees a kingdom offer in Jesus' preaching, but unfortunately her version of the offer skews the kingdom. She writes of Christ's ministry that the "kin-dom is already 'on offer' for anyone who is willing to accept it (Luke 19:11–27)."<sup>74</sup> Rather than seeing Jesus offer a national kingdom to national Israel, she sees Jesus as redefining the kingdom into a present spiritual reality for individuals who accept it. This difference brings vastly different results; while the dispensationalist has evangelism and discipleship on his agenda, Voelkel's current task is to build a movement of lovers who are "guided by an embodied and sexual eschatological vision of liberation and decolonization... practicing revolutionary patience even as they are prepared for and awaiting the inbreaking of the kin-dom."<sup>75</sup> Problems with advocating for sexual practices that the Bible calls sinful (Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 1 Tim. 1:10) should be apparent across the spectrum of conservative theology, but a specifically dispensational defence can focus on responding to the fact that the social justice agenda of Queer theology typically rests on an inaugurated view of the kingdom.

The dispensationalist sees the offer of the kingdom ceasing at the rejection of the Messiah in Matthew 12 while inaugurated theologians may seek an established kingdom later on in the life of Christ. A passage to which critical theologians may appeal to justify a kingdom-building missiology is Luke 17:21. An example of eco-justice missiology that has emerged in evangelicalism is available in the words of the founders of the Red Letter Christian Movement:

Jesus said that this peaceable kingdom [of Isaiah 11:6] is already breaking loose in our midst. He said, "The kingdom of God is among

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<sup>74</sup> Rebecca M. M. Voelkel, *Carnal Knowledge of God*, 79–81.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–132.

## 2. DISPENSATIONAL KINGDOM POSTPONEMENT THEOLOGY

you” (Luke 17:21 *isv*). I see signs of the kingdom here and now, and I believe that his kingdom is increasing before our eyes. To be a kingdom people is to join God in what he’s doing, and to participate with God in rescuing nature from the mess we’ve made of it.<sup>76</sup>

Notice that the quote begins with an inaugurated kingdom that is “breaking loose” today. The result is legalism, as instead of accepting God’s promises as guarantees that He will fulfil, the promises become mandates that men must fulfil instead. This relies on the kingdom being “already,” so that it can currently be “breaking loose in our midst.” In other words, the theological side of this form of eco-justice falls apart if indeed the kingdom was already postponed—rather than established—in Luke 17:21.

The appeal to Luke 17:21 to support an “already” kingdom rests on the present tense of “The kingdom of God is among you.” The context shows that the quote is a response to a question about the kingdom, which is posed, as many biblical prophecy references are, in the present but clearly referring to the future (Luke 17:20a) and immediately after the quote, Jesus continues speaking of the kingdom as yet future (Luke 17:22 *ff.*). From a dispensationalist perspective, Andy Woods provides three reasons that Luke 17:21 does not teach an “already” kingdom:

In sum, to the kingdom now use of Luke 17:20–21, *three* responses can be given. *First*, these verses do not teach that “the kingdom is within you” as Jesus now reigns within the hearts of His people. *Second*, the offer of the kingdom framework is sufficient for interpreting these verses as the kingdom through the king was present at that moment, thereby giving first-century Israel a unique and unprecedented

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<sup>76</sup> Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 103–104.

opportunity to receive both. *Third*, the larger context of these verses speaks primarily of a future kingdom rather than a present one. Although the offer of the kingdom framework seems more probable to me rather than seeing Christ's presentation of the kingdom as something completely future, they are both to be preferred in comparison to the idea that Luke 17:20–21 is teaching a present and spiritual form of the kingdom that was established at Christ's First Advent. Due to the legitimacy of these *three* interpretive options, despite the fact that kingdom now theology is primarily built upon these verses, Luke 17:20–21 does not authoritatively teach the present existence of a spiritual form of the kingdom.<sup>77</sup>

Since the kingdom was postponed until a day that is still future, it could not have been established before the Church Age. As such, the church is under no command to build the kingdom, especially through means that were developed to accommodate Marxism.

### **The Miracle-Working Ministries of Christ and His Disciples**

Jesus' earthly ministry is source material for much of the social justice reading of Scripture, often because justice theologians assume that Jesus established a kingdom that the church should grow by following His example. There is often an emphasis on Christ's miracles, but these are properly understood as authenticators of His messages rather than inbreakings of a spiritual kingdom. The Bible says that Jesus performed miracles and unfortunate people benefitted, but this does not necessarily mean that the purpose of the miracles was simply

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<sup>77</sup> Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How is Kingdom Now theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016), 226.

for the benefit of the unfortunate. The miracles showed that His messages should be taken seriously. Three events that were accompanied by miracles and conflict with justice missiology are Christ's offer of the kingdom, Christ's offer of eternal life, and the apostle's work in the early Church Age. An example of each of these three miracle periods will be examined here, but first, a word is in order about the different natures of Christ's work and the church's ministry.

Setting aside the miracle aspect for a moment, it should be recalled that the life of Christ was before the Church Age. As such, there should be a degree of caution when theologians ask Christians to mimic Christ's ministry since He had some tasks that the church does not emulate. A former Southern Baptist minister who began to embrace the LGBTQ+ agenda describes the church's primary task in terms of mimicking Jesus' work: "To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ."<sup>78</sup> The LGBTQ+ aspect is questionable because Jesus' teaching never endorsed homosexual partnerships. Such missiologies may sound nice on the surface—after all, who would not want to follow Jesus?—but this move opens the door for theologians to push their agendas into the words of Christ and redefine His work as it related to the offer and postponement of the kingdom. Another example would be The Red Letter Pledge, which has, "Like Jesus, I will interrupt injustice, and stand up for the life and dignity of all."<sup>79</sup> The social justice reading seems to indicate that Jesus' ministry was a "justice-making" ministry with the purpose to "interrupt injustice." This word, "injustice," of course, is defined in terms of contemporary

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<sup>78</sup> David P. Gushee and Cori D. Norred, "The Kingdom of God," 6.

<sup>79</sup> Red Letter Christians, "Red Letter Christian Pledge" Available online at <https://www.redletterchristians.org/pledge/> (accessed May 17, 2022).

secular struggles rather than in biblical terms. The biblical perspective would be the kingdom postponement reading, which sees Jesus offering a kingdom which would set the world straight in biblical terms. This leaves no room for modern manipulations into whichever cause the theologian is promoting. Since the kingdom is postponed, the promised justice is not yet present, much less growing. Appealing to the life of Christ for justice missiology is inherently problematic and opens the doors for agenda-setting. That said, let us turn our attention to the miracles that Jesus and His disciples performed.

As an example of Jesus' miracles that occurred during the kingdom offer, Matthew 9:1–8 records an instance of Jesus healing a paralytic wherein Jesus stated His purpose for the miracle. He did not heal the man for the man's sake. Some scribes were present who accused Jesus of blasphemy (Matt. 9:3), specifically, they accused Him of falsely claiming to be God (cf. Luke 5:21), so He healed the man, thus proving His deity and authority to offer everything that He offered. The paralytic certainly benefitted, but the miracle was to verify the Messiah for the scribes' sake. Critical theology would suppose that Jesus was serving for the benefit of the outcast. Was the scribe the outcast? Immediately after this account, Jesus went to Matthew's house, where He dined with the tax collectors (Matt. 9:9–13), and this was a stumbling block for the Pharisees who ultimately rejected Christ. Likewise, it should be a stumbling block for the critical theologians, as their worldview, if applied consistently, should have them side with the Pharisees in this situation, after all, the tax collectors were the first-century bourgeoisie who oppressed the proletariats (cf. Luke 3:12–13). Yet, Jesus called Himself a physician who was there to help the privileged class—including tax collectors and scribes—and His message was one of repentance (Matt. 9:12–13). Repentance is the command of the kingdom offer in the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." However, the Bible does not say that repentance was the national response. Indeed, a few chapters later,

Jesus “began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (Matt. 11:20b). Critical theology’s description of the purpose and result of Jesus’ miracles completely misses the point; the kingdom was in no way, shape, or form established in Christ’s miracles. In reality, Jesus offered the kingdom contingent on repentance, He did miracles to provoke Israel to repentance, and still, the cities where He did the most miracles did not repent. And so, He withdrew the offer.

After Israel’s leadership rejected Christ to the extent of ascribing the work of the Holy Spirit to demonic forces, Jesus’ earthly ministry experienced a dramatic shift. His proclamation of the gospel of eternal life did not change, as salvation has always been through faith alone, but He did stop offering to establish the kingdom. With a change in His kingdom offering ministry came a change in His miracle-working ministry, as observed by the dispensationalist, Arnold Fruchtenbaum:

While Yeshua continued to perform miracles after this event, their purpose had changed. No longer were they for the purpose of authenticating His Person and His message in order to get the nation to come to a decision. That decision had now been made—and made irrevocably. Rather, His miracles would be for the purpose of training the twelve apostles for the new kind of ministry they would need to conduct as a result of the rejection of His Messiahship.<sup>80</sup>

The kingdom was no longer available to unrepentant Israel, but Jesus still had other Messianic tasks to attend to, so He remained in Israel. The rejection of the Messiah continued, and while a minority accepted Him, Israel as a whole still continued to reject her Messiah.

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<sup>80</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Fourth Edition (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2021), 293.

For an example of Jesus' miracles that occurred after the kingdom offer was withdrawn, John 9 records an occasion of Jesus healing a man who was born blind. The greater context of John is the offer of eternal life (John 20:31), so little is said about the kingdom. Jesus states the purpose of the man's blindness, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but [he was born blind] that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:3b–5). Consistent with the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism,<sup>81</sup> the purpose of the blindness is specifically doxologically centred. Moreover, Jesus states that these works are unique to His ministry; so long as He is on earth, He is the light, but when He is removed, it will be a night when no one can do this work. At the end of the chapter, Jesus states in no uncertain terms that He is using this opportunity to authenticate His offer of eternal life. It has nothing to do with the kingdom. He asks the formerly blind man if he believed in Him and he does (John 9:35–38), so He uses the blindness to describe the gospel offer:

And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains. (John 9:39–41)

Notice the problem that the Pharisees face. The problem here is not that they oppress the blind, but rather, that they have too high

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Ryrie identified a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism that consists of three characteristics: a distinction between the church and Israel, a literal interpretation of Scripture, and a doxological centrality to God's purpose in the world. Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 38–41.

of an opinion of themselves and their own works. This is preventing them from believing in Christ for eternal life, so they remain on course to spend eternity separated from God. This is all tied to individual salvation from hell; it has nothing to do with establishing a spirit kingdom on earth. It is entirely in conflict with the Christus Victor view of salvation which rejects Christ as the one who provides salvation from hell. This miracle and other related miracles can not contribute to the critical theologian's case for a spiritualized kingdom.

Some would appeal to the disciples' miracle-working ministries as justification for a call to social justice today. Jesus did send out His disciples to perform miracles, but this does not mean that the sending carries over to the church (neither with acts of justice nor with actual miracles as charismatics may say).<sup>82</sup> The sending of the twelve in Matthew 10 came with the message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7). Stanley Toussaint writes, "To authenticate their message concerning the nearness of the kingdom, the Lord gave them power to perform signs. These miracles were not to be used merely to instill awe, but to show that the kingdom was at hand (Matthew 12:28)."<sup>83</sup> The disciple's miracles shifted with Christ's but eventually continued through the beginning of the Church Age. Of course, these miracles also had a specific purpose that is not for today. After Israel's utter rejection of the Messiah and messianic kingdom at the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22–50), Jesus revealed that there would be an interval before the coming tribulation and subsequent kingdom (Matt. 13). When God's attention shifted to the Gentiles during the postponement's resulting interim period, the use of miracles went through a shift as well. Miracles initially confirmed the dispensational shift to the Church Age and the human agents that God selected for ministering the transition. Once

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 216–217.

<sup>83</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 139.

the shift was accomplished, God withdrew the miraculous gifts, as is evidenced by Paul leaving Epaphroditus and Trophimus sick (Phil 2:25–27; 2 Tim 4:20) and Paul’s and James’ instruction for Christians to resort to medicine rather than miraculous healing (1 Tim 5:23; Jas 5:10–15).<sup>84</sup> If the insistence on social justice comes from any of the miracle ministries in the Bible, then it would follow that social justice should have ceased when the miracles ceased. In reality, the miracles were not contributing to a current mandate today, so they are not an appropriate framework for anti-biblical notions of social justice.

## CONCLUSION

The atheist worldview of Marxism has wrought much evil in this world, most recently through its developments in critical theory and intersectionality. Current trends in missiology that are rooted in these ideologies are penetrating Christianity today. Critical theologies are essentially critical theories that have been syncretized with Christianity and they come with missiologies that demand what the world calls social justice. Many heresies are attached to these doctrines, so all conservatives need to be prepared to defend orthodoxy in the face of critical theology. Justice missiologies are most frequently constructed on kingdom-now frameworks, so dispensationalists are at an advantage when it comes to responding to these trends since dispensationalism has a biblical view of the kingdom offered, rejected, and postponed.

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<sup>84</sup> For an excellent treatment of this topic from a dispensational perspective, see Moses Onwubiko, *Signs and Wonders: A biblical Reply to the Claims of Modern Day Miracle Workers* (Nashville, TN: Grace evangelistic Ministries, 2009), 60–61, 74.

# 3

## The 'Gospel Message' In The Gospel Of John: A Response To Hyperdispensationalism

*John Williams*

Nearly two thousand years ago, a Philippian jailor asked a question that Christendom has wrestled with and fought over ever since. This is a question that through the ages has received a multiplicity of wrong answers, and only ever one correct answer. The question he asked was simply 'what must I do to be saved?' Battles between the true and false answers to this question have raged throughout the centuries; Paul contended with the Judaizers, the reformers contended with Rome, and in more recent times there are examples such as the Lordship salvation controversy. However, even among those who might be considered both dispensational and free grace, there is sometimes a disagreement as to what does, and what does not constitute the true gospel message. My purpose is to demonstrate that the gospel message that is presented in the gospel of John is the same gospel message presented in the epistles. It is my view that the message of salvation in the fourth gospel is in harmony with the gospel message preached by Paul, and distinct from the gospel of the kingdom preached in the early chapters of the synoptic gospels. In demonstrating this, I will also be seeking to refute the view that

John's gospel teaches a different gospel to the one found in Paul's epistles, namely the gospel of the kingdom.

Dispensationalists recognise the importance of rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). One way of correctly dividing the word is by recognising certain biblical distinctions; in particular, the distinctions between Israel and the church, the kingdom and the church, and law and grace. When studying the gospels, it is important to recognise that they are primarily set under the law. Christ has not yet been crucified, the law of Moses is fully operational, and through the ministry of John the Baptist, then Jesus and the 12, the kingdom is offered to Israel. Thus, when we come to a passage like Mark 1:14–15, we read: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

The gospel message of John the Baptist, and afterwards of Jesus and His disciples in the first part of His ministry is not identical to the message that we preach today. Andy Woods notes:

The opportunity for first-century Israel to enthrone Christ and consequently experience all these blessings is known as the "offer of the kingdom." This idea is captured in the expression "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" as proclaimed to the nation first by John the Baptist (Matt 3:1–2), the Christ (Matt 4:17), then the Twelve (Matt 10:5–7), and finally the Seventy (Luke 10:1, 9).<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the Synoptics all record the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, I contend that the gospel of John consistently presents a gospel that could be deemed the gospel of grace, and thus it is to be distinguished from the gospel of the kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, (Grace Gospel Press, Duluth), pg. 55.

However, some apply the term 'dispensationalist' to themselves who view the fourth gospel in the same way that they view the Synoptics. Several labels can be applied (rightly or wrongly) to this group, such as mid-Acts dispensationalism, Acts 13 dispensationalism, Pauline dispensationalism, Bullingerism, hyper-dispensationalism, ultra-dispensationalism (although the latter terms are not terms they would use for themselves). Often, they will refer to themselves as the grace movement or as Bereans or possibly as rightly dividers. For this paper, they will be referred to as 'Post-Acts 2 Dispensationalists,' (or just 'Post-Acts 2') and this term will encompass all those who hold that the church began with Paul at some point later than Acts 2. Regarding how these various but related groups handled the gospels, Harry Ironside observes:

However they may differ in minor details of their various systems, practically all ultra-dispensationalists are a unit in declaring that the four Gospels must be entirely relegated to a past dispensation (in fact, according to most of them, they are pushed two dispensations back), and, therefore, are not to be considered as in any sense applying to this present age. It is affirmed with the utmost assurance that the Gospels are wholly Jewish.<sup>2</sup>

Thus in their view, none of the gospels, including John's gospel, are directly for the body of Christ and do not contain the gospel that saves people today.

When considering what constitutes the gospel that is being presented in each book or passage, two key determining criteria can be applied. These are 'content' and 'condition.' What is the correct content of the true gospel message, and what is the right condition, or conditions, for salvation? Early in the Synoptics, the content of the

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/ironside/wrongly.pdf>

message is that the king is present and is offering the kingdom in fulfilment of the Old Testament covenants and promises. The condition is national repentance and personal belief in the Messiah. This contrasts with the gospel preached in the church age. Paul Miles notes a distinction between the gospels of John and Matthew when he writes “While the Gospel of John tells us how to have life by believing in Christ, the Gospel of Matthew emphasises Christ’s role in the greater kingdom narrative of the Bible.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, we see that the theme of the Gospel of John is significantly different to that of the other Gospels.

In contrast to this, those of the Post-Acts 2 view see all four Gospels as presenting the same message, one that is distinct from the gospel preached by Paul. They see two groups of redeemed post-Calvary: the little flock and the body of Christ. For example, Michael Brown writes “We will observe how Paul’s message differs when he addresses the little flock and when he addresses the body of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> This is a distinction that is not recognised by most dispensationalists. The claim is that the little flock began before the cross during the ministry of Christ, but the body of Christ did not begin until after the stoning of Stephen and the conversion of the apostle Paul, with two different gospel messages for these two different groups.

Whilst most dispensationalists would recognise a difference between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace, Brown and those of his view push this distinction further than the Scriptures allow. However, he writes that “Paul’s gospel is found in 1 Cor 15:1–4,”<sup>5</sup> and this is a statement where we can find agreement.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Miles, “How is Jesus’ Ministry Part of the Bible’s Storyline?” in *What is Dispensationalism?*, Paul Miles, ed. (Wynnewood, OK: Grace Abroad Ministries, 2018), 181.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Brown, *The Apostolic Authority of Paul Vol 1*, Printed in Great Britain by Amazon.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 212.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 is perhaps the foundational passage regarding the content of the gospel. It says 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:'

This differs in its content from the gospel proclaimed in places like Mark 1:14–15, as noted above. Another important passage is Ephesians 2:8–9, which says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Also, Romans 3:28 says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

So in the epistles, when applying the criteria of what constitutes the gospel, it is evident that the content of the saving message is that of the death and resurrection of Christ, and that the sole condition is personal faith alone in Christ alone. In the Synoptics, the content of the gospel of the kingdom is that the king was present and offering the kingdom, and the condition was national repentance and faith. This kingdom offer has since been postponed. However, the question remains as to what is the content and the condition of the saving message of the fourth Gospel.

Those of the Post-Acts 2 view lump the Gospel of John in with the other pre-Pauline Scriptures. For example, Les Feldick writes:

**We preach today the Gospel of Grace that you must believe for your salvation, that Jesus died for your sins, was buried, and rose from the dead.** Jesus Himself revealed that to the Apostle Paul, and Paul alone, in I Corinthians 15:1–4, Romans 10:9–10 and many other places in Paul's writing. **But Jesus and the twelve preached the Gospel of the Kingdom which is believing for salvation that Jesus was the Messiah, repentance, and baptism.** This is found in Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and many other

Scriptures in the four Gospels and the Book of Acts through at least Chapter 15.<sup>6</sup>

Note how he includes all four gospels under the umbrella ‘gospel of the kingdom,’ which, in his words is a gospel of repentance. This is despite the fact that the word repentance is completely absent from John’s Gospel. Interestingly, the word kingdom appears 56 times in Matthew, 21 times in Mark, 45 times in Luke, but only 5 times in John. This suggests that neither repentance nor the kingdom is a central theme in this book.

Justin Johnson is even more specific when he writes from a Post-Acts 2 perspective:

John’s gospel was the gospel of the name of Jesus. This was also the gospel preached in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The gospel missing in John is the gospel given to the Church today for eternal life... There is a difference between the gospel of his name, and the gospel of his finished work on the cross. John’s gospel of his name does not include the good news of his death, burial, and resurrection as found in the mystery of Christ later given to Paul.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Post-Acts 2 view, the Gospel of John does not contain the saving message that the world needs to hear today. However, a study of John will demonstrate that such a conclusion arises from a presupposed system, and not from a careful exegesis of the text.

In examining the Fourth Gospel, it is important to lay a foundation regarding its purpose. The purpose statement of John’s gospel is

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<sup>6</sup><https://lesfeldick.org/lesqa-c.html#15c> (emphasis his), last accessed 08/04/2022

<sup>7</sup><https://graceambassadors.com/salvation/the-gospel-missing-in-john> , last accessed 08/04/2022

found in John 20:30–31, which says “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

From these two verses, we learn that there was an abundance of signs that Jesus performed in His life. The phrase, “these are written,” indicates that everything in this Gospel was specifically chosen to contribute to the overall purpose of the book, that the reader might believe, and in so doing have eternal life. Therefore, we must keep the overall context in mind, as every verse, passage and chapter have been specially chosen by both the human and divine authors to be part of one overall argument.

There are many themes that are interwoven throughout John, and perhaps the most prominent theme is the deity of Christ. For the sake of this paper, the deity of Christ will simply be assumed to be true. What I hope to do in the rest of the paper is examine three key components regarding salvation in the fourth gospel, and argue that it harmonises with 1 Corinthians 15 rather than Mark chapter 1. These components are congregation (or audience), condition and content.

Firstly, the congregation or audience context of John's gospel is clearly different from the rest of the gospels. The Synoptics emphasise Israel, whilst John emphasises the world. John uses the term 'world' more times than the other gospels combined. In John 1:10, part of the prologue of John's gospel, we read 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.' This verse helps set the tone of the whole gospel, which has a universal focus for its audience.

John 3:17 says 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.' This verse helps us to see the scope of the mission of Christ. His

purpose was not simply to save Israel or present Himself as the King of the kingdom, but extend the offer of eternal life to the whole world as well. The emphasis on the world in John's gospel is in stark contrast to the emphasis of the Synoptics, and thus understanding the audience context of this gospel goes a long way to demonstrate that the Post-Acts 2 view handles the book of John incorrectly.

Secondly, the condition for salvation in the gospel of John can be easily established. A simple examination of the text demonstrates that the claims of those who believe that John teaches a gospel of the kingdom, repentance, baptism and works are simply unfounded. It has already been noted that there is a scarcity of references to the kingdom and no mention of repentance in the entire book. As well as this, no verse even hints that baptism is a condition for salvation. Whilst in comparison to the Synoptics, John's references to the kingdom are few, the opposite is true when it comes to the word 'believe.' Robert Wilkin notes "While the other gospels use the verb to believe (*pisteuō*), they do so much less frequently than John does: Matthew, 11 times; Mark, 15 times; Luke, 10 times; John 99 times."<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is not the kingdom or repentance that is a central theme, but belief, a synonymous term with faith.

The fact that to believe is the sole condition for eternal life can be demonstrated from several verses, but three will be sufficient to establish the point. John 3:16 is perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible. It says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Quite simply, the one who believes in Jesus, and does nothing else, has everlasting, or eternal, life.

John 5:24 is another. It says "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life,

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<sup>8</sup>Robert N. Wilkin, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Grace Evangelical Society, Denton TX, pg. 178.

and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Here, hearing the word is synonymous with believing the word. The one who hears, or believes, not only has eternal life as a present possession but also has a future guarantee that they will not come into condemnation because they have positionally moved from death to life, in the past at the point that they believe. Once again, belief, or faith, is the sole condition for eternal life.

John 6:47 is the most straightforward of these three verses. It says "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life." Once again, there is the sole condition of belief or faith, and the result of eternal life. This harmonises well with the verses that were considered earlier from the epistles, that state that salvation is on the sole condition of faith, but does not harmonise well with the Post-Acts 2 understanding of John. Thus, when it comes to the condition or conditions, for justification, both Paul and John teach that it is by faith alone.

So having established that belief is the sole condition, it is time to examine the second criterion of the saving message in John's Gospel, namely, what is the content of the message that one must believe in order to receive eternal life. It can be demonstrated that the content of the saving message of the book of John is the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as belief in His deity. John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, builds a masterful argument over many chapters that climaxes in chapters 19 and 20, with the crucifixion and the empty tomb. He builds this argument piece by piece, beginning in John 1:29, which says, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This statement by John the Baptist alludes to the cross in two ways. Firstly, it presents Christ as a lamb, and therefore as a sacrifice, thus pointing to His substitutionary death. Secondly, he speaks of the removal of sin, which is the result of the death of Christ.

We see the next layer of argumentation in John 2:19–22. It says:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

Here, Jesus is already teaching, albeit symbolically, about His soon-coming resurrection. In order to be resurrected, one must first die. This saying was later remembered by His disciples after the event.

Next, we have John 3:14–15, which says “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” This passage once again uses a symbol, as well as a metaphor. The snake that Moses lifted up is used to symbolically point toward the lifting up of Christ on the cross. The idea in Numbers 21, where this analogy is taken from, is that whoever looks upon the serpent will live, and likewise, whoever believes in Jesus will live. The fact is that although John 3:16 itself does not mention the death of Christ, it cannot be contextually separated from verse 14, which alludes to the lifting up of Christ on the cross. There is another reference to the lifting up of the Son of man later. In John 8:28, Jesus, speaking to the Jewish leaders, says “When ye have lifted up the Son of man” which shows that this lifting up would be something that they are responsible for.

The next verse to consider is John 6:51, which says ‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.’ This is one of the famous ‘I Am’ statements of Christ. Here, He says that He will give His flesh for the life of the world. The giving of His flesh for the world is yet

another allusion to the crucifixion when the body of Jesus hung and died upon the cross.

We have another 'I Am' statement in John 10:11, which simply says "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Here, we see that Jesus is once again referring to His own death. Later in the same passage, He says "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." By both laying down and taking up His own life, He is speaking of His death and resurrection.

Not only does John record the words of Jesus on this subject, but he intersperses it with his own commentary. For example, in John 11:49–50 we have the words of Caiaphas, followed by John's commentary on his words. The passage says:

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.

Once again, we have a reference to the death of Christ, before the death of Christ occurs in the narrative. As well as this, we see in verse 51 that the purpose of this death was to be for the nation. Whilst the nation here does refer to Israel and not the whole world, it is at least apparent that by dying for the nation, Jesus would be dying as a substitute. Caiaphas thus prophesied that Jesus would die in the stead of others.

One final passage to consider is John 12:27, 32–33. Verse 27 says, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Several times

throughout this Gospel, Jesus states that His hour is not yet come, or words to a similar effect (John 2:4, 7:30, 8:20). Now, the hour has come, but it was troubling His soul. We also learn that this hour was the purpose for which He came. The immediate context speaks of a grain of wheat falling to the earth and dying (John 12:24), which Jesus employs as a metaphor for His own death.

Later, in John 12:32–33 we read “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” Verse 32 contains the words of Jesus, and the phrase “lifted up” which we noted earlier was a reference to the cross. Verse 33 is the commentary of John, who confirms this interpretation. This saying signified that Jesus would die a death in which He was lifted up from the earth, and this was on the cross at Calvary.

This is by no means an exhaustive examination of every reference to the crucifixion and resurrection in the fourth Gospel, but it is sufficient for us to understand that before we even reach chapter 19 (where Jesus does die) the Gospel reveals to us that Jesus would die, that He would be lifted up in death, and that His death would be substitutionary and provide atonement for both the nation and the world. As well as this, He would rise again from the dead, having the power to take up His own life. This is the content of the gospel in John’s Gospel.

When one keeps the overall purpose of the Gospel of John in mind, it will be understood that he is building an argument that climaxes with his purpose statement. When in John 20:30, the apostle pens the words “But these are written,” we understand that he is referring to everything that has gone before. He has carefully selected everything in this gospel to build his argument as one cohesive unit, in the same way that a preacher builds a sermon and makes a closing appeal. When John goes on to say that his purpose for writing was “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” this includes the signs that point to His deity and messiahship, the

### 3. THE 'GOSPEL MESSAGE' IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

substitutionary atonement of His death on the cross, and His resurrection back to life. When he closes the verse with the phrase “and that believing ye might have life through his name,” it can be seen that the result of faith is life, by which is meant eternal life, and this harmonises perfectly with verses like Ephesians 2:8. Just as John’s gospel often speaks of eternal life as something that Jesus gives to the one who believes (e.g. John 10:28), so salvation in Ephesians 2:8 is the ‘gift of God’ through faith on the basis of His own grace.

In conclusion, when Paul answered the Philippian jailers’ question in Acts 16:30–31, he did so with the words “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The only correct answer to this age-old question can be found multiple times throughout the gospel of John. There is a clear difference in themes and emphasis between the gospel of John and the three Synoptics. Also, contrary to the claims of those in the various Post-Acts 2 camps, the saving message of the Gospel of John and the apostle Paul’s epistles are the same saving message, the message of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone.

# 4

## **Dispensational Missiology: A Consideration Of The Original Audience Of The “Great Commission”**

*Jacob P. Heaton*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The accuracy and strength of dispensationalism is reliant on its method of interpreting God’s written revelation. The literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic applied consistently to every part of Scripture is the ultimate test to reveal if someone is a dispensationalist. In developing a dispensational missiology, application of this hermeneutic is required when studying passages addressing the mission or task of the Church. The objective of this paper is to apply the dispensational hermeneutic to the “great commission” and suggest a more accurate handling of this important charge, and how it can lead to greater appreciation for the teaching of the apostles and a more precise focus for the Church.

Applying this to the topic of the “great commission” (Mt. 28) I would suggest that the great commission was not directly for the Church but rather for the 11 apostles. I also would suggest including Matthias (Acts 1:26) and Paul (Acts 9:15) in this commission. My aim will be to measure the success of the commission’s fulfillment based

on the three areas of Jesus' charge: 1) make disciples of all nations, 2) baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and 3) teaching all that I have commanded you. I think great evidence is provided in the final teachings of Christ to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit's ministry in "reminding them" of all that He taught them. This combined with the powerful evidence of the final written words of Peter, Paul, and John shows that they understood their commission. Peter dealt with false teachers in 2 Peter. Paul charged Timothy to focus on what he had been taught with a strong emphasis on Scripture. John teaches about fellowship with God based on the apostolic teaching (1 Jn. 1:1–4) and dealing with false teachers (2 Jn. and 3 Jn.).

These seem to suggest that they understood the commission of Jesus and executed it by making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. A charge of sorts directed to the Church is summarized in Acts 2:42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." The charge is further developed in Ephesians 4:11–16.

The objective of this paper is not to push the Church away from the similar objectives contained within the "great commission," but to address the primary application of those passages being addressed to the apostles. We then take from the apostolic ministry, specifically the teaching element contained in the written word, to identify what the Church's task is in light of what the apostles accomplished. The ultimate goal of this paper is to elevate the view of the sufficiency and supremacy of Scripture by seeing the charge Jesus gave to His disciples culminate in the written word made available for the edification of the Church (Eph. 4:12).

I am not arguing that the Church shouldn't be involved in global mission efforts. My goal is to shift the focus of the great commission to the task specifically handed down to the apostles and I believe this results in a greater appreciation for the Scriptures.

## THE KEY PASSAGES FOR THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

Four direct passages in Scripture reveal the charge that Jesus gave and which is popularly called “the great commission.” Each passage can certainly be examined closely and a whole paper devoted to each, but for the sake of this article, a survey-style exposition should suffice. The first passage in Matthew 28:18–20 is one that is most often referenced when considering the so-called “great commission.” Beginning in verse 18 it says, “and Jesus came and spoke to THEM” (emphasis mine), “them” being the eleven disciples referenced in verse 16. Jesus, after stating His authority, issues a charge to the eleven disciples that is composed of three tasks. First, they are to “make disciples of all the nations” (19a). Second, they are to be “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (19b). Third, they are to be “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (20a). The success or failure of the commission will therefore be determined by these three activities being conducted by the eleven. Jesus adds encouragement to their task by saying “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The second common passage comes from the parallel gospel account provided by Mark. In Mark 16:14–18 there is a distinction between the three tasks stated in Matthew’s text. The eleven again are the direct audience of Jesus’ charge. But the three tasks do not appear in Mark’s account. Mark emphasizes preaching the gospel “to every creature.” Baptism is mentioned but is not given the same attention as in Matthew’s text. Mark also includes an addition to his commission account. Jesus tells the eleven, “these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Interestingly, these signs are all a part of the

temporary gifts that would be present during the days of the apostles. This would seem to be a strong argument for an Apostolic focus on this commission.

The third common passage referencing the commission is from Luke's account. Luke 24:44–49 has shared elements with Matthew and Mark, but also a particular emphasis. Luke shares Jesus' reminder to the eleven of the things He spoke to them from the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms concerning Himself (v. 44). Luke then adds an interesting event seemingly unique to the synoptic gospels. Verse 45 says "And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures." This would seem to be a preparation for the eleven to complete the task mentioned by Matthew: "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Luke also emulates Mark, in addressing the task of preaching the gospel to all nations (vv. 47–48).

The fourth common passage comes from Luke and is placed just before the ascension of Jesus into heaven. In Acts 1:4–8, Jesus commanded the eleven to not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the "Promise of the Father," adding that this is something "you have heard from Me." At this mention from Christ, it is important to consider two more passages that would explain His meaning. Both take place in the upper room discourse, which is the last teaching opportunity Jesus had with his eleven disciples before being crucified.

It is important to consider that the objective of the upper room discourse is to prepare the eleven for the ministry they will have after Jesus departs. This would fit well with what has been discussed thus far concerning the apostolic emphasis on the commission passages. In John 14:8–21 Jesus is responding to a statement from Philip to show them the Father. A few things to take note of in Jesus' response are first, He states clearly that if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father. He goes on to elaborate on their connection to Him as well as the Father and how they will be an extension of God's

ministry on the earth (vv. 10–15). Then Jesus adds an important factor to the disciple’s ministry that relates to the text in Acts 1:4–8. In verse 16 Jesus reveals to them that He will ask the Father and He will give to them another “Helper” that will abide with them forever. This Helper is identified as the “Spirit of truth” and is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit (v. 17). Jesus then expresses to His disciples that their fellowship with the Father is related to their fellowship with Him (v. 20).

Further in the text in verse 26 Jesus communicates two significant details about the Helper’s ministry. He says first, that “He will teach you all things” and secondly, “and bring to remembrance all things that I said to you.” This relates to the third charge in the commission passage of Matthew 28 where the disciples will teach all that Jesus commanded them, but the Holy Spirit will be vital to that task.

In John 16:1–15 there are at least two parts that are relevant to the discussion of the commission. First, Jesus prepares His disciples for their ministry by revealing to them the suffering that they will experience (vv. 1–6). The fulfillment of these things is described in the Book of Acts. As the Church grew, the apostles faced these persecutions from the Jews. The second part of this passage is another emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s role in the commission that Jesus would later give to His apostles, especially the area involving the task to teach the observation of all that He commanded them.

Before moving on to measuring the success of the apostolic commission it appears an argument can be made for including the apostle Paul in this commission. There is some distinction to Paul’s ministry, but the ultimate charge is the same. There are five implications of Paul’s inclusion to the apostolic commission. First, when Ananias expresses his concern about Paul to the Lord, He responds by telling Ananias about the ministry Paul will have. This ministry is to carry the name of Christ before Gentiles, kings, and the children of

Israel. Implying that Paul has a specific charge (Acts 9:15–16). Second, when writing to the churches of Galatia, Paul reveals that he was set apart from the womb for the task of preaching Christ among the Gentiles. This revelation lies within the context of Paul defending his apostolic commissioning by Christ. Third, Paul defends his apostleship by reminding the church at Corinth that the signs of the apostles were demonstrated to them (2 Corinthians 12:11–12). This implies that Paul is indeed an apostle and is involved in the apostolic commission. The fourth implication of Paul's inclusion to the apostolic commission is the remarks that he was not sent by Christ to baptize, but to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). The implication here is that Paul was sent by Christ and had similar tasks that the 11 were given but the task of baptizing was not explicitly given to Paul. This shows that while Paul was included in the commission, he had a distinct role. Lastly, Paul later in his first letter to the Corinthians mentions that he “labored more abundantly than they all,” (1 Corinthians 15:8–10). “They” in this context is the apostles. The labor of the apostles was the three tasks given to them by Jesus. This seems like a clear implication of Paul being included in the apostolic commission.

## **THE SUCCESS OF THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION**

To measure the apostle's success in going about the three tasks that Jesus gave to them before ascending to heaven, a survey of their activities is necessary. The first task to survey is the apostle's activity in making disciples of all nations. After receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a sermon to the Jews that were gathered in Jerusalem. Acts 2:41 gives an early indication of the reception that the teaching of the apostles had. It says that those who

received the words of Peter concerning Jesus Christ were baptized and that day saw 3,000 disciples added. Verse 42 adds that this group “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” On the very first public occasion we see the apostles pursuing all three of the tasks that Jesus gave to them.

Later in Acts another powerful preaching opportunity comes with the preaching of Stephen. Stephen’s message is not well received, and great persecution comes against the disciples in Jerusalem. As a result, there is a scattering that takes place. Interestingly, the apostles stay in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) while the gospel pushes forth and baptism is practiced on believers (8:12, 13, 38). Even though the apostles were not doing the evangelizing and baptizing in Samaria, their presence was required to bring the Samaritans under the authority of the apostles which is to be under the authority of the Triune God (Acts 8:14–17). The very authority that was given to the apostles by Jesus Himself (Mt. 28:18–20).

As the Gospel further spreads through Samaria and Judea, Luke introduces the beginning of the Gentile believers. In Acts 10, a God-fearing Roman centurion named Cornelius receives a vision from an angel of God (vv. 1–3). This angelic vision instructed him to send for the apostle Peter (vv. 5–6). When Peter comes to Cornelius, he preaches the gospel to him and all those who were with Cornelius (vv. 34–43). The Gentiles listening to Peter believed and then were baptized (vv. 44–48).

The rest of the book of Acts follows the ministry of the apostle Paul. Paul’s ministry is commonly broken into three missionary campaigns. Paul had a custom of going into a city and preaching the gospel to the Jews (Acts 17:2). Paul then would turn and preach to the Gentiles and would stay as long as possible with them teaching the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). He would also appoint elders in every city (Acts 14:23). Following the pattern of Paul’s ministry, it

appears that his methods and process were unique and would suggest that this was due to the apostolic commission.

Paul is identified as the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7–8). This was a ministry of emphasis and not exclusivity since both men ministered to all men. While the ministry of Paul is very well documented, Peter’s ministry is not. There are large gaps we are not sure what he was doing specifically during those times. But some key passages show he went to the lost sheep of Israel to preach to and teach them as Jesus apparently commissioned him to do (Jn. 21:15–19). A few observations make this a strong case. First, Peter wrote his letters to the believing Jews. 1 Peter 1:1 says “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” The word translated “dispersion” is “διασπορᾶς” and is a technical word only ever referring to the ethnic Jewish people. Another observation appears at the end of Peter’s first letter. In chapter 5 verse 13 Peter says, “She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you.” Contrary to popular interpretation, Babylon here means Babylon, the location of a large Jewish community that remained there after their exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Arnold Fruchtenbaum points to the historical context to defend this view. “At this point in time, Babylonia was the center of Judaism outside the Land; it is also the place where the Babylonian Talmud developed. And, since Peter was the apostle to the Circumcision, it makes perfect sense that he would have traveled to Babylon after he left the Land.”<sup>1</sup>

The record of the ministry of the other apostles, besides John, are remarkably silent. We don’t know what they did, or where they went. However, tradition says that many took the gospel to some pretty far-reaching areas. An early church father named Eusebius makes

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude*, 1st ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 384.

a comment allegedly stemming from an earlier church father named Origen. He says “Meanwhile the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were dispersed throughout the world. Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor, Scythia to Andrew, and Asia to John, who, after he had lived some time there, died at Ephesus.”<sup>2</sup> It wouldn’t be out of question to think that the apostles towards the end of their life took the teachings of Christ as far as they could in order to achieve the goals that Jesus laid out to them before His ascension.

The baptism ministry of the apostles isn’t as extensively revealed in Scripture as the discipling ministry they had. But we do see, especially in the early years of the Church, that baptism was practiced immediately upon believing the message concerning Christ. Additionally, Tom Constable notes an important observation about the apostles’ baptism in light of the apostolic commission. He says, “The early Christians evidently did not understand the words “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” as a baptismal formula that they needed to use whenever they baptized someone (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom. 6:3). Jesus apparently meant that His disciples were to connect others with the triune God of the Bible in baptism.”<sup>3</sup>

The success of the apostolic commission is most clearly seen in the books of the New Testament. The genres of the New Testament (which is a debated topic) can be broken into two basic categories. There are historical books which would be the gospel narratives, as well as the book of Acts. Then there are epistles which are writings

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<sup>2</sup> Eusebius of Caesaria, “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 132.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Constable *Matthew 28:19*

that address issues going on with an individual, church, or a group of churches. All of Paul's letters would fit this category. Peter, John, Jude, James, and the writer of Hebrews would, likewise, be in this epistolary category. For the sake of simplicity, I have included the Revelation that was written by John as an epistolary, since it was written to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Within, each of the New Testament books is contained everything that Jesus taught and that the Holy Spirit moved these men to write down (cf. 2 Peter 1:21).

To further demonstrate the success of the apostolic commission, I would like to focus on observations from the last letters written by Paul, Peter and John. Starting with the last of Paul's inspired letters written to the disciple Timothy. Paul is writing to Timothy with the realization that his "departure is at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6). Many observations of Paul's emphasis on the Word of God runs throughout this letter. Early in the letter Paul tells Timothy to "holdfast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me" (2 Timothy 1:13). Then another major charge is given wherein Paul admonishes diligence and accuracy in handling the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). After expressing the dangers that lay before Timothy in the last days, Paul charges Timothy to "continue in the things which you have learned" (2 Timothy 3:14) and to "preach the word!" (2 Timothy 4:2). Sandwiched between these charges is the beautiful declaration of the Word of God. Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Paul was passing the baton to Timothy and that baton was the teachings of Jesus Christ delivered to Paul and the other apostles.

The last letter written by Peter is 2 Peter. 2 Peter 1:12–15 contains a powerful argument for the success of the apostolic commission on

the part of Peter. Verse 12 issues an encouragement to his audience that he will continue to remind them of what he has taught them. Verse 14 alludes to the fact that he will not be around forever to do so. Finally, verse 15 suggests that Peter will ensure that the things he taught them will be a constant for them even after his departure. This mention forms a possible allusion to the collection of inspired writings that would make up the canon of Scripture. The rest of the letter exposes the severe dangers of false teachers and serves as an implied warning to draw close to the word of truth, the word of truth which was delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ.

I take the view that John wrote all of his letters later in his life shortly before his departure. This would make 1 John one of the last letters written to the Church in the apostolic age. However, whether this view is taken or not, the things that John says in this letter are still a strong argument for the apostolic commission. 1 John 1:1–4 lays out the purpose of John’s letter. He says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” The repeated pronoun “we” is the first-person plural. Based on the context of what was experienced in relation to Jesus, “we” should be understood as the apostles. What follows is that John wrote this letter to ensure that the fellowship the apostles have with God is delivered to believers and this fellowship is centered on the word of God. Again, this defends the argument that the apostles were very diligent in teaching all that Jesus commanded them.

## THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

There are at least three areas of consideration revealing the relationship of the early Church to the apostolic commission. These areas show that the early church understood the authority the apostles had come from Jesus Christ. They also show that the apostles prepared the Church to continue on after the apostles completed their three tasks.

The first area of consideration is the apparent understanding the early Church had in their gatherings. This is summarized in Acts 2:42, which says, “they continued steadfastly in the APOSTLES’ DOCTRINE and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Emphasis mine). The early church showed a clear understanding of the apostles’ role in delivering to them the teachings of Jesus Christ as eyewitnesses and equipped ministers of the things entrusted to them by Jesus Himself. There is an underlying theme in the New Testament of the dangers of false teachers and false apostles. This danger is directly related to the issue of authority. The apostles had it and the others did not. Another interesting observation within this text is the mention of the “breaking of bread” which would apparently relate to the last supper and communion that Jesus submitted to the apostles in the upper room, (cf. Mt. 26:26–29; Mk. 14:22–25; Lk. 22:19, 20) as well as to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

The second area of consideration is the appointment of elders and the function of overseers in the early church. As the early Church grew, elders were appointed in every church and this became the leadership structure that would exist after the time of the apostles. This is evidenced throughout Paul’s apostolic mission as one of his customs (Acts 14:23). The transition from apostles to overseers is seen in Paul’s last address to the elders of Ephesus. In Acts 20:28–32 Paul charges them to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock”,

because “after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves.” The emphasis of this passage is based on the teaching that Paul was careful to deliver them; the teaching of the “whole counsel of God” (v. 27).

The third area of consideration is the role that the word of God plays in the edification of the Church. More specifically, considering the exact role of those who will handle the word after the apostles’ departure. Ephesians 4:11–16 reveals the chain of authority that Jesus delivered to the Church. It says, “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The role of apostles and prophets ended when the complete canon of Scripture was provided. The roles of evangelist and pastor-teacher are now a fundamental role for the Church in the apostles’ absence. The apostle’s completed the task of making disciples and teaching all that Jesus commanded. It is now the responsibility of the word to be taught by faithful men in their locale. Where the commission of Matthew 28:18–20 was given to the apostles, a commission of sorts is given to the church here in Ephesians 4.

The result of observing the tasks entrusted to the Church in these texts shouldn’t deter missionary efforts but rather place them in the appropriate context. The Church is to teach the word and train believers within its local context and spread the gospel and the teachings of Jesus to their surrounding areas. If this was consistently accomplished following the apostolic age, the call for sending out international missionaries would be almost unnecessary. However, due to the lack of consistent practice of the edification principle prescribed in Ephesians 4, we have a world not only needy of the gospel but starving for biblical understanding. It is interesting to observe

that the churches that are devoted to verse-by-verse teaching of the Bible can develop individuals that are well equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17), and consequently have folks that minister to the people around them. Since the Church historically has struggled to complete its task, “missions” work is contracted out. The role of training and equipping workers is done by seminaries, bible schools, and mission agencies rather than the local church.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the above arguments for seeing an emphasis on the commission being directed toward the apostles, it would be negligent to conclude that the Church has no part whatsoever. Because of this, I think the great commission can be appropriately applied to the Church with a few important considerations. First, the issue of discipleship should be carefully considered. A disciple in the context that the apostles would have understood was someone who was a student under the teaching of another. Therefore, a way the Church should participate in the apostolic commission today is to emphasize that those they minister to are students under the apostles who were taught by Christ, and carried by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21) to deliver that teaching to us. Second, the Church must realize that the teaching that is delivered to the mission field must be sourced in the Word of God. Particularly the teaching them “to observe all that I commanded.” This emphasizes the apostolic authority that Jesus gave to them, and the substance of the Church’s authority now. Third, in dealing with the area of baptism, the Church faces issues that were not faced by the apostles. There is so much confusion surrounding baptism that a series of teachings should be done by the missionary before ever baptizing someone. This is to avoid any wrong thinking that it anyway contributes to their salvation or

special grace received for doing so. Lastly, because we live in a world where there are places that have not heard the gospel and places that have had the gospel but over time moved away from Christianity, reaching out to these communities becomes necessary. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to say that to some degree the Church takes on the great commission, but only after confirming the original audience of the apostles.

There are at least four practical benefits that come from reconsidering the “great commission” and emphasizing the “apostolic commission.” First, it provides a powerful context for the purpose of the epistles and the need to correct wrong practices. If the apostles were commissioned to teach the disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded, it would make sense for them to write letters to the churches and individuals informing them how they should live the Christian life. Second, it helps the Church age believer understand that their fellowship with God is directly related to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42; 1 Jn. 1:1–4). Third, it leads to a strong argument for the sufficiency of Scripture. The apostles accomplished their task, therefore, what we have in the canon of Scripture is all that Jesus intended for them to reveal. Nothing else is required; Scripture is sufficient. Finally, reconsidering the commission to the apostles leads to a strong argument favoring cessationism. What cessationists call the “temporary gifts” were utilized during the apostolic age with the specific objective of validating the apostle’s ministry. This was the ministry that was given to them in the apostolic commission.

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# 5

## “Go Into All The Earth,” A Dispensational Examination Of Missions, Missiology, And The Great Commission

*Luther Ray Smith Jr.*

### ABSTRACT

Missions, as popularly taught, have been a central activity in the body of Christ since its inception, and the primary Scripture used to make a case for missions, and a missional perspective is Matthew 28:18–20 commonly called “The Great Commission.” This paper will examine a brief history and perspective of the missionary movement throughout church history from the 15th century to the present day. The subject and the central tenets of “missional” are also discussed. Additionally, an examination of dispensational thought is considered in light of the Great Commission observing the *sine qua non* and a brief walkthrough of Matthew 28:18–20. The point is made that these verses, with good intentions, are used to stimulate missions’ activity in the body of Christ, however, these verses may be inconsistent with the *sine qua non* in dispensational thought and may have counterproductive implications for missions and missional work in

the church economy. Finally, this paper will offer alternative verses that promote the activity of missions, missiology and remains consistent with the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

## INTRODUCTION

Missions have been a significant activity within church history. Countless believers throughout the centuries have been committed to communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, establishing local churches, and establishing pastors and elders to carry on the work of strengthening the believers in those local churches. The Scriptural references that have been the primary motivation for people who are seeking to be missionaries comes from the book of Matthew 28:18–20, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”<sup>1</sup>

These Scriptures are the impetus for much of the missionary work to reach unbelievers for the sake of the gospel. Moreover, this would include various organizations and parachurch ministries that have been formed to assist and encourage missionaries all over the world. One writer noted the importance of Matthew 28:18–20 for the topic of missions when he wrote the following,

This understanding of our mission is based upon the “Great Commission” of Jesus, spoken to a crowd on a mountain in Galilee before he ascended into heaven (Matthew 28:16–20). In every era of Christian history, obedient Christ-followers have been committed to preach

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<sup>1</sup> All References of Scripture will be from the NASB20.

and convert, baptize and teach new believers. Evangelicals, believing that those who do not accept the personal confessions of traditional Christian doctrine are destined for eternal separation from God in hell, are focused upon trying to “save” as many people as possible. Thus, there is much emphasis upon taking a verbal message about Jesus to “unreached peoples” around the world who have not yet become Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Another author in his analysis of Matthew 28:18–20 concludes this is a mandate for the church when he concludes writing the following words,

The account of Matthew 28:18–20 is significant to Jesus’s mission on earth; Christ presents the mission mandate for the church with the task of thoroughly equipping all people for effective discipleship in order to advance the kingdom of God on earth, regardless of tribe, color, race, gender, or ethnic identity. The Great Commission reveals the mind of God toward the people God created, through faith in Jesus Christ as the platform for human redemption and salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew 28:18–20 has been an important motivator for considering the activity in the body of Christ to the lost. There has been thorough expositional and exegetical work on these verses, and this perspective of the Great Commission has been explained in light of a theological outlook and traditional outlook. What would be the perspective of missiology, missions work, and the Great Commission

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Sellers, “Our Vision Of Missions Should Shift From Matthew 28 To John 21 — Baptist News Global”, Baptist News Global, Last modified 2022, [https://baptistnews.com/article/our-vision-of-missions-should-shift-from-matthew-28-to-john-21/#.YgWk2N\\_MKUK](https://baptistnews.com/article/our-vision-of-missions-should-shift-from-matthew-28-to-john-21/#.YgWk2N_MKUK). Sellers. Robert.

<sup>3</sup> [https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/40-4\\_Holiness\\_And\\_Discipleship/40-4\\_Paul.pdf](https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/40-4_Holiness_And_Discipleship/40-4_Paul.pdf).

from the perspective of dispensational thought? This paper would focus on the Great Commission (i.e., "the Matthew 28:18–20 Mandate"), and the brief historical examination of the close association with missions. The major tenets of the dispensational perspective will be observed, and an exegetical look at Matthew 28:18–20 from the dispensational perspective will be investigated. Finally, and alternative explanation will be submitted for the need of missions in the church.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSIONS

Reaching the lost for the sake of the gospel of Christ has been around even before the word "missions" was coined.<sup>4</sup> Even though the word "missions" was not used some theologians underscore that the philosophy of missions is found in the triune nature of God—A phrase known as the *missio Dei*. This phrase was first used by Augustine as he noted that Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father, and the Holy Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son.<sup>5</sup>

However, it was not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century that some were sent to other regions from Europe whose focus was to adopt the practices of that culture to reach those people groups for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The word "missionary" seemed to have been adopted by a man named St. Ignatius Loyola. In 1539 during the season of Lent St. Ignatius and his closest colleagues after much conversing and prayer had desired to form a society in which they would work closely with the Pope and serve him for life. The duty of them

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<sup>4</sup> There are church scholars and theologians who would make the case that those early individuals who followed the apostles would be considered "missionaries," such as Polycarp (69–155 AD), Justin Martyr (100–165 AD), and Irenaeus (130–202 AD).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Schaff: NPNF1–03. On The Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises — Christian Classics Ethereal Library" 2022.

being sent out for various assignments is described in the following statement, “They would place themselves at the disposal of the Holy Father to travel wherever he should wish to send them for whatever duties. A vow to this effect was added to the ordinary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.”<sup>6</sup> This group (known as the *Societas Jesu*) would become known as the *Jesuits*.

These Roman Catholic priests would be sent out throughout the known world to set up churches and establish a main building in the areas known as “missions.” Due to their motivation of converting those who were not familiar with Roman Catholicism, they began to identify themselves with the word “missionary,” which was associated with their Latin origin *missionem* meaning “to send abroad”<sup>7</sup>

The missions built by the Jesuits also became linked with the churches they built in the regions they visited. Consequently, this may have been the reason that the word “mission” is now associated with the local church as one author noted, “These Catholic missionaries built churches or central buildings that were called “missions.” These missions were for religious purposes and to convert others to Christianity. The missions were strongly correlated with churches themselves, and this is why we use the word “missions” still to this day.”<sup>8</sup> The Jesuits’ labor was extremely influential in going to unreached areas to promote Roman Catholicism. It is believed that the Jesuit order was the first group to

In the mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> century, due to the Protestant Reformation, the activity of sending others to various regions in the world increased dramatically. This was in large part due to the appeal to return to the original languages of the Bible (Greek and Hebrew), that faith alone and the Scripture alone were the only way that a person could attain

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<sup>6</sup> Biography Of St. Ignatius Loyola Early Life Of St. Ignatius” 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Missionary | Etymology, Origin And Meaning Of Missionary By Etymonline” 2022.

<sup>8</sup> “Etymology Of Missions & Missionary” 2022.

peace and reconciliation with God,<sup>9</sup> and laying out the grievances of the abuses of the indulgences of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup>

These three points found in the Protestant Reformation, which originated in Germany, had spread throughout the Western world. In the country of Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli influenced the northern region of Switzerland, while Jean Calvin influenced the southernmost region. These religious views over time had gained the attention of kings and dignitaries, some of whom could use these theological perspectives to expand their political influence. As a result, many of the followers of these religious systems were sent out throughout the regions to expand their influence. In short, these "missionaries" were concerned about converting those away from the influence of Roman Catholicism and promoting their own systems: "Protestant churches did not do much missionary work during the era of the Reformation because all of their energies were absorbed in the work of organization and the struggle to exist."<sup>11</sup>

After the era of the Protestant Reformation attention was turned once more to missions and those who did not know Jesus Christ among the Protestants. A man by the name of William Carey (1761–1834) who became a missionary to the people of India was raised in the Anglican tradition and was self-studied in the subject of European dialects and geography. In 1792 he published a small work titled, "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens." In this paper, William Carey emphasized that the church ought to focus on missions work abroad. In addition, he also promoted that the Northampton Baptist Association create a group that would endorse missions throughout the world. This group would essentially be known as the Baptist Missionary

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<sup>9</sup> Cairns 1967.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Society.<sup>12</sup> In his work, William Carey appealed to the parallel passage found in Mark 16:15 to which he wrote the following,

Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to Go, and teach all nations; or, as another evangelist expresses it, Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country of the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception or limitation.<sup>13</sup>

William Carey also associated the missions work of the church with the arrival and expansion of kingdom of God, as recorded in Gospel of Matthew 6:9–15 and Luke 11:1–4 as the author noted,

As our blessed Lord has required us to pray that His kingdom may come, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, it becomes us not only to express our desires of that event by the word, but to use every lawful method to spread the knowledge of His name. In order to do this, it is necessary that we should become in some measure acquainted with the religious state of the world.<sup>14</sup>

William Carey reaffirmed this at the conclusion of his work writing the following, “What a heaven will it be to see the many myriads of poor heathens, of Britons amongst the rest, who by their labours have been brought to the knowledge of God. Surely a crown of rejoicing like this is worth aspiring to. Surely it is worthwhile to lay ourselves out with all our might, in promoting the cause, and kingdom of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> William Carey also believed that it was important

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<sup>12</sup> “Carey, William (1761–1834) | History Of Missiology” 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Carey, 1792 Pg. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.10.

to understand the customs and languages of other cultures so as to reach those in other nations for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

Another influential person who promoted the concept of missions was Duff Alexander (1806–1878), a native of Scotland, and much like William Carey, desired to spread the gospel of Christ Jesus to the people of India. After his first missionary trip from India, he returned and spoke to local churches spawning the birth of the need of financial support from local churches as noted,

In 1834, his health broken, Duff returned to Scotland to recuperate. A powerful speech (published as *The Church of Scotland's India Missions* [1835, 1836]) at the General Assembly disarmed critics, gave new prominence to missions in church agendas, and gained support for a new mission to Madras. He traveled throughout Scotland, producing enthusiasm in congregations and creating a local infrastructure that transformed mission finances.<sup>16</sup>

Alexander Duff also wrote the foremost book about missions and the role of missions in the body of Christ with his book titled, *Missions the Chief End of the Christian Church*. In his book, he stated that the two main objectives of the church of God was “the evangelical, and the evangelistic or missionary”<sup>17</sup> and stated the reason the church existed was for global evangelism.<sup>18</sup> In establishing his theological framework Alexander Duff quoted passages from Psalms, Isaiah, and Matthew 28:18–20 to which he wrote the following words,

This is the grand charter under which a visible church, directly holding of its Divine Head, was at first constituted, and designed to be forever

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<sup>16</sup> Duff, Alexander (1806–1878) | History Of Missiology. 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Duff, 1877. P.11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

perpetuated, for the administration of Gospel ordinances, and exercise of spiritual authority. These high functions in the Royal Head were original and underived—as transferred to his body, the Church, they are, of necessity, derivative, and vice-regal. As Christ, therefore, was proclaimed by prophets and apostles, as well as by himself in the appropriation of prophetic announcements, to be the world’s Evangelist—in his personal absence during the present dispensation, he was pleased solemnly to appoint and constitute the Church to be his delegated representative as the world’s evangelist; and along with the evangelistic functions, he conveyed the *power* and *authority* indispensable for their exercise.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander Duff referred to this order that Jesus Christ gave to the church as the “original Gospel commission” and the “great command.”<sup>20</sup> His influence, along with William Carey laid the groundwork for the mindset of missions in the known world.

Due to the seminal work of these men, and others who shared this perspective particular denominations began to establish their own missionary groups and organizations such as the American Missionary Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Evangelical Church Missionary Society each with their own focus in the world. Such missions work also included building not only churches but new agricultural developments and schools that were focused on Biblical education and industry. These Societies were also involved in translating the Bible in the culture’s language.

Missions have been influential throughout the centuries, each with its own unique focus. The missions of the Roman Catholics sought to expand the kingdom of God in the hearts and minds of humanity.<sup>21</sup> For the Protestant Reformation, the purpose of mis-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.25–26.

<sup>20</sup> Duff, 1877. p. 26–27

<sup>21</sup> Catechism Of The Catholic Church — Intratext. 2022

sions generally was to reinforce the *Five Solae* in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. For the modern age, the focus of missions was to reach different people and tribal groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ with Matthew 28:18–20 and corresponding texts being the motivating factor for such activity.

#### Missiology & Its Association with Matthew 28:18–20

A phrase that has become common in the area of “missions” is the word “missiology.” Whereas the word “missions” involves the activity of the church in promoting the message of the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, “missiology” is observed as a field of study that seeks to observe modern concepts and topics to determine if these things are associated with a Biblical perspective as one author comments,

Accordingly, one of the tasks of [missiology and] missiologists is to evaluate contemporary trends, ideas, issues, and influences to determine if they align with the biblical mission entrusted to the Church. Some of these ideas and influences are internal. Others are external and often a threat. Both need to be professionally critiqued and some need to be challenged. That becomes the task of informed persons — the missiologists.<sup>22</sup>

Proponents of Missiology state that the genesis of missiology was generated by the theology of missions proposed by Alexander Duff. Since Alexander’s work, the main points of missiology have been outlined which are the following:

1. Missiology is founded on the Bible.
2. Missiology has an interdisciplinary approach.
3. Missiology is relevant and sensible.

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<sup>22</sup> Amundson 2022.

4. Missiology seeks moderate fervor and knowledge.
5. Missiology has an “outward” focus of being “sent” and going on mission.
6. Missiology assesses concepts and trends in missions.
7. Missiology challenges those who are proponents of missiologist engage in the world.<sup>23</sup>

The Great Commission is at the heart of missiology and its core focus to direct and guide the practice of missions when an author comments on the following

Missiology functions much like the rudder of a ship that provides direction to the vessel as it passes through the water. Just as a ship undertakes to maintain a true course as it navigates through both calm and turbulent seas, missiology keeps the outreach of the church on course as its ambassadors expend themselves to “make disciples of all nations” (Mat. 28:19).<sup>24</sup>

The Great Commission has been seminal in promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. It has been the foundation for modern-day evangelism and has been the motivator for various movements and Evangelical events (such as the Billy Graham Crusades).<sup>25</sup> Those who endorse a missiological perspective have the concept that preparation for the kingdom of God advances through the activity of making disciples of Christ as one author wrote the following,

The [Matthew 28:18–20] narrative teaches the church about its mission as commanded by Jesus Christ. It is clear that Jesus speaks to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “What We Believe. 2022.

every disciple (even new converts) to key into the kingdom business (a vital responsibility) of making disciples. Thus, disciples should not remain relaxed or "arm-chaired" because of their salvation in Christ; they should have hunger to bring others into the light and knowledge of God's saving grandeur. In other words, discipleship goes beyond self-aggrandizement to preparing people for the heavenly kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

Does a dispensational perspective as it concerns missions and missiology align with the mainstream interpretation of Matthew 28:18–20? Should these two verses be used to promote the missionary activity of the church?

## **SINE QUA NON OF DISPENSATIONAL THOUGHT**

Considering dispensational thought, it is important to understand what points undergird the theological system. There are three points in dispensationalism which is referred to as the *sine qua non* ("without which not"). Each of these three points are interdependent of one another. If one of these points were absent, the *sine qua non* fails. The first point of *sine qua non* is a person adheres to a normal, grammatical, historical, (and cultural) methodology of examining and explaining Scripture. This means a person observes the words and the meaning of the words in the original language from the perspective of the author considering immediate and general context, lexical keys, and historical data. This method ought to be implemented in a consistent manner no matter the genre examined in Scripture. The second point is when a person follows this methodology constantly, they will see a distinction between Israel and the church in

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<sup>26</sup> Paul. 2020.

plan and program. The last point is that this leads one to see the glory of all in all of God's works in history. These three points are the basis for the analysis of Matthew 28:18–20.

## A BRIEF WALKTHROUGH MATTHEW 28:18–20

Matthew 28:18–20 in the Greek text reads as follows:

καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.<sup>27</sup>

The main point of the book of Matthew is to underscore to the audience that Jesus Christ is the Messiah-King sent to the nation of Israel. In the general context of chapter twenty-eight, Matthew discusses Jesus's resurrection mentioning an angelic messenger and Jesus appearing to Mary and Mary Magdeline (vs.1–12). The Jewish leaders met with the Roman soldiers to fabricate Jesus's body being stolen (vs. 11–15). The surrounding context of Matthew chapter 28 is the eleven disciples (ἐνδεκα μαθηται) meeting Jesus on a mountain in Galilee where He instructed them to meet Him. Matthew accounts that some were unsure (διστάζω). It is important to note the immediate audience who Jesus is addressing is His eleven disciples (who will soon become apostles).

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<sup>27</sup> “KATA MAQQAION (Matthew) 28 (MGNT) — καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν.” Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 17 May, 2022. [https://www.blueletterbible.org/mgnt/mat/28/18-20/s\\_957018](https://www.blueletterbible.org/mgnt/mat/28/18-20/s_957018).

As if to relieve the minds of those who were unsure about Him Jesus then begins to tell the Eleven that all authority (πάσα ἐξουσία), and the extent of that authority or influence—in heaven (ἐν οὐρανῶ), and on the land (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) had been given to Him. The phrase “had been given to me” (ἐδόθη μοι) is written in the aorist passive indicative. Jesus told the Eleven at a point in time Jesus had been given this authority. Furthermore, this phrase at the beginning of this sentence highlighted the recipient of this authority. In short, this statement in this mood, voice, and tense was to reassure the Eleven before their ministry.

Jesus connected the previous statement he made with the conjunction “therefore” (οὖν) and began to tell them what they were to accomplish with the phrase “Go” (πορευθέντες). This phrase is a verb which is written as an aorist passive participle. Jesus told the Eleven present with him that while they were going, they were to “make disciples” (μαθητεύω). This phrase is a verb and is written as an imperative. They were to be *actively engaged* in making disciples.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, this Greek word does not occur in the epistles as an imperative to the churches by the apostles.

Jesus spoke of those who they were to make disciples—all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). Jesus made it clear that no nation is excluded from the Eleven’s message. Jesus then spoke of the activity of the Eleven that they were to baptize (or identify) in the name (or reputation) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (acknowledging their message), and to instructing (διδάσκοντες) those from all the nations to intently focus (τηρεῖν) on everything that Jesus commanded the Eleven. Similar to the Greek word μαθητεύω this instruction to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit only occurs when Jesus talks with the Eleven.

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 13:52, 27:57, and Acts 14:21.

Jesus then used the phrase translated “lo!” (ἰδοῦ), as if to get the Eleven to focus their attention on the next statement. Jesus emphasized the certainty of being with the Eleven “all the days” (πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας) even “to the completion of the age” (ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). This last phrase Jesus says occurs four other times in the Greek Scriptures.<sup>29</sup> There is a similar phrase that is also found in the Septuagint as it is spoken by the messenger who spoke to Daniel.<sup>30</sup> In every instance that this statement is used, it concerns Israel during the time of Jacob’s trouble.

### **IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER WITH MATTHEW 28:18–20**

There are several important things relating to these statements to Jesus and His disciples. First, the imperative that Jesus gave to make disciples of all nations was given exclusively to the Eleven who were present. The apostles did not transmit this imperative to the church as something the church ought to be doing.

Second, the instruction to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was also something that was only mentioned here and was not transmitted to the churches by the apostles. Third, the instruction to teach all that Jesus commanded to the nations was once more transmitted to the Eleven. It would seem from the immediate audience this particular work was given to the disciples. All these activities that are given by Jesus to the Eleven on this mountain are recounted in the book of Acts.

Fourth, the phrase Jesus uses at the end of his statement pertaining to the completion of the age may not be associated with the

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 13:39–40, 13:49, 24:3.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel 12:13.

church as Paul detailed that this economy ends with the rapture and resurrection of the saints.<sup>31</sup> It would seem that Jesus is strengthening not only the Eleven who will soon be sent out to give the testimony of Jesus Christ, but also *the ethnic people and nation* who will experience great affliction in the future and need the certainty of words of their Messiah-King.

Fifth, there are imperatives that the apostles gave the church that saints are to instruct others in the church.<sup>32</sup> However, in the immediate context of Matthew, this imperative was given to the eleven disciples. In addition, the imperatives that were given by the apostles in their epistles concern those *who are already believers*. There are no imperatives where the apostles spoke to the church where they were to make disciples and teach those who are not disciples (a major point that is emphasized in missionary literature and practice).

Sixth, if one is convinced that this is a mandate given to the church, then it is every *Christian's obligation* to go into the world and make disciples. If a believer does not follow this command, then one may be convinced, they are sinning against God, as one article highlights,

This is what is known as the Great Commission. In the original language, these words are a command. That is why we call this the Great Commission and not the Great Suggestion. And I believe that to fail to do this actually could be a sin. "A sin?" you might say. "Well, maybe we should do more, but it is not a sin if I don't share the gospel." But I think it could be, because James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." This is called the sin of omission, which is not doing what you are supposed to do. These words were given to every follower of Jesus. If I am His disciple, I am

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<sup>31</sup> c.f., First Thessalonians 5:14–18. Second Thessalonians 2:1–3.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 12:7, First Timothy 4:11, Second Timothy 2:22.

commanded to go and make disciples of others. On the other hand, if I am not making disciples of others, then I am not being the disciple God wants me to be.<sup>33</sup>

Seventh, there are believers who may associate the Great Commission with the responsibility of the church in building and establishing the kingdom of God on earth as this author commented,

The account of Matthew 28:18–20 is significant to Jesus’s mission on earth; Christ presents the mission mandate for the church with the task of thoroughly equipping all people for effective discipleship in order to advance the kingdom of God on earth, regardless of tribe, color, race, gender, or ethnic identity.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, people who observe Matthew 28:18–20 in this manner run the risk of associating it with the eschatological passages found in the book of Matthew and connecting these verses to the present time, unintentionally promoting a postmillennial outlook of the Scriptures.<sup>35</sup> This perspective is incompatible with the dispensational framework as the “gospel of the kingdom” concerns the announcement and invitation of the physical kingdom presented to Israel and all of the subsequent promises associated with this kingdom.

Furthermore, these verses, used to associate with the activity of the church may lead to those promoting a perspective for social justice to establish the kingdom of God as noted in the following statement

The logic of the Great Commission requires Christians who are obedient to the Jesus’ commands to teach all nations of these commands.

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<sup>33</sup> Laurie 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Paul. 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 24:14.

We cannot teach people to obey the Lord if we have not been faithful ourselves. Our Master expects us to pass on to new disciples what we know and practice. Practicing Jesus' commands includes caring for the poor and the vulnerable. This means that the need to work to alleviate human suffering is necessarily intrinsic to the Church's mission. Therefore, the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church is wrong. The Church cannot believe that its only duty is to preach the gospel. When the gospel truly takes root in a culture, its followers will work tirelessly to meet all the needs of the people around them—both spiritual and physical.<sup>36</sup>

The church building wells in a foreign country, establishing soup kitchens and food banks in a low socioeconomic community, or starting after-school programs to give the good news of Jesus Christ may be expedient. However, a believer who accomplishes these things is not "building" or "expanding" the kingdom due by their activity.

In addition to demonstrating Jesus is the Messiah-King of Israel, another purpose of Matthew 28:18–20 was to lend credibility to the eleven disciples who Christ sent out to the Jewish people. Matthew was an apostle to Jesus Christ and was Jewish.<sup>37</sup> This historical narrative emphasizes Matthew and the other apostle's credibility to their ministry with those who read his account. This speaks of the uniqueness of the statement by Jesus to the Eleven present on the mountain.

This perspective in using Matthew 28:18–20 as a mandate for the universal church to complete may fail to observe the second aspect of the *sine qua non* as the person may infuse (or even mystify) the promises associated with Israel to the church. Using these verses may also affect the third aspect of *sine qua non*. Since God is the divine Author who wrote through the apostles, the intention of why

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<sup>36</sup> Social Justice And The Great Commission — The Columbia Witness. 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 9:9, 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13.

Matthew wrote his gospel is significant as it acknowledges *God's intentions through Matthew*. To take a past descriptive text and make it a prescriptive passage for believers in the present day a person may run the risk of missing the intention of why this was written, thus minimizing God's glory.

With the best intentions pastors, Bible scholars, and theologians have used Matthew 28:18–20 as an imperative for the church. Based on this text, missions organizations have invented strategies, steps, and best practices for missions; however, based upon the words used in Matthew 28:18–20, this statement addresses the apostles and their activity and ought not to be used as the cornerstone for missions and missiology. However, the researcher would like to submit an alternative verse that would satisfy the objectives of missions and stay consistent with the *sine qua non* in dispensational thought.

### **ALTERNATIVE VERSES FOR MISSIONS AND MISSIOLOGY FROM A DISPENSATIONAL OUTLOOK**

Based on the claim above the obvious question must be asked, “If Matthew 28:18–20 ought not to be used as the central verses for the foundations of missions and missiology, what verses could be used?” The writer is convinced an alternative verse that can be used as the central focus for missions and missiology is found in Paul's letter to the churches in Ephesus, which says the following, “...For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ephesians 2:8–10 NASB20.

In contrast to Matthew 28:18–20, which based on the context applies only to the eleven disciples, Ephesians 2:8–10 includes *all* the body of Christ which is emphasized using the first-person plural verb “we” (ἔσμεν), which includes the work of God positionally for the believer (His workmanship) and what God has established for the believer to complete (good works). Consequently, when one applies Matthew 28:18–20 to missions and missiology a person may believe that missions may be the *only* important thing for the believer to complete in the Christian life. Using Ephesians 2:8–10 the verse emphasize that missions is *one of many* important works that are found in the life of a Christian. In addition, the phrase Jesus uses for “making disciples” (μαθητεύω) is *only* found in Matthew’s account, whereas the phrase translated “good works” (or good deeds) (ἔργον ἀγαθός/καλός ἔργον) is found in multiple epistles,<sup>39</sup> which underscores the purposeful activities of the believers.

The benefit of using Ephesians 2:8–10 is that it maintains all the points in the *sine qua non*. Ephesians 2:8–10 considers the normal grammatical historical and even cultural points found in the epistle, maintains the distinction between Israel and church and program and plan, and it acknowledges that all the good works that a believer engages in highlight the glory of God because God has sanctioned and made important all of these works for the believer to complete. This would also include the activity of teaching which is found in Matthew 28:18–20 but is also found in the various epistles to the church.<sup>40</sup>

Ephesians 2:8–10 does not have the supplementary focus on the believer being responsible for “building the kingdom of God.” Paul wrote in this statement to the church in Ephesus that the believer is created in Christ Jesus *for* (ἐπι) good works. Paul used this preposition as a conjunction to indicate the reason why a person is in Christ.

<sup>39</sup> First Timothy 2:10, 5:10, 6:18, Titus 2:7, 2:14, 3:8, 3:14, Hebrews 10:24, First Peter 2:12.

<sup>40</sup> Romans 12:7, Colossians 3:16, First Timothy 4:11, First Timothy 6:2.

Paul in this epistle (or Biblical authors in any other epistle) does not mention the purpose of the church is to build the kingdom of God.

The focus of the book of Matthew and Ephesus ought to be considered. The book of Matthew was written primarily to the Jewish people to communicate that Jesus is the Messiah whom the Hebrew Scriptures attest. Therefore, there are Jewish idioms, culture, and history that are heavily emphasized throughout the book. However, the Epistle to the Ephesians has a Jewish and non-Jewish focus which the reality and activity of the church are underscored. Furthermore, the account of Matthew is a *historical* account meant to validate the credibility of the eleven disciples and their work after the ascension of Jesus Christ. Epistle to the saints of Ephesus instructs believers concerning the reality of activity (good works), considering their identity (workmanship in Christ Jesus).

As a final point, Matthew 28:18–20 obligates the Christians to accomplish this task and if they fail there is a risk that they may be evaluated as sinning before God. In the word of God, the activity of sin is clearly defined,<sup>41</sup> and the Scripture does not mention in any of its epistles that not to “fulfill” the Great Commission is a sin and offense against God. As a result, a person may feel as if they must complete the Great Commission out of fear they are sinning against God. In Ephesians 2:8–10, Paul connects the activities of good works with the grace of God in all things.<sup>42</sup> In short, the motivating factor for a person who desires to do missions is not just who He is and what He has done, *but also who the person’s identity and position is before God as they have received the grace of being in Christ.*

Matthew 28:18–20, which can be very impactful verses for missions and missiology may be improper to use to emphasize the

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew 15:18–20, Romans 1:18–32, 3:9–18, c.f., 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, c.f., Galatians 5:19–22.

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 2:4–7.

personal and universal activity of the church if a person is to apply the results of the literal, grammatical, and historical method consistently. However, if a person were to use Ephesians 2:8–10 as applicable verses for the motive and actions of missions, these verses appear not to violate the *sine qua non* that governs dispensational thought.

## CONCLUSION

Missions have a robust history with great men and women who sought to carry the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world, and the cornerstone verses for the motivations and actions of missionaries and missional work is Matthew 28:18–20 (also known as the Great Commission). These verses have been beneficial as missionaries as those who have been influenced by these verses have impacted tribes, cities, and nations with the good news of Christ Jesus. These verses have also inspired those to build organizations, and academic institutions with the sole purpose of building and sending out missionaries committed to spreading the gospel to the world.

Yet, when compared to the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism these verses, considering missions may be problematic due to several factors: the immediate audience that Jesus was addressing, the lack of the Greek verb to make disciples in the epistles to the church, the exclusivity of the actions Jesus commanded to the disciples in the context of Matthew chapter 28:18–20, the belief that a person may believe they are establishing the Kingdom of God, and the possibility that a person may believe they are sinning against God if they believe they are not completing the Great Commission. Alternative verses ought to be considered as a mainstay verse for the activity of missions—Ephesians 2:8–10. Using these verses addresses all the challenges that are found using Matthew 28:18–20 as a seminal proof-text for missions. and is consistent with the elements found in *the sine qua*

non of dispensationalism. Considering Ephesians 2:8–10, we honor the legacy of those who labored in this vocation of missionary work and maintain the integrity of the message of the Scriptures the way the human authors intended.

May we who promote dispensational thought continue to be assured of the literal, grammatical, and historical method when studying God special revelation to humanity and the activities of the believers. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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# 6

## The Role of Literal Grammatical Historical Hermeneutics in Discipleship

*Christopher Cone*

### INTRODUCTION

From Paul's exhortations to Timothy it is evident that the discipler is responsible to understand all that is communicated in the Scriptures,<sup>1</sup> and to pass along that content.<sup>2</sup> Because of the time necessary to teach Biblical content comprehensively, it would seem practically worthwhile to include in that training a methodology for understanding Biblical content so that the Learner can develop an independent learning capability (as the Bereans seemed to demonstrate<sup>3</sup>) so that they can carry on the discipleship process beyond the discipler's direct guidance. If on the other hand it can be demonstrated that there is an internally derived hermeneutic method, then the discipler's responsibility to teach a Biblical approach to hermeneutics extends beyond the mere practical

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16–17.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:11.

advantages to a certain ethical responsibility in presenting Biblical content.

This paper asserts that the Literal Grammatical Historical (LGH) method is the hermeneutic approach consistently modeled in Scripture, and consequently is part of not only the proper method for understanding Scripture, but is itself Biblical content. As such, the LGH is a necessary ingredient of any discipleship approach first for its pre-eminent status as Biblical content and secondly for its practical advantages. Consequently, the discipler should not present the LGH as a theological construction or an extra-biblical tool, but rather as one of the primary principles of God's communication with humanity. In short, if the LGH is itself Biblical content, and if it is present in the earliest speech act interactions of God to humanity, then the role of hermeneutics — and LGH specifically — in discipleship is among the most focus worthy of Biblical truths for the discipleship process, or for the kind of learning that transforms.

### **HERMENEUTIC (DE)EMPHASIS BY SOME LEADING CONTEMPORARY DISCIPLESHIP METHODS**

As of May 18, 2022, Amazon's Top 10 Best Sellers in Christian Discipleship<sup>4</sup> all contain assertions of the importance of understanding ideas and principles about God, yet most share the common characteristic of neither using the words *hermeneutic* nor *interpret*, failing to provide a single explanation of *how* we come to understand these important ideas and principles of God. We find many prescriptions without explanations.

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<sup>4</sup> Viewed at <https://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Christian-Discipleship/zgbs/books/12335>.

Dan Kimball's *How to (Not) Read the Bible* stands fairly alone on this particular best-seller list in taking the time to address the important matter of interpretation. Kimball says, "I want to show you how to read, interpret, and understand the Bible accurately."<sup>5</sup> Note that Kimball perceives there is an *accurate* understanding of Scripture and an *inaccurate* understanding. Whether or not one agrees with Kimball's methodology and conclusions, it is refreshing to see an emphasis on interpretive method as central to understanding what God has said, as Kimball emphasizes that, "it is critically important to invest time and effort into understanding how to and how *not to* properly read and study the Bible. Failure to do so is one of the primary reasons why people critique it and misunderstand what it says. Their interpretations are distortions of the original meaning..."<sup>6</sup>

While Kimball's (8<sup>th</sup> ranked at the time of this writing) discipleship text is focused on helping the reader arrive at a correct understanding of the Bible, the other writings on the Top -10 list dismiss or ignore interpretive issues entirely. Gretchen Saffles's *The Well Watered Woman* is said to help "women understand their own past, fears, and ungodly desires, and offers them a gospel-centered approach to real Christian growth."<sup>7</sup> The author encourages women to "receive his [God's] everything,"<sup>8</sup> — which is certainly an important appeal, and yet there is nothing to guide a woman on *how* one might actually process what God has communicated for understanding.

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Kimball, *How to (Not) Read the Bible: Making Sense of the Anti-women, Anti-science, Pro-violence, Pro-slavery, and Other Crazy-sounding Parts of Scripture* (Zondervan, 2020), 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Gretchen Saffles, *The Well Watered Woman* (Tyndale Publishers, 2021), endorsement by Dr. Jason Edwin Dees.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, dedication page.

Peter Scazzero encouragingly asks the question of *how* Joseph was able to walk with God, and answers that Joseph “...had a profound sense of the bigness of God...rested in God’s goodness and love...admitted honestly the sadness and losses of his family...rewrote his life script according to Scripture...thought about it...and then opened the door to God’s future by rewriting it with God...”<sup>9</sup> Scazzero points out an important principle that emotional growth is a necessary and integral part of spiritual growth, but doesn’t guide the reader in how to understand what God has said about emotional growth or how to achieve it.

Henry Blackabee provides an important caution, when he notes that “experience can not be our guide. Every event in your life must be understood and interpreted by the Scriptures.”<sup>10</sup> Despite this wise warning, Blackabee contradicts it when asserting that God speaks separately from (though using) the Scriptures. He instructs readers to “ask God to speak to you as you read” various Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> He adds, “when God is about to do something through you, He has to get you from where you are to where He is, so He tells you what He is doing...”<sup>12</sup> But how is a learner to know when God is speaking and providing this needed information Blackabee is promising? Blackabee assures the reader that he will “help you understand how you can clearly know when God is speaking to you.”<sup>13</sup> Here is Blackabee’s method:

As you pray, watch what He is doing around you and in your circumstances. The God who is speaking to you as you pray and the God

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Zondervan, 2017), 93–94.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Blackabee, *Experiencing God: Bible Study Book with Video Access* (Lifeway, 2022), 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

who is speaking to you in the Scriptures is the God who is also working around you...God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself..<sup>14</sup>

After assuring the reader that he would help them understand how they can clearly know when God is speaking to them, Blackabee finally admits that, "I cannot give you a formula, however, and say this is how you can know for certain that God is speaking to you."<sup>15</sup> Blackabee can't provide such a formula (despite his earlier promise to provide certainty) because he has introduced — based on no Scriptural data at all — that God communicates today in ways other than Scripture. Because Blackabee asserts that God's communication in this age extends beyond the written word, he can offer no evidence for these various forms of communication besides the experiencing of these extra-biblical communications.

Blackabee had earlier asserted that we should interpret our experience through the Scriptures, yet he has built his discipleship model on the assumption that God also uses other methods to reveal Himself, effectively relegating the Scriptures to only one of several standards by which to test experience. Blackabee's contradictory ideas of God's revelation eliminate any possibility of asserting accurate or inaccurate interpretation of the Scriptures, and thus minimize the need for interpretive diligence, besides exegeting circumstances and praying correctly. Perhaps Blackabee's misguided approach is worse than if he had ignored the issue altogether, as some of the bestselling writers in the Christian discipleship category have done. Errant interpretation and dismissiveness of interpretive responsibility are remarkable developments particularly when discussing the importance of and methods for spiritual growth.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

John Mark Comer's dismissiveness of interpretive concepts is likewise problematic, and is fairly representative of the majority of texts (though not all, of course) in this category. Whether by error or omission hermeneutics is treated by Comer as an unnecessary technicality. He notes that,

Maybe you have read the early chapters of Genesis as history, with a literal talking snake and Eve speaking Parseltongue, or maybe you read them as mythology, with the snake as a common ancient image for a spiritual being and *Genesis* as a subversive counterstory to ancient creation myths like the Enuma Elish. Or maybe something else. But those are questions about genre of literature, not about whether we can trust Genesis as Scripture. Whichever interpretation is right, the garden story is *true*. For millennia billions of people have found it to be the truest and most insightful treatise of the human condition in the history of the world."<sup>16</sup>

Remarkably Comer disassociates interpretation from meaning, and meaning from truth. His affirmation that the garden story is true is evidenced solely by the a (non-scientific) assertion that billions of people have perceived it as true. Besides being guilty of the *argumentum ad populum* fallacy, Comer's foundational assertion provides readers no way of ensuring they have ascertained what is true, and no way of testing truth for themselves. Consequently, the reader who seeks to learn and grow discovers quickly that they possess no tools with which to pursue growth confidently, and must rather be totally dependent on the spiritual guru who mysteriously seems to possess these tools and to wield them effortlessly — because thousands or even millions of purchasing readers can't be wrong. They

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<sup>16</sup> John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies that Sabotage Your Peace* (Waterbrook, 2021), 62.

bought the book and perceive it to be true and insightful, so it *must* be a trustworthy path to growth. Comer's error at this critical juncture of guiding readers (learners) obfuscates his otherwise valuable assertion that there are three enemies of growth for the believer (the devil, the flesh, and the world), and provides no way for his readers to understand the derivation for his thesis nor how to test the validity of it. Therein lies the problem these typical so-called methods for growth. They are drawn from valuable principles discovered by their authors, but are (typically) not undergirded with transparent methodology of how they were discovered, how they can be tested, and how they can be expanded on. In short: the learner is given little or no methodology other than to simply follow the prescriptions of the guru.

Further, it is ironic that Comer chooses to plant his flag on the Genesis garden account while dismissing its actual meaning. It is in the details of that very narrative that we discover an embedded method for understanding truth, testing it, applying it, and discovering more truth — all that we might continue to grow as we were designed.

## **LGH AS *BIBLICAL*, NOT *EXTRA-BIBLICAL* CONTENT**

### **The Exception That Proves the Rule**

This author has elsewhere asserted and defended that the earliest narratives of Scripture demonstrate a precedent of LGH as requisite for understanding communication, and that this hermeneutic is integral to the Biblical record and not merely implied therein. The Biblical hermeneutic is literal in the sense of normative according to the basic principles of written communication, grammatical in the

sense that the communication applies the normative grammatical principles of the language employed, and historical in the sense that the speech act occurred in a particular time and context, and should be understood within the framework of that historical moment and context. That argument is summarized as follows:

In examination of the ninety-four passages in Genesis and Job that record Divine speech acts, the evidence is overwhelming...that God intended for His words to be taken at face value, using a plain-sense interpretive approach. The hermeneutic method that reflects this straightforward methodology has become known as the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic. This method recognizes that verbal expression has meaning rooted in and inseparable from the grammatical and historical context of the language used, and that these components require that readers be consistent in applying the interpretive method in their study of the Scriptures. Because of the two-thousand-year precedent evident in Genesis and Job, any departure from the simplicity of this method bears a strong exegetical burden of proof, requiring that there be explicit exegetical support for any change one might perceive as necessary in handling later Scriptures. Absent any such exegetical data, we can conclude that (1) hermeneutic methodology for understanding Scripture is not arbitrary but is instead plainly modeled, and that (2) later Scriptures should be understood in light of the hermeneutic precedent provided by Genesis and Job.<sup>17</sup>

The hermeneutic principles communicated in the Biblical text is profoundly evident in the opening passages of Genesis. In the “garden story” which Comer references, for example, we discover a great deal of emphasis on speech acts, and all of the characters introduced to

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Exegetica Publishing, 2018), 35.

that point are involved: God, Eve, Adam, and the serpent, who is later identified as Satan.<sup>18</sup> The serpent speaks to the woman (who we will simply refer to, like the text does, as *the woman* since she has at this point apparently not yet been named Eve),<sup>19</sup> challenging what God had earlier said to Adam.<sup>20</sup> The woman responds to the serpent,<sup>21</sup> then the serpent to the woman.<sup>22</sup> After the man and woman violate God's prescription, God speaks to Adam,<sup>23</sup> Adam responds to God,<sup>24</sup> God responds to Adam,<sup>25</sup> Adam answers God,<sup>26</sup> God speaks to the woman,<sup>27</sup> the woman responds to God,<sup>28</sup> God addresses the serpent,<sup>29</sup> God addresses the woman,<sup>30</sup> then God addresses Adam,<sup>31</sup> concluding the matter at hand (the judgment resulting from the man's and the woman's disobedience). Adding further context to the setting, Adam addresses the woman as Eve,<sup>32</sup> and finally, God converses with Himself.<sup>33</sup>

This brief narrative includes at least fourteen speech acts, and fourteen opportunities for interpretation and misinterpretation. These fourteen speech acts are not insignificant and are not simply matters of "genre of literature." Instead, they help us understand exactly how we should understand Biblical communication, and God's communication specifically:

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<sup>18</sup> Revelation 20:2.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 3:1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., and cf. Genesis 2:16–17.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 3:2–3.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 3:4–5.

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:9.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 3:10.

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 3:11.

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 3:12.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 3:14–15.

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 3:16.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 3:17–19.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 3:20.

<sup>33</sup> Genesis 3:22.

*(1) The Serpent Speaks to The Woman*

When the serpent speaks to the woman in 3:1, he questions what God had said earlier, challenging the very wording of God's instruction, betraying either a deliberate misrepresentation or a misunderstanding of what God had said. As this one is called the deceiver<sup>34</sup> and the father of lies,<sup>35</sup> and because he deceived Eve in the garden,<sup>36</sup> it is evident that his questioning of Genesis 2:16–17 was deliberate and with deceitful intent, which becomes apparent as the account unfolds. Prior to this particular speech act Genesis records many speech acts of God (particularly in the creation account). In each instance we discern that the respondent/listener responds in a way that affirms a normative understanding of the speech act according to the commonly understood principles of the language used in that time and instance (or simply put, LGH). In this pivotal first speech act of the garden story, the serpent introduces his departure from the normalized principles of communication evident in the opening two chapters of Genesis. The serpent's hermeneutic deviation does not introduce a new precedent for proper understanding of communication, but rather introduces a distortion and the first recorded instance of dishonest and errant hermeneutic methodology. The outcome is catastrophic and provides a vital cautionary hermeneutic tale.

*(2) The Woman Responds to the Serpent*

Curiously, the woman adds the phrase "or touch it" to her recounting of God's direction in 3:2–3. It is worth noting that she was not yet created when God gave the initial instruction to Adam. Perhaps

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<sup>34</sup> Revelation 12:9.

<sup>35</sup> John 8:44.

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 3:13, 1 Timothy 2:14.

God expanded on the prohibition, or perhaps Eve was shaken by the serpent's question. While the reasoning for her added words is not implicit in the text, the process of her deception had begun. Still, she responds normatively to the serpent's question by providing a response, indicating normative communication was taking place.

*(3) The Serpent Responds to the Woman*

The serpent's response to the woman in 3:4–5 was to directly contradict what God had said. The initial questioning had turned to outright denial, with a deceptive rationale — that God knew the truth but was maliciously hiding it from the woman. The serpent responded normatively to the woman's statement, indicating a clear understanding of what she had said, and he stated patently false information. The woman responded in action rather than speech in 3:6–7, as she was led by experience (she *saw*) that countered what God had said and was compatible with the lie she had been told by the serpent. By falling for the serpent's hermeneutic deviation, and dismissing what God had communicated, the woman was deceived, and Adam fell with her — though his fall was not through deception in the same sense as was hers.<sup>37</sup>

*(4) God Calls to the Man*

In 3:9 God asks the simple question, "Where are you?"

*(5) Adam Responds to God*

Adam's response in 3:10 indicates a clear understanding of the question, as Adam answers and explains why he was hiding.

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Timothy 2:14.

*(6) God Questions Adam*

In 3:11 God questions Adam further, requiring that Adam expand on the previous answer he gave, and providing Adam an opportunity to take responsibility for his disobedience.

*(7) Adam Answers God*

Rather than own up to his failure, in 3:12 Adam passed the blame to the woman indirectly and to God directly because God had given the woman to Adam.

*(8) God Addresses the Woman*

Demonstrating a normative understanding of Adam's (blame-shifting) statement, in 3:13 God questions the woman regarding her action.

*(9) The Woman Responds to God*

The woman answers God's question in similar fashion to Adam. In 3:13 she refused to admit her fault and blamed the serpent for his deception.

*(10) God Addresses the Serpent*

Demonstrating that God understood in a normative sense the accusation the woman had levied against the serpent, He pronounces judgment and a curse on the serpent in 3:14–15, with an odd prediction that the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head, and the serpent would crush His heel. While some might dismiss this statement as metaphoric (because women don't have *seed*), history shows

that this came to pass when the Messiah, born of a virgin crushed Satan and death on the cross. Paul adds a further usage of this idea asserting that God would soon crush Satan under the feet of the Roman believers.<sup>38</sup> Notably Paul adds a significance to the passage, without asserting any change in the meaning of the original passage (perhaps similar to his usage of Sarah and Hagar in his metaphoric contrast of bondage and freedom).<sup>39</sup>

*(11) God Addresses the Woman*

Again demonstrating His normative understanding of the woman's response (blameshifting) and of her guilt in violating His instruction (which was also given using normative communication), God pronounces a judgment on the woman in 3:16 which any woman who has ever given birth to a child would understand consistently with LGH.

*(12) God Addresses Adam*

Finally, God addresses Adam's guilt, also in recognition of the normative communication He had provided in 2:16–17. Adam had died (his relationship with God being completely broken) just as God had promised in 2:17. In 3:17–19 God added a curse on the earth and pronounced that Adam would physically die in the future, rather than remain alive in the state of separation from God (the primary reason the text gives for God's banishing Adam and Eve from the garden in 3:23). Whereas God had initially commanded that the man and woman were to rule and subdue His creation,<sup>40</sup> because of their

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<sup>38</sup> Romans 16:20.

<sup>39</sup> Galatians 4:22–31.

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 1:28.

sin the creation would fight back and ultimately rule and subdue the man and woman. This curse and consequence of sin would remain until the woman's seed (the Messiah) would one day make things new and remove the curse entirely.<sup>41</sup> Each of these elements depend on the normality of communication and understanding, as these occurrences and predictions build on one another. God addresses the sin of the serpent, the woman, and the man all from the framework of His own normative communication in Genesis 1–2. His speech acts in Genesis 3 show with clarity that God meant exactly what He said.

*(13) Adam Addresses the Woman as Eve*

As the garden episode (the Fall narrative) draws to a conclusion, in 3:20 Adam demonstrates that he understands all that has been said and done in an LGH way, as he refers to his wife as *Chevvah*, or Eve, which means *life*, because Adam recognized that she would be the mother of all who would live. Perhaps he understood the prophetic significance of what God had said in 3:15, that Eve would have a seed Who would bring an end to the curse that sin brought.

*(14) God Confers With Himself*

In another profound evidence of God's own LGH approach to understanding communication, He speaks with Himself in 3:22 recognizing the undesirable potential of humanity living forever physically in a cursed state. His response to His own communication was to personally send Adam away and drive him from the garden and the tree of life that lived within it.

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<sup>41</sup> Revelation 22:3.

These fourteen speech acts demonstrate consistent attention to the LGH throughout. Importantly, the hermeneutic deviation recorded in these conversations was contrived by the serpent and Eve fell into his deception. It is notable that the only departure from LGH in all the speech acts of Genesis resulted in the catastrophic fall from innocence of the man and woman and consequently of the entire creation on earth.

While numerous popular advocates of spiritual growth seem to discount hermeneutics and interpretive discipline of the written word, it is most evident that God's written word profoundly emphasizes attention to normative understanding of communication. The LGH is an inherent necessity throughout the Genesis (and Job) narratives and these books set a precedent that is never overturned and instead is affirmed time and time again. The LGH is Biblical not extra-biblical content, and that truth brings significant implications to anything and everything pertaining to learning, growth, and maturity.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF LGH AS *BIBLICAL* NOT *EXTRA-BIBLICAL* CONTENT**

Because of the weight of hermeneutic data within the Biblical text showing that LGH is in fact itself Biblical content, Biblical hermeneutics (and more specifically the LGH) should be thought of not in the sense of the genitive of description (hermeneutics about or for the Bible) as the discipline is often considered to be, but rather as the genitive of possession — the *Bible's* hermeneutics. If Biblical hermeneutics is indeed truly Biblical, and if the Biblical hermeneutic is LGH, as has been argued here, and if *all* Biblical content is necessary for discipleship training, then LGH is not merely methodological preface to set the stage for Biblical study, but is rather

part of the *prolegomena*<sup>42</sup> of Bible study. One cannot encounter the first three chapters of Genesis without being immersed in introductory concepts of communication and necessary components for understanding communication. Further, because communication is important to God, and because He provided it to His creation, we have no warrant to ignore its principles, lest we find ourselves contradicting His communication as Adam and Eve ultimately found themselves doing. What Biblical discipleship program can intelligently ignore the incredible foundational principles of the early Genesis narrative? So many of the great questions of human ontology and phenomena are addressed there, and hermeneutics is an revelation in that context.

Besides the ethical necessity of appropriately dealing with Biblical hermeneutics as an integral component of Bible study, there are also practical advantages for training learners in hermeneutic methodology in discipleship contexts. Understanding hermeneutic concepts and consistently applying LGH allows the learner to learn Scripture and experience growth apart from mastery of any particular theological construct or system. In the covenantalist tradition one needs a systematic theology to understand “the eschatology of Ezekiel or the sacramental language in John 6 or the Psalmists insistence that he is righteous and blameless.”<sup>43</sup> For DeYoung and other Covenantal theologians, it means “starting with Reformed theology and my confessional tradition and sticking with that unless I have really good reason not to.”<sup>44</sup> Without a thorough understanding of systematic theology, one can’t really have certainty that they have interpreted the Scriptures correctly.

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<sup>42</sup> Greek compound meaning *first word*.

<sup>43</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Your Theological System Should Tell You How to Exegete” *The Gospel Coalition*, February 23, 2012, viewed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/your-theological-system-should-tell-you-how-to-exegete/>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

One significant flaw in that premise is that in order to understand any one topic of systematic theology, one must understand everything the Scripture has to say on that matter, and then, just to be sure one has understood correctly all of that material, one must also have understanding of every other passage not dealing with that particular topic of systematic theology just to ensure it isn't addressing that particular topic. This two-way street of hermeneutic circularity effectually means that there can never be any certainty that a learner is exegeting correctly, as they may be coming from the wrong or simply insufficient systematic theological knowledge. In short, the learner can only exegete as far as their current understanding of systematic theology can take them. So then what is the best way to learn systematic theology? "Good systematic theology will be anchored in good exegesis...We all know exegesis should inform systematic theology..."<sup>45</sup> Again, this is an impossible hermeneutic circle, causing any learner who realizes the impossibility of the situation to either give up altogether trying to arrive at certain conclusions through data, facts, and objective truth (as seems to be the case with today's prominent experientialist discipleship methods), or to recognize the permanence of the learner's deficiency and simply rely on a spiritual guru who has somehow overcome the impossible circularity and look to that magisterium-enlightened expert for the necessary information pertaining to life and godliness. Either way, this model destroys any hope for self-guided learning.

On the other hand, when we acknowledge that God has revealed Himself in His text in such a way as to be understood, that He has Himself provided humanity with the ability to communicate, understand, and be understood, we can recognize that His communication is sufficient, and that He has provided us what is needed for life and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

godliness *through the true knowledge of Him*.<sup>46</sup> And how does Peter suggest we access that true knowledge of Him? How has God provided that to His people?

So we have the more reliable prophetic word, to which you do well to pay attention... above all you know that all written prophesies were not developed of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by a human, but by the Holy Spirit leading men they spoke from God.<sup>47</sup>

The certain (true) knowledge of God is revealed in the word of God — not in our prayers or our circumstances. While God can certainly work through those things — and has in the past spoken in many ways, but in this era He has spoken through His Son,<sup>48</sup> who has affirmed that God has spoken *in His written word through His Spirit*.<sup>49</sup>

This is why Paul urges believers to be transformed by the renewing of their mind.<sup>50</sup> The word of God transforms. His word is the *sine qua non* of transformative learning (discipleship). His word is that which is necessary to make us adequate for every good work.<sup>51</sup> Paul further acknowledges that all Scripture is from the mouth of God,<sup>52</sup> and if Genesis is from the mouth of God, then it records God's communications and understandings accurately — as He would have us understand Him. Therein we discover the necessity to study and show ourselves approved as workers handling His word accurately.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 2 Peter 1:3.

<sup>47</sup> 2 Peter 1:19–21.

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 1:1–2.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., John 16:13–15.

<sup>50</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>51</sup> 2 Timothy 3:17.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.

<sup>53</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15.

## DEVELOPING A DISPENSATIONAL MISSIOLOGY

Handling the word of God is not optional. It is an integral and necessary component of learning, growth, and maturity; because the method for handling His word accurately is communicated very early in His revealed text, no discipleship process can be effective without an appropriate emphasis on understanding God as He has designed us to understand Him.

# 7

## **Timothy As A Theological Minority In 2 Timothy 3:14–4:4**

*Greg Muller*

In 2 Timothy 3:14–4:4 Paul instructs and encourages his student and young pastor friend Timothy to teach truth even through difficult circumstances. Much like the dispensationalist today, Timothy was also in the minority in his commitment to clarity as he led a group of believers in the first century church. This paper will examine what can be understood about secularism and what a teacher’s response from the instructions that Paul gives to Timothy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

We live in a day when it is popular to question the reliability of the Bible. It is stylish to doubt the Scriptures. We should not be surprised to hear people of the world criticize the Word. In an article a while back, Christian columnist Peter Heck related an interaction that he had with an attorney working for the so-called “Freedom from Religion Foundation” when the atheist attorney tweeted that people should read the Bible because is an awful immoral book and it breeds atheism. This atheist was saying that what Christians believe to be the inspired Word of God, not only is not the Word of God, but will lead you to believe there is no God. It is popular today to

ridicule the Bible about everything from the six-day creation, to the story of Jonah, and of course the resurrection and faith in Christ. To say that the bible has errors or contradictions is common.

This columnist, Peter Heck, says that he considered a proverb in his response to the atheist. Proverbs 26:4–5 (which itself has been pointed to as a contradiction), probably mostly due to the difficulty in reading the KJV, that aside, modern translations provide more clarity. The NASB reads: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes.” Rather than descend into an online debate with the atheists ridicule the columnist retweeted him and said “Evangelistic atheists encouraging people to read the Bible. Tell me God doesn’t have a great sense of humor.” (Figure 1).

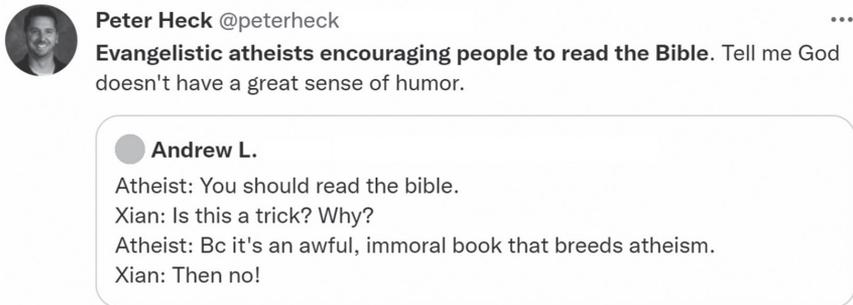


Figure 1. Screen capture of tweet answering a fool as his folly deserves.

What is surprising and saddening is the attack on the reliability of the Bible from within Christianity. Even in conservative theological circles, there are views such as limited inerrancy, which proposes that the Bible is true as much as it fulfills its intended purpose, so that a text in the Bible is true if its redemptive purpose is accomplished even if parts of the text are false. That is a compromised view of truth that does not make sense at all.

We as Christians must be aware of the rising skepticism and take steps to insulate ourselves from the infection of doubt. The apostles in the early church depended totally and wholly on God's Word. They did not question it or doubt it. In no other place in the Scripture do we find a better explanation to the utter dependence on the Word as we find recorded in 2 Timothy 3:14–4:4. Through the concepts and principles Paul explains in 2 Timothy 3–4, Paul demonstrates a total reliance on the Bible even when in the theological minority.

## BACKGROUND

To understand the situation that Timothy was facing in his ministry, look back at the context of this passage in the first portion of chapter 3. Paul presents a picture of what Timothy would live through in his ministry. A similar picture could be developed for the church and those that hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible. Paul pointed out two major problems, but he also has two statements of counsel to Timothy:

### *Two Major Problems*

1. *Secular moral deterioration v. 1–4*
  - lovers of self
  - lovers of money,
  - lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God
2. *Spiritual theological defection v. 5–9*
  - holding a form of godliness
  - denying its power

### *Two Statements of Counsel*

1. *Avoid v. 5,9*
  - *such men*
  - obvious error
2. *Continue v. 14*
  - in the things you have learned

The significance of these major problems to Paul and Timothy are that these problems would be the majority view, “for men” v. 2

(*anthrōpoi*) is mankind. That means most of the people that Timothy would have to deal with would be rooted in these problems whether secular or spiritual. Paul instructs Timothy to get away from these people both because of their moral deterioration and theological defection, that their error would be obvious v. 9. Paul tells Timothy in a day and age where there is moral deterioration and theological defection. The message that Paul has is that even in the minority, one who is grounded and learned in the Word such as Timothy should continue in the things he has learned. The word Paul uses for continue (*menō*) can be translated as *abide*: *You, however abide in the things you have learned and become convinced of*. Timothy had learned the Scriptures from childhood. Paul was not just telling Timothy based on a small amount of teaching to abide in the Word of God; he was telling Timothy to be faithful, and a way to do that is to continue and remain in the Word of God throughout his ministry. Holding the minority view amid the problems described this type of encouragement is essential. Paul explains the importance of continuing. In the rest of the chapter, the apostle Paul develops the things that we should hold on to if we are to withstand and be insulated to withstand the characteristic of our day.

## FIVE REASONS TO CONTINUE IN THE SCRIPTURE

### **People (2 Tim. 3:14)**

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, (2 Tim. 3:14)

Paul knew what people Timothy had learned and pointed to them as a reason to continue in the Scripture. Timothy learned from

his mother and grandmother,<sup>1</sup> and we also know that he learned from the Apostle Paul.<sup>2</sup> Timothy had Paul as a spiritual example of a life that he could follow. Timothy was told he could continue in the Word of God simply because the people that taught it to him had a touch of reality to their faith. Paul pointed out struggles that he himself had gone through in his ministry. Timothy had several people in his life who had characteristics about them that could only be explained by the Lord's rescue. The people that Timothy learned from were real in their faith.

### **Power (2 Tim. 3:15)**

and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:15)

Paul says the writings (Greek *grammata*) provide the knowledge to be saved through faith. This use of *grammata* may have had a subset of the OT in mind that perhaps Timothy had focused on in his upbringing, or Paul be playing off local traditions to provide contrast. Either way, from the context it is clear Paul is communicating that all the Scripture can provide this powerful knowledge. That salvation was accomplished through Christ's death on the cross and it is applied through faith in Christ Jesus. The verse very plainly shows that Paul could tell Timothy to abide in God's Word because there is power in the Scriptures to bring a person to faith in Jesus Christ. The power to make wise to salvation is shown in the story of Acts 8:25-40: Phillip speaking with the Ethiopian from just a section of

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<sup>1</sup> His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5).

<sup>2</sup> Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings... (2 Tim. 3:10-11b).

the prophet Isaiah provided the basis for his faith in Christ. For the Ethiopian that most likely only had a portion of the Old Testament or even just a portion of the book of Isaiah the Scripture was the beginning of the teaching that Philip used to preach Christ.

**Production (2 Tim. 3:16a)**

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God... (2 Tim. 3:16a)

The third thing that Paul says about the Word of God that makes it possible to continue in his Word is about the production of the Word, how it was produced. The Greek word (*theopneustos*) means God-breathed, that is, God breathed out the Scriptures. The words in Scripture are God’s Words; however, He gave them to us through human authors. Paul emphasizes the Scriptures in several ways in both of his letters to Timothy. Some of these ways are shown in this table:

writings	Scripture	Word
γράμματα ( <i>grammata</i> )	γραφῆ ( <i>graphē</i> )	λόγος ( <i>logos</i> )
2 Timothy 3:15 the sacred writings which are able	1 Timothy 5:18 For the Scripture says,	2 Timothy 2:15 accurately handling the word of truth.
	2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God	2 Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season

*Words that Paul uses for the Bible in his letters to Timothy*

All Scripture is God-breathed, so it is a product of God. Because of this production method, we can depend on it. Since we can depend on God to save us through Jesus Christ, it is only natural, logical, reasonable, spiritual to depend upon the Word He gave, the Word He

breathed out. Because God produced His Word, Paul instructs and encourages Timothy to continue in it.

### **Profitable (2 Tim. 3:16b)**

... and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for <sup>[c]</sup> instruction in righteousness, (2 Tim. 3:16b)

The fourth reason Paul gives for abiding in the Word of God is found in the last part of verse 16. Paul says it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Timothy is reminded that Scripture is inspired, which all Jews knew, and that the profitableness of the text is through that inspiration.

The Scriptures are profitable to teach us all the truth that we need to know. Do not misunderstand Paul; he is not saying to read the Bible in order to become a doctor and perform surgery. That is not what he is saying. If you want to know about God and your relationship with Him; about how to live pleasing to God in this world and in your situation; about how to cope in life; about how to understand, how to live in your relationships to others and to God's creation, then the Scriptures are profitable for teaching these things. Being in the theological minority in the midst of a secular culture, Timothy would need to abide in the Word and depend on it for the truth of doctrine as well as for instruction in righteousness in daily living.

The Scriptures are profitable for reproof. If there something that needs pointing out as sin, the Scriptures can identify it. The Scriptures are clear in reproofing us when we need it, and that is profitable.

The Scriptures are also profitable for correction. They do not just point out and leave us in guilt and despair. The Scriptures are correct. The etymology of the Word *epanorthōsis* here is related to the roots of the English Word *orthopedics*. This Word means to set straight or to relocate. An *epanorthōsis* is a restoration. The Scriptures are

profitable for restoration to correct us to spiritual health and to train us in righteousness. Scripture gives us the practice and the principal pattern to follow of righteous lives.

Paul instructs Timothy to continue in the Word to obtain all of that profit from the Scriptures. The Church's call today is not just to critique and analyze; we are to produce value in our vocations, personal relationships, and communities by individually continuing to depend on the Word.

### **Product (2 Tim. 3:17)**

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:17)

The product of remaining in the Word of God is that the man of God may be complete. Paul wants Timothy to be a man of God thoroughly equipped, that this equipping is adequate to do every good work. Everything that God wants you to do for him is directed in the Scriptures. God equips through the Scripture. This is not an overnight event, equipping takes time.

Many adults today were in athletics growing up, in most every team sport, equipment is given to players to wear or use. For professionals playing in a big American football game like the Superbowl the teams will use the best equipment. The helmet and shoulder pads and hip pads and special cleats and gloves. Equipment they will put on and be ready to use to win, winning the game is the work their coaches and team owners want them to do. The Scriptures are the equipment for us if we are to go out and serve the Lord, the Scriptures are our equipment. If we are to go out and share the gospel and lead people to Christ, the Scriptures are our equipment. If we are to face the secular moral deterioration and Spiritual theological defection of our time, we need to be armed with the Scriptures. If we

are to go and serve, minister, and comfort the grieving we need the Scriptures as our equipment.

## **HOW TO CONTINUE IN THE SCRIPTURE.**

### **Permanent**

As an established believer rooted in the Scripture, one is to continue in the Scripture, the continuance is a permanent position. It is being stuck in it, not in a bad way, but in a way that continues in the Word of God. Timothy is to abide in the Word of God because the imposters are going to be deceiving and being deceived progressively worse and worse. Keep practicing, keep learning, and keep performing according to its directions. The definition goes a little further; one is to maintain an unbroken relationship to the Word. We need to continue and maintain an unbroken relationship to God's Word. Some have illustrated it this way: A stake can be put in the ground, but a tree abides in the ground. That is to picture that abide means to draw sustenance from, to draw life from, that is what we are to do with God's Word.

### **Established**

We need first to establish our position in the Word by realizing the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy, understanding and believing that the Bible is God's Word. Every bit of it. Paul tells Timothy the Bible is true, he says every word of it is God breathed. To continue in the text is essential that a person holds to that understanding it is the beginning of abiding in God's Word. As a child Paul knew Timothy had learned the Scriptures, for some who may already be adults when they believe, being established would require learning and study.

## **Study**

Drawing your life out of God's Word means that you study it yourself; the foundation is put down by those that taught (v. 14), but study or diligence in it is also essential (cf. 2:14). Memorizing it needs to become a living part of Christian's thought life. When a believer makes a choice, he should know that God's Word says that is the kind of decision to make.

## **Use**

We must use God's Word. If you want to be effective in witnessing, you need to use God's Word. If you want to counsel someone, use God's Word. If you want to comfort someone, use God's Word.

## **THE MINORITY'S MISSION**

### **Motive in the Minority (2 Tim. 4:1)**

I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: (2 Tim. 4:1)

Christ is going to judge the living and the dead. The judgment that Christ brings forth will be a very solemn event. Concerning the living and the dead, probably he is speaking of those who are living physically and those who are dead. He is talking about the full scope of Christ's judgment for every person when he comes. He goes on to say that this will take place when Christ appears. It means that the living and the dead will be judged.

There is also motivation through hope at his appearing and his kingdom. This is speaking of Christ's second coming to Earth as the King when he establishes his kingdom.

### ***Message of Minority (2 Tim. 4:2)***

Preach the Word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim. 4:2)

The content of preaching is to be the Word. One cannot preach the Word if he does not know it and it take time to learn. A man behind a pulpit would not have even entered Timothy's mind for the word that is used here is the word that speaks of a herald. A herald was a person sent by the king with a message from the king. He was to go into the public areas of a town and among all the people he was to proclaim the message of the king. He was not to proclaim it in a mild manner; he was to proclaim the message the king sent with the same authority that the king proclaimed. The herald was to proclaim authoritatively the message of the king. What Paul is saying to Timothy, he is saying to Timothy, who needs to deliver authoritatively the message God that given. He should not deliver it as though it was his best guess, but as God's message. It is God's proclamation, so we are to preach the Word.

Christians should be consistent in preaching, always being ready whether time opportune or not. Paul anticipates practically every question, being ready in season and out of season. That is anytime the opportunity presents itself whether or not it is convenient. Preach the Word anytime the opportunity is available and be ready even if you do not get the chance.

There is character involved in preaching the word. Paul gives three commands that are clear in what is to happen when the word is preached. The preacher is to reprove, rebuke, and exhort.

Reprove means convince, be persuasive; Paul is telling Timothy that preaching the word means you persuade people, convince them of something. Paul also says to rebuke people. Rebuke means to correct them, a rebuke is verbal discipline, it involves a warning of judgment considering the context. Rebuke is what parents do to their children when they are doing something wrong. Rebuke implies if you do not cut it out, you are going to get it. Preaching the Word is a form of discipline, it is a correction. Paul also says to exhort. The first two, convincing and correcting, deal with the negative aspects; exhortation deals with the positive. Exhortation is a challenge to do what is right. Challenge people in the right direction and encourage them.

### ***Majority's Myths (2 Tim. 4:3–4)***

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:3–4)

The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine but will, having itching ears, heap up teachers. Their ears will be tickled with each new fancy of thought and the result will be turning away from truth to fables. They will turn away their ears from the truth, and this goes so far as they reject the truth as truth; before they did not like it, but now they simply, say, “oh, that’s not true.” The natural result then, is in verse four: they will turn aside to myths. Instead of accepting the truth as truth. They now reject the truth as truth and accept the false is true. A picture of what happened in the first century, and in the present one. When the apostle Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word there is not simply a command for the speaker. There is an implied directive to the hearer, that is to listen.

There is implied in this command and in this situation the challenge to listen and to apply it, and if you do not like it, change your life. Do not try to change the truth.

## CONCLUSION

For Timothy, a theological minority in his day, and those of us today that hold to the minority view of dispensationalism, or inerrancy of Scripture; the type of encouragement Paul gives in this text to remain in the Scriptures is essential. The foundation of teaching in the church is in danger if we think we can have an inspired Word of God without an inerrant Word of God. God has provided guidance to avoid theological defection or secular moral deterioration through Paul teaching Timothy to preach and continue in the Scripture...

- Because of the spiritual example of the people learned from
- Because of the power in the Scriptures
- Because of production of the Scriptures
- Because of the profit from the Scriptures
- Because of the product from the Scriptures

... to be a complete, equipped, and adequate servant of God.

