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Why Should We Translate the Bible into Other Languages?

Alan J Torrance, PhD

At the heart of the witness of the Scriptures stands the testimony that the eternal God, the Creator of the universe, became a particular human being born at a particular time in a particular location on our tiny planet. Indeed, the recognition that God became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ (Messiah) is the key affirmation that defines the Christian faith. To affirm this is to affirm an almost inconceivable event of grace. To recognize that God is transcendent and eternal is to recognize that the God whom we worship is radically and profoundly different from human creatures. We are finite, temporal creatures who live in a remote corner of an unthinkably massive universe. Our capacities, our powers, and, indeed, all our knowing, moreover, are profoundly limited. Still, we are also confused sinners – “hostile in our minds,” as Paul puts it (Colossians 1:21). Despite all of this, the eternal, transcendent God freely chooses to communicate with the sinful inhabitants of this cosmic village. As John argues, the creative Word (Logos/*dabar*) which brought everything into being from nothing, *became flesh*. Put simply, God chose to *speak, to communicate* with humanity by becoming one of us as Immanuel, God with us.

But how precisely do we find God speaking to us as the incarnate Word? The Gospels witness to the fact that God did not drop onto the planet as a perfectly formed adult speaking some kind of transcendent, celestial language appropriate to his divine being. Nor, indeed, did he speak some universal language to be appropriated by everyone on planet Earth. He didn't speak English nor, indeed, did he speak Esperanto (the language constructed to be a universal, world language). The Word became flesh as a baby and grew up learning to speak, primarily, Aramaic. Now Aramaic is a very specific, local Semitic language which originated in the middle Euphrates and spread to Syria and Mesopotamia. As Jesus grew up, he learned not only to communicate with others by this means but as a child he learned to interpret the world by means of the linguistic tool-set given to him by his parents and social context. What do I mean by this? Language is not simply a set of words that we attach to prior, perfectly formed thoughts. It is a set of tools by means of which we learn to *think, to interpret* the world, to *distinguish* between objects, to *understand* what is right and wrong, what is appropriate and inappropriate. It is the means by which parents teach children how to respond to situations and how to react to the world: “Two plus two equals four!”, “Don't touch!”, “That will burn your fingers!”, “Don't lie to me!”, “Help granny carry the shopping!” That is, language is the means by which we learn, when we are children, how to interpret and, indeed, to negotiate the world and others. When the Word became flesh, the incarnate Son of God learned Aramaic from parents who raised him to understand and interpret the world around him and to try and come to grips with a world that is confusing, complex and, indeed, sinful.

In sum, in becoming human, God became (*egeneto*) what was otherwise radically “foreign” to him – human flesh in a sinful world. And to reiterate, God became a human creature living on a planet in a remote corner of an unthinkably vast universe. Why did God do this? Out of love for creatures and out of a desire to communicate with them *in their language and in ways that they could understand and with which they could identify*. That is, the Word chose to communicate with human beings through learning a local language and adapting to the circumstances of a particular people within a particular culture located in this unthinkably remote part of the universe. In sum, God chose and, indeed, chooses to communicate by means of an act of the most profoundly humble identification with a people and a culture that are, in almost every respect, radically different from who God is. All this was done in order that we might “have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...” (Ephesians 3:18-19).

In short, it is the love of the eternal God for sinful mortals that explains God’s commitment to ensuring that, despite the radical difference between God and us, nothing can come between God’s transcendent and eternal being and the frail, finitude of fallen creatures – all of this in order that those creatures might not remain ignorant but be given to know the extent of God’s love and commitment to them. Cf Romans 8:38-39.

Communicating the Gospel “in Christ”

The apostle Paul summarizes the life of a Christian as participating “in Christ” – a concept that features in his writings more than 170 times. In John, we find reference to “abiding” in Christ and in Hebrews we are presented as sharing in the life of Jesus Christ, the sole priest of our confession. In short, we are called and recreated to share and participate in the life, mission and ministry of the sole Mediator between God and humanity – the one who alone mediates God’s purposes to humanity. As we are called, therefore, to communicate God’s Self-disclosure and testimony, we are to do this in a way that participates and shares in HIS sole mediation of God’s purposes to the world, in HIS mission from the Father to the creatures, in HIS life as the incarnate Word to humanity. What are the implications of that? One of these is that in our outreach to societies and people groups of other cultures and languages, we are to reflect God’s form of Address by reaching out to them in ways that take *their* thought forms radically seriously and thus communicate in their languages – speaking, that is, in ways that they can hear, understand, recognize and appropriate. That involves communicating in ways that they can indwell or, more specifically, in ways whereby the incarnate Word can indwell so that he might transform their understanding and give them the ears to hear. And no Christian communication can possibly be satisfactory that does not involve their being given the gift of hearing and reading and understanding the Scriptures. It is not possible to conceive of a form of outreach that is true to participating, sharing and abiding in Christ’s mission to the world and yet which does not include access to the sole witness to God’s purposes and engagement with humanity in Jesus Christ, namely, the Bible.

It belongs to the very essence, therefore, of the church's mission that the Bible be translated into the languages of those whom God, and thus the church, would reach. Why? Because the Christian Scriptures are the sole written witness to God's creative and redemptive purposes and to the incarnation of the Word. It is through the Bible's witness that the incarnate Son is heard and God's presence as Jesus Christ is recognized through the creative and reconciling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is in and through the witness of the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks.

New Wine in Old Wine Skins?

Does this suggest that every language is inherently satisfactory in its given state to accommodate divine revelation? No! Indeed, throughout the Gospels and the New Testament, one witnesses the extent to which God's self-disclosure transforms the terms it uses. When it comes to interpreting who Jesus is, for example, he is named "King" - but the word "king" is then redefined so that the word becomes appropriate to the nature and character of Jesus' distinctive lordship. We are presented with a king who, far from exercising unrestrained power over others, is also described as a suffering servant. The notion of kingship is redefined. We are also told that he is the sole Priest but this is a priest who becomes the lamb offered for the people - who presents his own life to the Father on behalf of the people. Not only does he fulfill the roles of King and Priest in redefined ways, he also fulfills the role of Prophet. Again, however, he doesn't do this by speaking wise or future-predictive "words"; he fulfills this office by *being* the Word in his person - the Word that *becomes* flesh. It is who Jesus is and not simply what he says that communicates God. So, the language that is used of Jesus is redefined in being applied to him. This became a problem for Peter. He recognized and confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. However, he had no sooner done so than he started interpreting and describing what Jesus must and must not do by reference to the old concept of a messiah. Messiahs don't suffer - so Jesus should not suffer. Jesus' response to Peter was brutal. By refusing to allow God's self-disclosure to redefine his conception of what it is to be the Messiah, Peter was allowing his prior interpretation of the term to define Jesus' mission. To do that was nothing less than demonic. In other words, all our language and talk about God requires to be transformed by that reality to which the Scriptures bear witness and not by the current meanings of the terms.

Sometimes this means that new words are coined. For example, the word for baptism "*baptisma*" is effectively unique in the ancient world and filled with all the meaning that is required to make sense of Christ's "baptism" on the cross and human baptism redefined accordingly. We are "baptized" in his blood. In short, the Bible bears witness to the fact that our language is continually *commandeered* and its meanings *transformed* so that our language becomes a new wine skin that can faithfully accommodate and communicate the new wine that is the *eu-aggelion*, lit, "Good News". News that, because it is new, changes the way we think, interpret and speak about God and God's purposes.

Interestingly, this means that in the process of translating the Scriptures into new languages, one can be helped to discover the extent to which the English language has failed to capture certain key insights - because the vocabulary is inadequate for

that which it is seeking to communicate. For example, African insights into solidarity, participation and inter-relationships can mean that it has the vocabulary to translate certain central Hebrew and Christian insights that the more individualistic categories provided by the English language lack. Desmond Tutu famously introduced the Zulu concept of Ubuntu which means “I am because you are.” What it communicates is a sense of community and solidarity where our being as persons is constituted by our relationship to others. The Judeo-Christian concept of relations is served well by this. The concept of participation in Christ, to which we referred above is a notoriously difficult concept to interpret in English and yet that notion appears, as we mentioned, over 170 times in Paul’s letters. Here, the concept that, “I am because you are” opens insights into what participation means and indeed what it means to share in the new humanity and new creation established in Jesus Christ. To refer, with Paul, to the fact that we participate “in Christ” is to say, of him, “I am because you are!” – a conceptuality that Africans may grasp better than Anglo-Europeans.

Consequently, translating the Bible into other languages is not only important for the sake of those with whom we are communicating, but it also has the potential to challenge Western interpretive categories. We stand to learn and not simply teach in and through the process of translating the Bible into other languages.

The Communication of the Gospel is Inherently Personal & Interpersonal

In his recent book, *Pauline Dogmatics*, Professor Douglas Campbell of Duke University writes as follows: “Just as God first came to us as a human being, meeting us concretely, in person, face-to-face, so too the message about God spreads through people, concretely, face-to-face, although superintended especially by the Holy Spirit. A relational God calls people to a relationship through a relationship. (*Pauline Dogmatics*, 465.)

Integral to what we have argued above is the “personal” and “interpersonal” nature of communicating the Gospel. When God speaks, he speaks “in person” and addresses us “personally” as creatures created for love and for personal relationship with God and each other. This lies at the heart, indeed, of the Jewish Torah. The “Ten Commandments” are set in a context wherein God restates God’s faithful covenant commitment to the people of Israel. “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The implication is clear and spelled out accordingly, “THEREFORE, as God has been unconditionally faithful to Israel, SO the people of Israel are to be unconditionally faithful to God and also to others - that is, they are to be faithful to all those to whom God remains faithful. This is then spelled out in further detail: “Be faithful to me and don’t worship other gods before me!”, “Don’t engage in idolatry!”, “Don’t take the name of the Lord in vain!”, “Keep the Sabbath holy!” and then the horizontal obligations, “Honor your parents!”, “Do not kill!”, “Do not commit adultery!”, “Do not lie!”

The essence of the Jewish law is that we are both inspired and called to “image” or to “reflect” God’s relationship toward us in our relationship both to God and toward others. We are created in the image of God and thus *to reflect God* in all our dealings with others.

When it comes to communicating the Gospel and the Biblical witness to groups who cannot access the Bible in English or in other “foreign” languages, we are called to “image God” in our relationship with them - and in mediating God’s self-communication. It is hard to see how ‘imaging’ the personal communication of the personal God of love is possible without a commitment to mediate that revelation in and through the languages of those to whom we are seeking to communicate. And it is unthinkable that we should wish to communicate the Gospel to them without wanting them to be able to access the Scriptures using that linguistic tool-set that they understand and with which they feel at home.

The “Ownership” of the Scriptures

One of the defining events in European religious and, indeed, cultural history was Luther’s translation of the Bible. This, together with the emergence of the printing press, made the Bible accessible to the people in ways that were unthinkable in the period prior to that. Until then, the church leadership had effective “ownership” and, indeed control over the biblical witness. People were obliged to believe the (often selective) interpretation by the established church of the biblical witness, its message, exhortations, and commands. Members of the church who were not clergy had no opportunity, therefore, to challenge its interpretation. The translation of the Bible into the language of the people and the dissemination of copies of this Bible meant that literate people could question and challenge the church’s interpretation of the Scriptures. That led to reformation within the church.

Under the influence of what was started by Luther was continued much later by the Puritans and, indeed, the Scottish Covenanters. They opposed the “ownership” of the Bible and the “control” of its interpretation by the church hierarchy – namely, bishops appointed by the king. This led to a passionate commitment to teach young people to read and write. In Scotland, in particular, this was motivated by the belief that every child needed education so that they could read and understand the Scriptures. They had been translated into English - the King James translation of the Bible. Indeed, the roots of the contemporary commitment to state education in Scotland can be traced directly back to this determination that the Scriptures should be accessible to everyone.

In the Christian outreach to the world, this same concern needs to be apparent. The Scriptures are not “owned” by English speakers or those who speak the language of the majority. Access to them and to their interpretation should be open to all. Why? Because at the heart of the New Testament witness is an all-inclusive vision of God’s purposes: “There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29). That is, the church is called to encourage Jews and Gentiles, women and men, all people of all races and cultures and languages, namely, *all* the “heirs of the promise” to have access to the Scriptures. Everyone should enjoy the privilege of interpreting God’s declared purposes for them and for their communities, as also for the world.

In conclusion, the great Reformer, John Calvin, stressed that when the transcendent God addresses humanity, God communicates with us at our level, in human language, and in ways that we understand. To make the point, he appropriated the Latin word “balbutire” which refers to the ways in which parents speak to babies in their cots. Parents don’t speak an adult language to babies. Rather, they seek to communicate with children at their level – balbutire means “to prattle” or “to babble”. For Calvin, God is committed to addressing us at our level and in ways that we can appropriate and understand.

When asking the question of why we should translate the Bible into minority languages, we should consider the lengths to which God has gone to communicate with us, God’s ignorant, sinful, confused, and yet dearly beloved children. He communicates with us at our level so that we might know our heavenly Father, understand his purposes for us, and be reconciled and redeemed in our thinking and in our orientation both toward God and to the world. It is not possible as the Body of Christ to recognize and affirm this without also recognizing the extent of our obligation to find ways of translating the Bible and thus to enable (rather than control) access to its resources so that others might have that life-giving knowledge mediated through it. To do this in the mother tongues of those whom God treasures is to be faithful to the God who goes to the ends of the universe in pursuit of the lost. And it is to recognize our Lord’s mission to address those whom he loves both personally and in person.

About the Author



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Christ the Fulfilment of the Law

Si Fry

There are many scripture verses referenced in the footnotes that are not in this text, I encourage all who read this also to look up and read those verses too.

“Woe is me! For I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”¹ This was the cry of the Prophet Isaiah when he had an encounter with the glory of the living God; his sin came to the forefront of the prophet’s mind. The same happened in the New Testament when the Apostle Peter had an encounter with the glory of God displayed perfectly through Jesus. “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”²

There is something in the heart of the one whom God stirs in his grace that when they encounter a glimpse of God’s majesty, they become acutely aware of their sin and inadequacy before his holy presence. Wonderfully in both cases of Isaiah and Peter, God made a way for them to be commissioned to his service. John 3:19-21 makes it clear that for the impenitent, any sense of being exposed to the majesty of God’s light causes them to want to hide from it or extinguish it; however, the focus of this article is on those who endeavor to please God with their life.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 3:20 “Through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Knowing one has broken God’s Law subjectively through their conscience,³ or objectively through having access to God’s revealed Law,⁴ makes people feel a sense of guilt and shame before God. This causes them to want to hide from God,⁵ or somehow appease him. Galatians 3:24 declares, “**Therefore the law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ**, so that we may be justified by faith.” (NASB). The same Law that clearly highlights sin and condemns us is supposed to lead us to the one who can save us and redeem us from sin’s curse;⁶ not leave us struggling to appease God’s righteous anger through our own efforts.

For those coming to Christ from an Islamic background, which is essentially a works-based religion⁷, understanding the Law of God and its role for those in Christ can be particularly confusing. Therefore, to help one understand this I want to briefly consider the following:

¹ Isaiah 6:5.

² Luke 5:8.

³ Romans 2:14-16.

⁴ Romans 2:17-23.

⁵ Genesis 3:8-11, John 3:19-21.

⁶ Galatians 3:13.

⁷ Surah 3:129, 7:8-9, 23:102-103, 98:6-8, Chapman 2003, 77.

- What is the Law,
- The coming of the Law,
- the privilege of the Law,
- the curse of the Law,
- the fulfillment of the Law,
- freedom from the Law,
- the internalizing of the Law,
- greater than the Law.

What is the Law?

Normally speaking the law is a list of rules and requirements set by governments and social or religious institutions to regulate the behavior (and sometimes thoughts) of those under their authority. “The laws of the ancient Near East dealt with the ordering of society; but Israel’s laws were given to regulate every aspect of life: personal, familial, social, and cultic. The laws were to teach Israel to distinguish between holy and profane, between clean and unclean, and between just and unjust.”⁸

The Bible employs several words for the Law. “Tôrāh, ‘law, instruction, teaching’; hōq, ‘statute, decree’; mišpāt, ‘judgment, legal decision’; mišwāh, ‘command(ment)’. Their number reflects the importance of law within the Bible.”⁹ “Indeed the first five books are called Tôrāh , or Law, by Jews and the New Testament, even though they appear to be as much about history as law...this context is important for the understanding of biblical law.”¹⁰ Within the Tôrāh or Pentateuch (Greek word referring to the 5 books of Moses), there are specific law sections:

- The 10 Commandments (Decalogue) – Exodus 20:2-17,
- The book of the Covenant – Exodus 20:22-23:33,
- The Levitical Collection and Holiness Code – Leviticus 1-16 and 17-26,
- The Deuteronomic Collections where Moses retells and sometimes expands on previous laws and requirements given, hence the name of the book in Greek stands for second law – the book of Deuteronomy.¹¹

However, unless specifically specified, when Scripture refers to the Law or the Law of Moses it is referring to the truth revealed about God’s ways and requirements in the books of Moses – the Tôrāh or Pentateuch. It is important to realize other words are sometimes used in scripture to refer to the Law, examples are: “‘word, judgment, ordinance, command(ment), precepts, stipulations, requirements,’ or simply ‘the way(s)’.”¹² However, most importantly of all is to understand that these laws, ways, and requirements were not man made, but given by God to his people. “The giving

⁸ Walter A. Elwell, *The Marshall Pickering Encyclopaedia of the Bible Volume 2 J-Z*, Marshall Pickering, 1988, 1314.

⁹ I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman. *New Bible Dictionary 3rd Edition*, IVP, 1996, 672.

¹⁰ Marshall, 1996, 672

¹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God*, IVP, 1992, 148-151.

¹² Elwell, 1988, 1314.

of the law was part of God's ongoing grace towards Israel."¹³ Chris Wright notes, "God stood above and behind the law, so in keeping the law was by no means an end in itself, but rather the way to 'knowing God' in personal covenant relationship. In that sense, the law was indeed 'life.' It was living as God commanded that they would be the people he wanted, and so fulfill his purpose in the world (Exodus 19:5f)."¹⁴

It is worth pointing out at the beginning that before God gave Israel the Law, he already had redeemed them out of Egypt. Alec Motyer says, "The grace of God precedes the law of God. His grace reaches out to save, and it is to those whom he has saved that he reveals his law."¹⁵ Blackburn notes, "Exodus firmly brings gospel and law into relationship.... The law is given to Israel after she has been delivered from slavery. Nowhere does Exodus suggest that Israel was delivered because of her faithfulness to the law."¹⁶ John Mackay writes, "The people have already been freed by divine grace and power. They are not given the law to save themselves, but so that they might continue to enjoy the salvation they have already received."¹⁷

The Coming of the Law

The sense of shame due to sin when humanity encounters God has been there since the Fall when they broke the only law given to them.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat. Genesis 3:8-11

Notice how God even though he knows everything;¹⁸ he knows what Adam and Eve have done and where they are, does not jump straight to punishing them, but reaches out to them and lets them come to him first. Even when God punishes them, he gives hope of future deliverance¹⁹ and covers their shame²⁰. The account in Genesis 4 shows a group of people who want to either approach God on their own terms (Cain) or just ignore God completely (Cain's descendants), however the chapter finishes making it clear some still wanted to try to please God. "At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD."²¹ How they did that is not clear,

¹³ Marshall, 1996:674.

¹⁴ Wright, 1992:159.

¹⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus – BST*, IVP, 2005, 191.

¹⁶ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus* (New Studies in Biblical Theology, Volume 28), 2012, 113-114

¹⁷ Mackay, 2001, 334.

¹⁸ See Psalm 139:1-6, 147:5, Isaiah 46:9-10.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:15.

²⁰ Genesis 3:21.

²¹ Genesis 4:26.

yet there are hints throughout Genesis that people were trying to and had some understanding of God's ways and requirements.

Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High who blessed Abram and received a tithe from him in Genesis 14:17-20. How he ministered is not stated, but what is made clear is that he was a minister of the things of God. Circumcision was given to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17:9-14 as a command. The encounter with Abimelech in Genesis 20 shows there was some knowledge and fear of God's ways over the sanctity of marriage. God can say to Isaac in Genesis 26:5 "And in your offspring, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because Abraham **obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.**"

However, all these are just little glimpses here and there of God and his ways revealed through creation,²² and some specific commands or special revelation given to mankind²³ or the people of God.²⁴ The Apostle Paul summarizes this time up until the Law was given through Moses in Romans 5:12-14, "Just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – **for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses.**"

The Privilege of the Law

So, it is important to realize that for Israel, it was an enormous privilege to be the chosen people who received the Law of God, and this was recognized as such by them. "They are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, **the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law**, the worship, and the promises."²⁵ The reason why Paul uses this and the following language is to explain how the Jews thought about their position in the world because of the Law and Covenants:

But if you call yourself a Jew and **rely on the law and boast in God**, and **know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law**, and if you are sure that you yourself are **a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.** Romans 2:17-20.

The people of Israel under Moses had met with God at Mount Sinai,²⁶ they heard the very voice of God giving them the ten commandments, before begging not to hear him anymore lest they die.²⁷ Douglas Stuart commenting on the account in Exodus writes, "This verse specially emphasizes that God spoke the Ten Commandments himself directly to Israel rather than through the intermediation of Moses. So

²² Romans 1:18-21, Psalm 19:1-4.

²³ Genesis 9:1-17.

²⁴ E.g., Genesis 12:1-3, 17:9-14.

²⁵ Romans 9:4.

²⁶ Exodus 19:17.

²⁷ Exodus 20:1-21, Deuteronomy 5:4-5, 6:22-25.

frightening was this for the people to experience that as soon as God had finished, they demanded no further direct audition of God's commands." (Ex. 20:19).²⁸ Ross Blackburn notes, "From a canonical perspective, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Decalogue in Exodus...it is the first law code given in the canonical form of Exodus, it is given directly to the people without the mediation of Moses, it is spoken of in different terms (literally ten words) it alone appeared at the tablets written by the Lord at Sinai and was specially designated to be placed in the ark."²⁹

They then received further instructions directly from God to Moses which he wrote down for them,³⁰ before the Elders of Israel went to see the God of Israel and ate and drank before him and he did not lay his hand on them.³¹ Moses then went up the mountain for 40 days and nights where he received further instructions from the LORD.³² He came back down the mountain to deal with the golden calf incident and smashed the two tablets that were cut out and written on by the finger of God.³³ Moses then goes back up with tablets that he had cut out, yet God will still be the one to write on them.³⁴ He then receives further revelation while there for another forty days and nights.³⁵

Humanity is no longer left in the dark about God's righteous requirements, there is no longer any subjectivity around God's ways, expectations, laws, or attributes; they had been declared and recorded for all time. Sure, there were and are still lots of things people would like to know but all that they need to know about God's ways had been revealed to them and their children for all time. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, **that we may do all the words of this law.**"³⁶ John Calvin writes, "The Law was committed to writing in order that it might teach more fully and perfectly the knowledge both of God and of ourselves, which the law of nature teaches meagerly and obscurely."³⁷ No wonder the Psalmist rejoiced greatly in the Law.

Blessed is the man who...delights in the law of the LORD."³⁸ "In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."³⁹ "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my

²⁸ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: Exodus, Vol 2*. B&H Publishing, 2006,

²⁹ Blackburn, 2012, 104.

³⁰ Exodus 24:4.

³¹ Exodus 24:9-11.

³² Exodus 24:18.

³³ Exodus 32.

³⁴ Exodus 34:1.

³⁵ Exodus 34:28.

³⁶ Deuteronomy 29:29.

³⁷ Calvin J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Eerdmans, Book 2. Reprinted 1997, 314.

³⁸ Psalm 1:1-2.

³⁹ Psalm 119:14-16.

meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path...your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.⁴⁰

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.⁴¹

The Curse of the Law

Moses wrote,

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. **If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God** that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, **then you shall live....But if your heart turns away** and you will not hear, but are drawn away....**I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish....I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and curse.**⁴²

To listen and obey the Law means life, to ignore and disobey means death, and here in lies the problem, for the Bible makes clear, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”⁴³ “For by works of the law no human being (literally ‘flesh’) will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”⁴⁴ “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.... For apart from the law, sin lies dead.... The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.... It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh.”⁴⁵

The Law of the Lord may be perfect,⁴⁶ yet it perfectly highlights humanity’s imperfections right down to the core of our being. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good”,⁴⁷ but, “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”⁴⁸ In Romans 7:1-3, the Apostle Paul compares the Law to being Humanity’s husband, we are under its authority and when we break it, our

⁴⁰ Psalm 119:97-111.

⁴¹ Psalm 19:7-11.

⁴² Deuteronomy 30:15-19.

⁴³ Romans 8:8.

⁴⁴ Romans 3:20.

⁴⁵ Romans 7:7-14.

⁴⁶ Psalm 19:7.

⁴⁷ Romans 7:12.

⁴⁸ Romans 7:18.

condemnation is deserved just like in a case of marital infidelity. James 2:10-11 makes it clear that for any offense we become a transgressor of all the Law:

“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”

Galatians 3:10-12 adds:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.” **Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law,** for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.

This understanding of man’s inability to fulfill the Law in his own strength is not only in the New Testament. A careful reading of the Old Testament will show God made this clear to his people from the beginning. Arguably, if mankind broke God’s one law in the Garden of Eden when the world was perfect, they by themselves were not going to be able to fulfill the Law now that sin and death were at work in the world. God, after the giving of the Law, makes it clear to Moses that his people will break the Law and not be able to fulfill it. Consider the following passage in Deuteronomy 31:16-21:

And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. **Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods** among them in the land that they are entering, and **they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.** Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’ And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods.

Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that **this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel.** For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, **they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness** (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring). **For I know what they are inclined to do even today,** before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give.

Likewise with Joshua once Israel was in the promised land:

But Joshua said to the people, **“You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”** And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.” Then Joshua said to the people, **“You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.”** And they said, “We are witnesses.” Joshua 24:19-22.

The Apostle Paul explains in Galatians 3:21-24:

Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? Far from it! For if a law had been given that was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being confined for the faith that was destined to be revealed. Therefore, **the Law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.** (NASB).

The Fulfillment of the Law

The Law of God given to Moses reveals God’s righteous ways, his expectation of his People and the way they can make atonement for their sin. However, Israel and all humanity constantly fall short of God’s Law and come under its judgment so that “the whole world may be held accountable to God,⁴⁹” due to our sin. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,⁵⁰” and are “by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁵¹” Terry Virgo says, “The law could only describe and indeed command the appropriate conduct for God’s people. It could not actually accomplish or produce it.⁵²”

Mankind is totally unable to make himself righteous and acceptable to God in his own strength; but what man could not do for God, God did for man, through becoming a man, the man Jesus Christ. **“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”⁵³** Through faith in Christ the Law is fulfilled in us, as we walk by grace, according to the Spirit.

⁴⁹ Romans 3:19.

⁵⁰ Romans 3:23.

⁵¹ Ephesians 2:3.

⁵² Terry Virgo, *God’s Treasured Possession*, IVP, 2021, 80.

⁵³ Romans 8:3-4.

For Jesus said of himself, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”**⁵⁴ Jesus fulfils the Law completely, the only person ever to do so, and through his death makes a way for people to be redeemed from being under the Law’s curse. For “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of women, **born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law**, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”⁵⁵

Christ redeems all who come to him from under the Law by taking on himself their sin and judgment before God on the cross. **“For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.”**⁵⁶ Galatians 3:13-14 says:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The writer of the Hebrews makes abundantly clear the inability of the Law and its priests to save those under it; they were there to point us to the greater reality, our need for Christ.

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**⁵⁷ Every priest stands daily at his service, **offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins**, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.**”⁵⁸

Hebrews 9:11-14 and v23-28 reveals how Christ’s death on the cross atones for the sin of those who put their faith in him:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands,

⁵⁴ Matthew 5:17-18.

⁵⁵ Galatians 4:4-5.

⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁵⁷ Hebrews 10:1-4.

⁵⁸ Hebrews 10:11-14.

that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but **by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**”

“Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. **For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.** Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, **he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the Law, so no one can boast.⁵⁹ Through faith, one receives – forgiveness, the blessing given to Abraham, the promised Holy Spirit who is a guarantee of our future inheritance as well as being God’s empowering presence within us. In Christ we are a new creation and adopted into God’s family. All this is through God’s grace, not our adherence to the Law. (For more on this see Somali Bible Society Journal, volume 3, issue 1, page 16).

The Law itself, however, is not dead or abolished as it will continue until all is accomplished when Christ returns to judge the world. Jesus in Matthew 5:19 gives a strong warning to those who would relax any of its commandments. No, it is not the Law that is dead or abolished, it still stands to lead people to Christ,⁶⁰ but it is the person who dies to the Law when they put their faith in Christ (the one who fulfilled the Law). As Romans 7:4-6 beautifully declares:

Likewise, my brothers **you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.** For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. **But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**

⁵⁹ Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁶⁰ Galatians 3:24.

Freedom From the Law

In fact, it is the Law itself, the Apostle Paul says, that declared him dead to it, thus by default making clear that it still stands, but not for those who through faith have been crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:19-21:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Since in Christ we are dead to the Law and made righteous by faith, we do not seek to establish righteousness through our own efforts as the Jews mistakenly did but receive it by faith in Christ. “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and **seeking to establish their own**, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.⁶¹

Galatians 4:21-31 explains how the Old Covenant Law given at Mount Sinai and temple worship in Jerusalem should be seen allegorically through Abraham's relationship with the slave woman Hagar and his son Ishmael. However, those who have been born again by the Spirit of God are like Isaac, born of the free woman Sarah. In Christ, we must have nothing to do with seeking right standing with God through the Law, for we have this by grace through faith; in fact, there is no other way possible.

But what does the Scripture say? “**Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.**” **So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.** Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. **I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.**⁶²

In Christ we are free from the Law, for we are under grace.⁶³ This does not mean we are free to sin as the Apostle Paul was accused of teaching⁶⁴ (for more on this see Andy Johnston's article 'Grace to say No' on pages 26-31). As to the purpose of the Law; for those in Christ it has led many theologians to break the Law up into 3 camps of Civil Laws, Ceremonial Laws, and Moral Laws.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Romans 10:3-4.

⁶² Galatians 4:30-5:4.

⁶³ Romans 6:15.

⁶⁴ Romans 3:8, 6:1, Galatians 3:25.

⁶⁵ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, Zondervan, 2001, 317.

The Moral Laws still apply to the Christian today and are summarized by Jesus' Great Commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."⁶⁶ John Stott commenting on Paul's letter to the Thessalonians on this subject said, "What Paul meant is that our acceptance before God is not due to our observance of the Law. But Christians are still under obligation to keep God's moral law and commandments. Indeed, the purpose of Christ's death was that the 'righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us' and the purpose of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in our hearts is that he might write God's law there."⁶⁷ (It is worth noting that Baptism, regularly taking the Lord's Supper, and engaging in the great Commission also form part of Christ-specific commands for all those who surrender to him – see Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 22:14-20, Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

In regard to the Civil part of the Law that governed ancient Israel, Jesus told Pilot his Kingdom was not of this world,⁶⁸ The New Testament repeatedly tells us to be subject to the authorities of the land we are in,⁶⁹ so we are not looking to live under the Civil Law of Israel. In relation to the Ceremonial part of the Law, it has already been made clear that it could not make one righteous; they were but shadows of the reality of what Christ has achieved. The Christian has access to God and is forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.⁷⁰ When we sin as we all do this side of eternity every day, then as Jesus taught us we go to God in prayer, "Give us **this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**"⁷¹ Knowing that "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**"⁷²

Indeed, the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1-29 makes it clear that the civil and ceremonial part of the Law is no longer binding on those in Christ. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."⁷³

Whilst this simple division into Moral, Civil and Ceremonial can be a helpful way to approach the Law, there is however often there is an overlay between the three areas, and it can result in discarding some Scriptures as irrelevant, yet "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable."⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Luke 10:27.

⁶⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, IVP, 1996, 76.

⁶⁸ John 18:36.

⁶⁹ Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:17-18.

⁷⁰ Ephesians 3:11-12.

⁷¹ Matthews 6:11-12.

⁷² 1 John 1:9.

⁷³ Acts 15:28-29.

⁷⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

A more robust way to rightly divide the word of truth⁷⁵ in the case of Old Testament Law (and indeed all Old Testament passages) has been developed by Duvall and Hays. It is a series of 5 steps or questions that you ask and try to answer from the passage you are seeking to understand and apply to your life. These are:⁷⁶

1. What did the text mean to the original audience?
2. What is the difference between the biblical audience and us? (Culture, time, Covenant, etc.)
3. What is the theological principle in this text? (Principle must be relevant to the text, not culturally bound, timeless, consistent with the rest of Scripture, and relevant to all people)
4. Does the New Testament teaching modify or qualify this principle, and if so, how? (e.g., Matthew 5:38-39 “You have heard it said an eye for an eye...but I say turn the other cheek”).
5. How should we apply the theological principle in our lives today?

The Internalizing of the Law

So, the believer is free from the Law being what determines their access and acceptance by God, they have this through faith in Jesus.⁷⁷ However once someone believes in Jesus, God’s Holy Spirit makes his home in them,⁷⁸ and begins an internal work on the heart and mind changing the Christian to become more like Christ.⁷⁹ The Holy Spirit’s work within the believer causes an obedience to God to arise from within. This is in accordance with what the Prophet Jeremiah wrote:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will **make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers** on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.⁸⁰

The Prophet Ezekiel explains how this internalizing of the law happens when he writes:

⁷⁵ 2 Timothy 2:15.

⁷⁶ Duvall and Hays 2001, 324.

⁷⁷ Ephesians 2:18.

⁷⁸ John 14:16-17.

⁷⁹ Galatians 5:16-25, Titus 3:5-6, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 John 3:9.

⁸⁰ Jeremiah 31:31-34.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**⁸¹

This is the New Covenant relationship that Christ has brought about, not by abolishing the Old Covenant but by fulfilling, and then through his death and resurrection, offering to all who come to him in faith a way to know God and be acceptable to him by grace, not works of the Law. God's Spirit dwells in us and transforms us not to abandon God's ways but to want to please him from our hearts. R.T. France writes that Jesus' expectations of his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount do not make things easier, instead "The standard set is nothing less than perfection, being like God."⁸² Calvin notes, "Our life must be formed by the Law, not only to external honesty but inward and spiritual righteousness."⁸³ So, whilst the New Testament teachings reinforce the moral exhortations found in the Law⁸⁴, we are never encouraged to go back under the written Law, but rather to keep in step with what the Holy Spirit is leading us into and away from. The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 5, writes:

But I say, **walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** For the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you doing the things you want to do. **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**⁸⁵

Thus, the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts and mind is encouraging us and gives us the power to enable us to live a life that pleases God; he causes us to grow to be more like Christ. The Holy Spirit at work in the Christian is seeking to internalize the Law and bring about a heart of obedience and a mind that wants to please God. He encourages obedience and discourages things of our sinful nature from within. In God's sovereignty, the believer is called to work in partnership with the Spirit in this transformation, as Philippians 2:12-13 makes clear, "**Work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you**, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

⁸¹ Ezekiel 36:26-27.

⁸² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew – NICNT*, Eerdmans, 2007, 154.

⁸³ Calvin 1997:314 of Book 2.

⁸⁴ See 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

⁸⁵ Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25.

Greater than the Law

Yet even more impressive than the privilege of the internalizing of the Law through the Holy Spirit that leads us to want to live for God is the greater truth that in Christ, the believer is so loved that they have been adopted into God's family and have the Spirit of God himself living within them.

In Christ, the Christian has the privilege of being so loved by God that his love causes us to have a more significant reason to live to please God out of love. God so loves us that Christ died to save us.⁸⁶ This love is so great that it is at work transforming our lives, "For the love of God controls us."⁸⁷ The NIV and NKJV translations say, "Compels us," and the KJV and ASV "Constrains us." The Greek word *συνέχω* means to hold together or to press together on every side, molding and shaping something. The image of God's love is that it controls us, compelling us to do God's will and stopping us from going against it. The Apostle John clearly states that we only love God because he first loved us.⁸⁸ Jesus could tell his followers, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."⁸⁹ Ephesians 5:2 says, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Of course, as Romans 13:10 tells us, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

The Christian's love arises out of the overflow of knowing the all-surpassing love of God in our own lives; this love causes one to want to live for God. That is why the Apostle Paul prayed, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God,"⁹⁰ before praying about the amazing outworking of this in us and through his church in the following 2 verses.

In addition to God's great love causing obedience, it gives the Christian the awesome privilege of being a child of God. "See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."⁹¹ So we don't just try to fulfill the promptings of the Spirit only to not displease God, but because we have a higher calling to be like Christ as his brothers and sisters, we bear the family image. **"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."**⁹² In Christ we can call God our Father so as his children we should be holy like him. The Apostle Peter puts it like this, **"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written:**

⁸⁶ John 3:16.

⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

⁸⁸ 1 John 4:19.

⁸⁹ John 14:15.

⁹⁰ Ephesians 3:17-19.

⁹¹ 1 John 3:1.

⁹² Romans 8:29.

“You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”⁹³

Finally, since in Christ the Spirit of the living God who is holy lives in us, we therefore must strive to live for him because God dwells in us. As 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 fearfully and wonderfully declares, **“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”** Later in 1 Corinthians when Paul is dealing with sexual immorality within the church, he does not appeal back to the Law, but to the greater truth that in Christ we are the very temple of God.

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, **but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.**⁹⁴

God's great love for us means that in Christ Jesus, we have been adopted into his family as his children; we are his living temple through the Holy Spirit's presence within us. These three realities in Christ give us the most excellent reason and motivation to give our all in living a life of obedience to please our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, from the very core of our being.

Conclusion

The Law of God given in the first five books of the Bible to the people of Israel was an amazing privilege for them and through them to the world. It made clear and certain God's righteous ways and expectations for his people; it showed the way of life and death. However, despite the Law being good, perfect, and true, it only helped to highlight mankind's willful, rebellious, sinful ways before God and our inadequacy to meet his standards.

This tragic state of humanity highlighted by the Law was not to lead people to despair or legalistically try to obtain their own righteousness before God but is to lead them to Christ. His perfect life completely fulfills the Law of God, and his sacrificial death on the cross makes way for all who believe in him to be forgiven, accepted, and righteous before God.

Through Christ, the Christian has died to the Law and is thus free from its demands and requirements making him alive by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of God makes his home in the believer the moment they turn to God and begins to transform

⁹³ 1 Peter 1:14-19.

⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.

the believer from the core of their being. The Holy Spirit constantly encourages them to live to please God and discourages sinful ways. However, in Christ, the greatest motivation to live for God comes not from what we can do to please him but from who we are in him. We are so loved by God in Christ that this love compels us to live a life of love for Him. We have been adopted into God's family and thus should increasingly seek to bear Christ's image and our heavenly Father's holiness. And finally, because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer, making us the temple of the living God, the place where God himself chooses to dwell. In Christ, we have the most incredible privilege, reason, and through the power of the Spirit, ability to deal with our sins and live a life of worship to the King, the LORD of Hosts.

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About the Author



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Grace To Say “No,” Titus 2:11-15

Andy Johnson, PhD

Catalyst is a movement of Churches founded on the grace of God. Fifty years ago, when Terry Virgo, the founder of Newfrontiers of which Catalyst is a part, had first come to faith in Christ, he sat under the ministry of Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, the pastor of Westminster Chapel, London. For much of the 1950s & 60s, Lloyd Jones worked through the book of Romans verse by verse in his exegetical preaching. Lloyd Jones himself was saturated with the theology of the late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Puritans, who were shaped by the theology of Luther, Calvin & the Protestant Reformers.

Since the leadership of Newfrontiers has passed from Terry Virgo to David Devenish and then to Steve Tibbert, grace has continued to be a solid doctrinal value. In the Newfrontiers Best Practice booklet (issued October 2019), there are 9 theological, leadership, and missional core values laid out as to how Newfrontiers apostles work in the churches they care for. Uppermost in the theological values, along with an emphasis on being word-based and Spirit-empowered, is being grace-filled. So why does grace matter so much?

- **Grace is Foundational**

The apostle Paul tells us that there is no other Gospel other than the Gospel of grace (see Galatians 1:6-7). Any other foundation is, in reality, a distortion of the true Gospel. It is a false Gospel. Sadly, over 2,000 years of Christian history, the Church has often turned away from grace whilst continuing to claim it was preaching a grace message. My own experience of British evangelicalism growing up as a teenager in the 1970s was hearing and responding to a message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But living the Christian life was by performance. I had experienced grace but now I was being shaped by legalism.

- **Grace is Experiential**

Grace is not meant simply to be a doctrine to be nodded to. It is a person. Jesus was full of grace & truth (John 1:14). To know Jesus, to be a Jesus-follower is to know His grace. Grace is also a power. It is the love of our heavenly Father in action. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Rather than behaving like the legalistic elder brother who does nothing but stands in judgment on his younger brother, the Father threw His arms around him & kissed him. Many evangelicals nod to the doctrine of grace but fail to experience the warm embrace of the Father that a proper understanding of grace brings to our lives. Grace is, of course, about justification. I am made right legally with God through a transaction that takes place at the Cross. Jesus takes my sin & I receive His righteousness as a free gift. But at the heart of the message of grace is the doctrine of adoption. As JI Packer so brilliantly puts it,

“Adoption is the highest privilege of the Gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper & given the family name. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.”⁹⁵

The Holy Spirit is given as the Spirit of adoption. It is Him living in us that cries “Abba Father” (Romans 8:15 & Galatians 4:6).

- **Grace is Transformational**

*“Run John run the law demands
But gives me neither feet nor hands
Better news the Gospel brings
It bids me fly & gives me wings”*

So says John Bunyan, the famous English Baptist pastor who went to prison nearly 400 years ago for his refusal to give up preaching the Gospel of grace.⁹⁶ Receiving God’s grace as a free gift as the foundation of my relationship with God in the New Covenant gives me an ability, by His mighty power at work within me, to live a life that truly pleases Him from the inside out. I sometimes hear pastors ask the question, “Shall I preach grace or holiness? This is entirely and completely the wrong question. Grace and holiness are not mutually exclusive. Neither are they opposite ends of a spectrum. Rather a real understanding of grace produces true holiness. Grace calls us to a higher standard of righteousness but then gives us the transforming power at work within us to fulfill God’s righteous requirements. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus quotes the Law as saying “Don’t kill,” but then raises the bar by telling us as His followers, “Don’t even be angry against your brother.” Likewise, the Law says, “Don’t commit adultery,” but Jesus says, “Don’t even be lustful towards a woman” (see Matthew 5:21-30).

The Problem of a Misapplication of Grace

The problem of a misunderstanding, abuse or misapplication of grace has existed since the New Testament times. The apostle Paul was himself accused of antinomianism (the idea that because we are saved by grace as Christians, we are not required to obey God’s law):

Why not say – as we are slanderously reported as saying & as some claim that we say – “Let us do evil that good may result?” (Romans 3:8) What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means (Romans 6:1-2).

⁹⁵ JI Packer, *Knowing God*, 206-207.

⁹⁶ There is actually some question as to whether this rhyme was actually written by John Bunyan. The famous Baptist preacher CH Spurgeon attributes it to the eighteenth-century English revivalist John Berridge (1716-1793), see *The Sermons and practical works of Ralph Erksine* (vol10), 283.

There were people in Paul's day (probably religious people such as those who came from the Galatian churches) who claimed that Paul's message of grace was harmful because it encouraged sinful patterns of behavior. "If you are saved by grace, then it really doesn't matter how you live," so the argument goes.

Similar confusion lingers today. People often lead careless, sloppy, and sometimes downright ungodly lives and seek to justify a lack of holiness by claiming that they are living in and enjoying the grace of God. But true grace is far from cheap – it cost Jesus His very life-blood on the Cross.

This problem of grace as an excuse for sin is not merely a first-century or twenty-first century issue. It has existed throughout church history. By the fourth century, the church had drifted significantly from its first-century moral purity. The British theologian Pelagius (AD 354-418), seeing worldliness increasingly encroaching into church life, began to teach that the main problem that was causing this was too much emphasis on grace. Human beings, he taught, were able by their own efforts, to cooperate with God. There was no such thing, according to Pelagius, as "original sin" (i.e., the power of sin at work in our lives as fallen human beings). This flies in the face of what Paul teaches in Romans 5 about our being "in Adam" before we come to know Jesus – i.e., forever tainted by Adam's rebellion as the human race. It took all of the intellectual weight of St Augustine to push back against the Pelagian advance.

In the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther rejected a new form of Pelagianism that had become prevalent in the late-medieval Catholic church. According to this teaching, you could only receive grace when God saw you doing your very best. After years of trying to do his best, Luther realized that he could never receive God's grace because his best was never going to be good enough. Grace was entirely a free gift accessed through faith in Christ and His merits, not our own.

Today, the battle for a proper understanding of grace continues. In recent years the hyper-grace movement has sprung up and attracted a considerable following, especially in sections of the health, wealth, and prosperity movement. Hyper-grace teaches, quite rightly, that we are saved totally by God's wonderful free grace, but then twists and distorts grace towards antinomianism. It teaches that, at the Cross, Jesus dealt with all sin – past, present & future. Therefore, a Christian does not need to pray the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins..." (Matthew 6:12), since they are already forgiven. Once we have become Christian, God looks at us as holy & righteous so we don't ever need, after that, to repent of or confess sin. The Ten Commandments are irrelevant to us as believers, and texts such as 1 John 1:9 –

"If we confess our sins He is faithful & just to forgive us our sins..." are irrelevant to us since John did not write this letter to believers.

This is all a perversion of grace and will lead to immorality and ungodly behavior: *"For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people who pervert the grace of our*

God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ, our only Sovereign and Lord.” (Jude v4)

A Right Understanding of Grace

As John Piper has so wonderfully shown us, grace works in three distinct time frames, past, present, and future.⁹⁷

Past grace, i.e., justification (see Romans 1 – 4).

Present grace, i.e., sanctification (Romans 5 – 8:17). This is the grace to say “No!” to sin that Paul makes passing reference to in Titus 2:12.

Future grace, i.e., glorification (Romans 8:18-39).

Past Grace – Justification

This is the instantaneous declaration that I am righteous because of the finished work of Christ on the Cross (Romans 1:16-17). Paul gives us three illustrations of how this works in Romans 3:24. The law court – not simply a “not guilty” verdict but declared legally righteous. The marketplace – redemption. The temple – atonement. Our being declared righteous on the basis of faith rather than works is illustrated through the life of Abraham (chapter 4).

Present Grace - Sanctification

Having been made right with God by the finished work of Jesus on the Cross, I can now live a life that pleases Him by the power of the Holy Spirit:

- Grace reigns through Jesus & now is freely available to us all (5:15).
- I now reign in life because of Jesus (5:17).
- I am dead to sin (6:1).
- Baptism indicates death to a former way of life & a new (Resurrection) life working in me (6:3-4).
- I am united with Christ (6:5).
- I now as a believer, have a choice about whether or not I sin (6:11-13).
- I now live under a new reign, i.e., new authority and power – the reign of grace (6:14).
- I have been set free from the power of sin & am a slave to righteousness (6:18) with holiness (6:22) as an end product in my life.
- I used to be married to a tyrant, a perfect husband who never put a foot wrong but continually pointed out my shortcomings – i.e., the Law (7:1-2).
- When I became a Christian, I died so that I am freed from my former marriage (7:4).
- I am now married to or united with Christ & share His Resurrection life (7:4).
- I now live a life that bears fruit – i.e. please Him (7:4) not by my own efforts but by the power of the Holy Spirit living in me (7:6). See also Galatians 5:22.
- I am free from the condemnation that sin brought in my life (8:1) – the righteous requirements of the Law have been fulfilled.

⁹⁷ See John Piper, Future Grace.

- We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit – He guides us & empowers us (8:9). We are controlled (i.e. led by) the Holy Spirit & not by our sinful nature.
- We have received the Spirit of Sonship / the Spirit of adoption so that we know we are children of God & therefore joint heirs with Jesus (8:16-17 & Galatians 4:5-7).

No one can read Romans 5 – 7 and imagine that God’s grace does not empower us to say “No” to sin and to live a life transformed, a life that pleases Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Future Grace – Glorification

There is a glorious catch-up that will one day take place. Of course, the Kingdom is now & not yet. It is breaking in but is not yet fully realized. The grace of God has come; it has transformed my life, making me right with God. The power of sin & death is broken, and the grace of God is, day by day, making me more & more like Jesus. The evidence of the influence or power of sin is being weakened in my life. However, I still live in a sin-tinged universe in which the power and prevalence of sin are still on display. Nevertheless, there will come a day when the grace of God will reach its climax by removing every last vestige of sin from my life & from the whole Universe. Right now, my body reminds me of my sinful nature. I was made in God’s image, but I am tainted by Adam’s rebellion. My hands do wrong things. My feet take me to sinful places. My eyes look at things I shouldn’t see. But one day I will receive a Resurrection body just like Jesus’ (8:23). This is because I am part of God’s New Creation (8:21). The apostle Paul gives a fuller treatment of this theme see 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 where he explains how Jesus’ Resurrection is the guarantee of our Resurrection. The apostle John puts this into an even bigger and more magnificent context in Revelation 20 and 21 where he unpacks the glories and magnificence of New Creation.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, grace is much bigger than you think. First, it forgives the past. This is the wonder of justification by faith alone. I am made right with God through grace by faith in what Jesus made possible for me through His death on the Cross. Ultimately, grace revolutionizes our future. New Creation will transform my lowly body to become a Resurrection body like that of the Lord Jesus. In the meantime, between now and then, grace is changing me day by day to be more and more like Jesus. Before I became a Christian my automatic default was to say “Yes” to sin. I had an inbuilt tendency and pre-disposition to sin and to wrongdoing. But now, God’s grace has broken in. His power, the power of His grace is now at work in my life. This means that I can now choose to say “No” to sin and “Yes” to righteousness. I am being changed to be more and more like Jesus.

The power of grace to transform how we live is a key but much underplayed aspect of the teaching of the apostle Paul. In many of his letters, Paul starts by explaining the Good News of the grace of God to deal with our past sins. He then goes on to show us how grace then transforms day-to-day living. The day-to-day impact of grace in our lives is seen, for example, in Romans 12-15 and Colossians 3-4.

However, it is perhaps best seen in Ephesians 4-6. Having made it clear that it is only by grace that we are saved (see, for example, Ephesians 1:5-8 & 2:4-5), Paul goes on to teach us that grace is utterly transformational. If we have truly experienced the grace of Ephesians 1 & 2, we cannot live or “walk” as Gentiles, i.e., in our pre-Christian state. Rather, we make a choice to put off our old self and to put on our new self (Ephesians 4:22-24). God’s empowering and sanctifying grace will affect our speech, our self-control, our work, our sexual purity, our marriage and our family life. God delights in people who choose to live lives that please Him and bring Him glory.

About the Author



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The Gospel Revealed to the Apostle Paul

Second Part: The Gospel Was Promised Beforehand

Russell Cross

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...” Romans 1:1- 4.

Introduction

We saw in the last article that the Apostle Paul was called and commissioned to be an apostle by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ himself. His task was “to be a servant and witness” and “to open people’s eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified” by faith in Christ. To do this, he was to proclaim the gospel in the power of the Spirit. But what was that gospel? Paul will tell us in this letter to the Romans. Paul’s epistle to the Romans is all about the gospel. Paul introduces that gospel in chap 1:1-7 and starts his argument in chapter 1:16 & 17 with the words:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

He takes as his text God’s words in Habakkuk 2:4:

“The righteous will live by faith.”

We will see in a later article that for many Jews, this text was the most important verse in the whole O.T. This was the only place where all of the 613 laws given through Moses were thought to be summed up in one verse. But Paul will expound it in a way that the Jews had never dreamed of.

Paul shows us in Romans what the gospel is and why we need the gospel, and how the gospel meets that need. He also tells us how to respond to the gospel and how to apply the new life that comes from believing the gospel to our relationships with God and others.

Anders Nygren, in the introduction to his commentary on Romans, says:

“What the gospel is, what the content of the Christian faith is, one learns to know in

the Epistle to the Romans as in no other place in the New Testament. Romans gives us the gospel in its wide context.” (P.3)

So what is this gospel that Paul proclaimed? Romans 1:1-7 gives it to us in summary form. Paul will expand on these verses in the rest of his letter, but the essential content of the gospel is given here.

The Gospel in Summary Form

In verse 1 Paul tells us that he has been called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. We looked at that in the First Part. In the succeeding verses, he tells us several things about that gospel:

1. It was promised beforehand.
2. It concerns God’s Son.
3. That Son was descended from David according to the flesh.
4. That he was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.
5. Paul and the other apostles had received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

We can see that for Paul, the essence of the gospel that was revealed to him concerned the historical facts about Jesus Christ: who he was and is and about his death, burial, and resurrection as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and the salvation that he brought for all those who believe.

Paul also gives a summary of the essential points of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1- 9:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me...”

The Gospel Was Promised Beforehand

When we read the New Testament, we find that the writers are often quoting from the Old Testament or alluding to passages in the Old Testament. We cannot fully appreciate the message of the NT without some understanding of the OT. As Augustine wrote:

“The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes manifest in the New.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Augustine, Quæst in Heptateuch, ii, 73.

We saw in the article on Romans 1:1 that when the risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, he said to them:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Luke 24: 25 – 27.

Then when they returned to Jerusalem to the 11 and those gathered with them, the risen Lord appeared to them all and said to them:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24: 44 – 49.

Then during the 40 days between the Resurrection and the Ascension he gave commands

“Through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” Luke 1: 2 – 3.

So it is not surprising that the New Testament writers present their message as the fulfillment of the OT history, promises, prophecies, and expectations.

So what was the central theme of the Old Testament that the New Testament writers claimed had been fulfilled by Jesus Christ?

Alfred Edersheim, who himself was a Jew who converted to Christianity, in his book “Prophecy and History” wrote:

Christianity in its origin appealed to a great Messianic expectancy, the source and spring of which must be sought not in the post-exilic period, but is found in the Old Testament itself. The whole Old Testament is prophetic. Its special predictions form only a part, although an organic part, of the prophetic Scriptures; and all prophecy points to the Kingdom of God and to the Messiah as its King. The narrow boundaries of Judah and Israel were to be enlarged so as to embrace all men, and one King would reign in righteousness over a ransomed world that would offer to Him its homage of praise and service. All that had marred the moral harmony of earth would be removed; the universal Fatherhood of God would become the birth right of redeemed, pardoned, regenerated humanity; and all this blessing would centre in, and flow from, the

Person of the Messiah. Such at least is the promise of the Old Testament which the New Testament declares to have been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. And if it were not so, then surely can it never more be fulfilled....” Alfred Edersheim. “Prophecy and History. P 24.

I Howard Marshall describes in Luke’s own words a typical argument used by preachers in Acts when speaking to a Jewish audience as:

“Explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you is the Christ’” (Acts 17:3). The form of the argument is simple enough. First, on the basis of the Old Testament a case is developed by which one may recognize the Christ when he comes: Old Testament prophecy is said to show that the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead. Then, it is argued that a particular person, namely Jesus, fulfills these requirements. Therefore, the conclusion follows that Jesus is the Christ.” I. H. Marshall. Luke, Historian & Theologian. P. 42.

The New Testament makes it plain throughout that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah) who was awaited by the Jews throughout their history. The very first verse of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1, gives us the short genealogy of Jesus Christ:

The Beginning of the New Testament

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew 1:1.

Why does Matthew put it this way? Because God promised a son to Abraham, and Paul tells us in Galatians that promised son was Jesus Christ:

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.” Galatians 3:16.

Certainly God did give Abraham and Sarah a promised son, Isaac, as Matthew tells us in his long genealogy:

“Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob...” Matthew 1:2.

But the promises mainly concerned that far off descendant of Isaac, Jesus Christ. Isaac was just the first step to the fulfilment of God’s plan. He was in some respects a “type” of Christ:

- Abraham had to wait many years for the birth of his promised son, Isaac. Israel would have to wait a long time for the birth of their Messiah;
- Isaac’s birth was a miraculous birth, born to a woman who was 90 years old. Christ’s birth was a miraculous birth to a virgin.

- Before Isaac, the son of promise, was born, Ishmael was born to Hagar, the slave woman. He represented all who would be under the law. The law would precede the gospel of grace (Galatians 4:21-31). Hagar represents the Old Covenant and Sarah the New Covenant (V 24.) Those under the law would be in slavery, those under grace would be free.
- Abraham was asked to offer up his son on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22), but at the last-minute, God stopped him and provided a ram instead. “So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.” (Genesis 22:14.) God then repeated his promises to Abraham to bless him and to multiply his offspring greatly and He adds: “and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.” Paul says in Galatians 3: 8 “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed...” Many say that Mount Moriah was where the Temple was later built and near where Jesus died on the cross. I Howard Marshall says that the Abraham/Isaac typology seen in Genesis 22: 2, 12 & 16 (“Your son, your only son, whom you love”) may also be reflected in the voice that came from heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:17, Luke 3:22) (and at the Transfiguration Matthew 17:5). (I H Marshall, The Origins of New Testament Christology. P 116-117.)
- Isaac and his marriage to Rebekah (Genesis 24) are considered to be typical of the marriage of Jesus and His bride – the Church. One of the reasons that early Christians thought this was because the numerical value of the name Rebekah is 153- a number considered to represent all the nations of the earth. (Georges Contenau, “Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria.”) Hebrew and Greek, like Arabic, assign numerical values to each letter of the alphabet. The most famous example of the use of numbers for a name in the NT is, of course, Revelation 13:18 where the ancient manuscripts use the number 666 or 616. According to R C Sproul, Bruce Metzger, the leading N.T. Greek scholar, has apparently said that both numbers may be correct as the writer may have been referring to the emperor Nero, whose title in Hebrew had a value of 666, while in Greek the value was 616. So some copies of Revelation might have been meant for Christians of Jewish background and some for those of Gentile background.

Nero, who died in 68 AD, might have been a type of the coming antichrist. (Revelation was probably written after 68 AD.) This could be pointed to by the number 616 which was made up of the letters Chi Iota Sigma, which were written as XIC where C stood for Sigma in early times, at least in the Eastern Empire. By extending the I and attaching the C to it, one gets a q which was superimposed on the X to form an episeimon, or symbol, which is the mirror image of the Chi Ro or XP episeimon (symbol), where the P is superimposed on the X. This symbol (XP) existed before the time of Christ, but has been used by churches throughout church history and was used on Roman coins at

one stage. The Christian use of the XP symbol comes from the first 2 letters of the name CHRISTOS in Greek. The episeimon or symbol (Xq) would indicate that the beast in Revelation 13 would be a counterfeit Christ, a counterfeit Messiah, an antichrist, imitating but inverting the character of Christ. John is the only writer in the N.T. to use the term “antichrist” which he does in 1 John and 2 John. (See *The Apocalypse of St John* by Henry Barclay Swete Page cxxxviii Footnote 2).

The Son of David: A King Who Would Reign Forever

Further, God promised a son to David who would sit upon his throne and reign as King forever.

In 2 Samuel 7:11-16; and 2 Chronicles 17 God promises through the prophet Nathan to give David a son and to establish His throne forever. The prophecy was partly fulfilled in Solomon but only finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Israelites waited in hope for that son of David who would sit on David’s throne forever:

Isaiah prophesied 700 years before the birth of Christ:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, *on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

See also Psalm 89 and other places in the O.T.

When the angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary, he announced to her:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. *And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” Luke 1:30 – 33.

A King Who Would Also Be a Priest Forever

However, not only would the Messiah be a King, sitting upon the Throne of David forever, he would also be a Priest forever. Psalm 110, which Jesus himself appealed to and which is recognized as a Messianic Psalm of David states:

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

The author of the letter to the Hebrews takes this up. He quotes Psalm 110: 4 three times and refers to it a lot. It is central to his argument. Jesus was a High Priest of a different type from the High Priests who descended from Aaron. He was perfect and

he was both High Priest and sacrifice. The O.T. sacrificial system pointed forward to him. He offered the one sacrifice necessary and sufficient for all sin for all time, and he ever lives to intercede for us as our Great High Priest in Heaven.

A Prophet Whose Words Would Never Pass Away

In Deuteronomy 18:18 – 19, God promised to raise up a prophet like Moses and said:

“And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”

In Acts 3:22ff, Peter tells us that Jesus Christ was that Prophet.

And in Matthew 24:35, Jesus says:

“Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

The Three Divisions of Matthew’s Genealogy:

Matthew, in his long genealogy, divided the genealogy of Jesus into 3 parts:

“So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.”

In the first part, the people of Israel were waiting for a king (who was promised through Jacob, the grandson of Abraham in Genesis 49: 8-10 and who would be of the tribe of Judah). In the second part, we have the kings from David down to the exile in Babylon. In the third part, from Babylon to Christ, the line of kings stops in fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy:

“And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the LORD God: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.” Ezekiel 21: 25 – 27.

One of the titles of Jesus in the N.T. is “Son of David.” (e.g. Matthew 15:22; 20: 30 & 31; 21: 9; 22: 41 – 42.)

The End of the New Testament

On the other hand, the New Testament ends with the revelation of the New Jerusalem. In the 50th vision given to John in the book of Revelation, we are back at Eden in the year of Jubilee. Everything has been restored, and access opened up to the tree of life for the redeemed, resurrected, and glorified ones who are in the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein dwells righteousness.

The Rest of the New Testament

In between Matthew 1:1 and Revelation 22:21, much of the New Testament is about the fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies. We can consider some of the ways that Matthew links the birth and life of Jesus to Old Testament prophesy:

He was born to the virgin in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14;

He was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah 5:2;

And consider the baptism of Jesus, where the voice comes from heaven:

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt:3: 16-17).

This voice from heaven was in fulfillment of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42:1ff identifying Jesus as the anointed one, the Son and the King of the Nations and the servant of the LORD who will establish justice in the earth and bring out the prisoners from the dungeon.

The first thing that Matthew says happened after the baptism was that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. This is the counterpart to Genesis chapter 3. He had to succeed where the first Adam had failed. Only after this initial victory over Satan could he begin his ministry. Satan had no power over Him. The Spirit was in Him and empowering him for his ministry and Satan was bound.

The Sermon on the Mount starts with the beatitudes and the first 2 are from Isaiah 61:1-3. In Luke 4, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-3 in the Synagogue in Nazareth and says: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus is announcing that the exile is over. He is bringing deliverance from Satan, from sin, and from the guilt and power of sin and the judgment pronounced and accomplished by the law. He has come to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17 ff). He came to fulfill the ceremonial law by offering himself as the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sin for all time (as explained in the letter to the Hebrews.) He also fulfilled the moral law completely as our representative. Man in the Kingdom of God is now free from the bondage of sin to be able to live the life described in the Sermon on the Mount.

Paul & the Old Testament

Paul is also concerned with presenting the gospel as the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy in his letters.

Jesus is the second Adam undoing the damage and consequences of the first Adam’s sin and restoring a people for Himself (Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15);

Justification by faith was taught in the Old Testament. Abraham was justified by faith

centuries before Moses received the Law (Romans 4 and Galatians).

The Law of Moses was a schoolmaster, a guardian/pedagogue to prepare the people and lead them till the Messiah came (Romans and Galatians).

Even the history of God's people was preparing the way for the Messiah (Galatians 4:4-5.)

Herman Ridderbos has summed up Paul's message with the following words:

"The whole content of this preaching can be summarized as the proclamation and explication of the eschatological time of salvation inaugurated with Christ's advent, death, and resurrection. It is from this principal point of view and under this denominator that all the separate themes of Paul's preaching can be understood and penetrated in their unity and relation to each other." (Paul: An Outline of His Theology. P. 44).

Conclusion

In his introduction to his commentary on Romans, Anders Nygren says:

"If there is anything which the newer exegetical study has clearly established, it is the extraordinary significance which the eschatological had for early Christian faith. At the centre of Jesus' message stood the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the beginning of the new age. In hope the pious who "looked for the consolation of Israel" had reached forward toward that day when God himself would institute His Kingdom and take command. In that tense expectation the proclamation of Jesus is heard, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, it is no longer a matter of something distant, which shall sometime come. "This age" has already reached its end, and "the new age" stands at the door. With Jesus himself the messianic age has arrived.

With reference to the messianic prophecy about "a year of grace from the Lord," He could say, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). That He was "He that should come" is seen in that the messianic signs were already at hand, "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:5).

"The Kingdom of God comes. But therewith is also given a *new righteousness*: the righteousness of God. Jesus' disciples "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6); they do not think, like the Pharisees, that they have the righteousness by virtue of which they can stand before God. But Jesus calls them blessed, "for they shall be filled." The Kingdom of God is approaching, and in it they will receive God's righteousness as a gift from Him. For just as the Kingdom of God can come only through God's mighty intervention, so God's righteousness can become man's possession only in that he receives it as a gift from God. Jesus does not at all deny that the Pharisees also have a kind of righteousness; it was zealous for God's law

and sought the realization thereof in all of life's relationships. But that is not the righteousness that belongs with the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is written, in Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." So inseparably do the new Kingdom and the new righteousness belong together. In Matthew 6:33, we also hear how Jesus directly couples these two in the exhortation, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." (Anders Nygren. Commentary on Romans, P 9-11).

The Jews were expecting their Messiah to appear. That is why the Pharisees sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist who he was and John replied that he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet (John 1: 19- 28). But Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that they were looking for. The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would reign over them like an earthly king and lead them in battle against the Romans to conquer them and make them the leading nation in the world. But Jesus was not that kind of King. He would conquer by obeying his Father all the way to dying on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11). It was another Jew, Benjamin Disraeli, who was the only Jew who has ever been Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who, according to Samuel Zwemer: "In 1852 ...wrote in the last chapter of his "Life of Lord George Bentinck":

"Perhaps in this enlightened age, as his mind expands and he takes a comprehensive view of this period of progress, the pupil of Moses may ask himself whether all the princes of the house of David have done so much for the Jews as that Prince who was crucified on Calvary. Had it not been for Him, the Jews would have been comparatively unknown or known only as a high Oriental caste which had lost its country. Has not He made their history the most famous in the world? Has not He hung up their laws in every temple? Has not He vindicated all their wrongs? Has not He avenged the victory of Titus and conquered the Caesars? What success did they anticipate from their Messiah? The wildest dreams of the rabbis have been far exceeded...

Christians may continue to persecute Jews and Jews may persist in disbelieving Christians, but who can deny that Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of the Most High God, is the eternal glory of the Jewish race?" Quoted by Samuel Zwemer, "Into All The World." P 128.

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About the Author



Russell Cross went to Kenya in 1983 with the Africa Inland Mission as a short term missionary for 4 years. He worked among the Turkana people in North East Kenya where he oversaw an irrigation scheme at Elelea. The scheme was under the Turkana Rehabilitation Project and the Kenyan Government. Russell also helped in planting a church in the new village of Elelea which came into being as people working on the scheme settled there. In 1990 he went to Chad as a full term missionary, after 1 year of French study. Again with AIM. In Chad he worked with the Evangelical Church of Chad in various towns. In 1993 he married Mireille, a French nurse working in a Mission hospital. They were based at Kouno and Ba-Illi along the south side of the Chari River and lastly at Koutou in the South of Chad between 2006 and 2008. At Koutou Russell taught part time in a French language Bible School and helped in a Print Shop. Russell and Mireille now live in Auckland, New Zealand. He has been involved in a Rest Home Ministry and teaching an ESOL class for immigrants. Russell has a B Sc and a Bible College diploma and has done some other Biblical Studies. He likes reading books and collecting useful quotes. The author can be reached at rm.cross64@gmail.com

Hawa, You Can Be Like God!

Dennis Dyvig

Introduction

I will attempt to show that most peoples' personal beliefs and much of the teachings of the world's religions are based on the first lie of Satan to mankind. Satan sought to convince Hawa (*Eve* in most English Bibles) and Adam that they could be **like God**. To some degree, they did believe Satan's lie. Similarly, most people today believe they must do something to save themselves, to be blessed, and to reach heaven, and in so doing, they also seek to make themselves like God.

Those who claim to be Christian and who should know the truth seldom believe that Jesus' work on the cross, alone, is the only way to be saved. The Bible is clear that there is only one God and one Savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, most people seem to think they still must do something, or in the end, they will not be saved. That belief in a person's own contribution to their salvation is actually **unbelief** in, or rejection of Jesus' ability to save totally. We must defend the truth that Jesus alone can save anyone, and He does that by His death on the cross, and nothing else. Paul preached "Christ crucified," and we must do that as well (1 Cor. 1:23).

Truth is More Important Than Behavior

The main issue with the true God is ALWAYS about truth and belief. Jesus said the world is wrong about sin because they **do not believe in Me**. John 16:8-9.

Does that phrase, "**The world**" mean people who are not religious? No. In fact, I find that most (maybe all) religions teach almost exactly what Jesus here said is wrong. Religions and the world are very similar.

God had warned that Adam and Hawa would die if they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). The Serpent (Satan) said they would not die (Gen. 3:4). Hawa had to decide whom she would believe? What God said and what Satan said were not the same. The content of the two statements could not both be true. Dying or not dying are mutually exclusive. Only one could be true.

Satan sweetened his lie by adding, "God knows you will be **like God**..." (Gen. 3:5). This was also a lie. No one can be like God. The definition of God excludes all others. God **alone** is the highest, most powerful, all knowing, etc. There cannot be two equal Gods. If two who claim to be God are exactly the same, then they aren't really two Gods, but one God, perhaps with different names. (The Trinity is NOT three Gods, but one God in three persons or forms or manifestations.) If two *claimed* Gods but are different, then only one can be truly God and Whoever is the truly superior God will prevail, and the other will be shown to NOT be God at all, but a myth, a fake idea about a competing, but false claim to be equal with God.

So Hawa had to choose who she thought REALLY was speaking **the truth**. Hawa had to choose WHOM to believe. The issue was truth and faith. That is what Bible faith always is. Whatever a person is convinced is true, that is what he believes in. That is his faith.

What is Faith?

No one believes what they think to be false. However, in religion, people often *claim* that they believe what they do not really believe. It is usually not hard to learn what a person really believes, and it is often different from what they SAY they believe. That is why salvation is by faith, which means the lost person comes to learn (and accept) what the TRUE God says is THE TRUTH. That change of belief is faith.

People are easily deceived into believing what is false. People often believe to be true what evidence does not support as being true at all.

Hawa's and Adam's acceptance of the Serpent's lie resulted in the whole creation being plunged into corruption and decay and death (Rom 8:19-22). Science sometimes calls this entropy. Ultimately, that decay is followed by eternal destruction in the Lake of Fire.

With Hawa's and Adam's belief in The Lie, all the religions of all time established their foundation, all religions that is, except for the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is NOT a religion, but the eternal truth. I think the central belief of all religions is that we indeed are **like God** and therefore we can and must make some effort at our own salvation.

In the center of the Garden of Eden, there were two trees (Gen. 2:9):

- The Tree of Life. I suspect this tree represents the Cross. The Cross is often called a tree. Here is salvation and life.
- The Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. I suspect this represents our independence and our belief that we are capable of determining what is good or evil, true or false, etc., on our own, apart from the true God's judgment of such. Here is where we *think* we are **like God**.

God made the choice simple: Believe what God says and live. Or believe what Satan says and die. It remains the same today. God had said that if Adam and Hawa ate of the tree of knowledge they would die. Hawa chose to believe the serpent's words: "You will not surely die. God knows you will be like God..." (Gen. 3:4-5).

Hawa had already, in part, accepted to be "like God" in that she judged whether what God had said was true and beneficial or not. Hawa made herself the judge of God. She judged that she could not really trust what God said to be true. She, alone, by herself, would decide what is true and not true. Otherwise, why did she eat the fruit that God said would kill her? Unless she was suicidal (and she wasn't) she would never have eaten poison IF she truly believed it would kill her. Obviously, Hawa believed Satan's words to be true and judged God's to be not fully true.

Unbelief, the First Sin

The first sin was unbelief, which **preceded** Hawa's eating of the Tree of Knowledge. I suspect that unbelief is the foundation or first cause of all other sins. Behavior sins (such as eating from that tree) follow belief sins (not believing what God said—that they would die).

We are saved by faith, and that means belief in the truth. We are not saved by our own works or sacrifices (Eph. 2:8-9). God said (in the Bible) that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). Do we believe that? Paul said the Gospel is the word of truth (Eph. 1:13, Col. 1:5). Do we believe that? Romans says God's righteousness is revealed in the Gospel (not the law) (Romans 1:16-17). Do we believe that, or do we believe, as Israel wrongly believed, that we must establish our own righteousness? (Romans 10:1-4).

If death came from **believing** what is not true, it follows that eternal life comes from **believing** what is God's truth. Hence, salvation by faith.

Actually, all people believe something, but most people do not believe the truth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Who Himself is The Truth. James said even the demons believe, but implies they obviously are not saved by what they believe but shudder (in fear) instead (James 2:19).

Who is Capable of Being the Savior?

A Savior can't be a complete, universal Savior, who can save from all dangers, unless He is more powerful than all dangers, thus more powerful than any other living being, or any danger, or any threat of danger. The TRUE Savior must be stronger than all else; otherwise, He might be able to save from some dangers, but not from **ALL** dangers. Since Hell is an infinitely large danger (in that it is infinite in duration, i.e., eternal), a Savior, who would be capable of saving us from Hell, must be infinitely large to defeat an eternal (infinitely long) Hell.

The concept of "God" means "the Most Powerful." Whoever is the Most Powerful is truly God. If anyone claims to be God or is believed by people to be God, He must be more powerful than all others. If He is not the Most Powerful, He will be defeated by whoever IS the Most Powerful.

If the Most Powerful is NOT the Most Benevolent, then we are lost, and we need saving from the Most Powerful who is NOT the Most Benevolent because he would be the greatest danger we need to be rescued from. In other words, if God was not good, He would be dangerous, and we would need to be saved from Him. But since the Most Powerful always wins in the end, and is not defeated in the end, then if the Most Benevolent is not also the Most Powerful, then there can be no salvation from the Most Dangerous.

I believe the Bible teaches that wisdom defeats power. Therefore, the TRUE God must be the Most Powerful and the Most Benevolent *and* the Most Intelligent (wise). Hence, He (Jehovah / Jesus), being all three, is indeed capable of saving us and the

only One capable of saving us, no matter what the danger is. Most importantly, He can save us from the greatest danger, Hell.

Colossians (1:16-17) and Hebrews (1:2-3) teach us that all of creation is inside God (inside Jesus actually) and exists and continues to exist for Him and by Him. That affirms that He is the Most Powerful, Most Benevolent, and Most Intelligent. Therefore, He (Jehovah / Jesus) is capable of being the universal, and thus the only, true Savior.

Only the True God Can Be the True Savior

The following passages link BEING God as necessary in order to BE the Savior. All passages are taken from the NAS95 translation:

1. 1Tim. 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of **God our Savior**, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope,*
2. 1Tim. 2:3 *This is good and acceptable in the sight of **God our Savior**,*
3. 1Tim. 4:10 *For it is for this we labor and strive because we have fixed our hope on the living **God, who is the Savior** of all men, **especially** of **believers**.*
4. Titus 1:3 *but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of **God our Savior**,*
5. Titus 2:10 *not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of **God our Savior** in every respect.*
6. Titus 2:13 *looking for the blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of our great **God and Savior**, Christ Jesus,*
7. Titus 3:4 *But when the kindness of **God our Savior** and His love for mankind appeared,*
8. 2Pet. 1:1 *Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our **God and Savior**, Jesus Christ:*

Whoever you believe can save you must be the true God, the most powerful of all. So, if you think you can save yourself or can make some useful contribution to your salvation, then you actually do believe that you are God, or a god, or like God.

The Gospel or Religion?

If the only Savior is the only TRUE God, did Hawa think by assuming the role of God that she could and would save herself (if she ever needed saving)? Perhaps this was Satan's intent all along. Satan is against the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which Satan knows is the only means of eternal salvation, so by convincing Hawa she could be like God, perhaps Satan was seeking to block her salvation, and ours, by the false belief WE can be like God. That belief rules out the true God and true salvation.

I differentiate between *religion* and *the Gospel*. By "*religion*" I mean:

- all beliefs in all cultures among all people-groups over all of time...
- about God and life and eternity and morality and ethics and so on.

Religion is what people think (including deception by Satan, as he deceived Hawa in the Garden). The Gospel is what God says is true and is the truth. The Gospel is God's eternal truth. In Revelation, we see an angel proclaiming "the eternal Gospel" (Rev. 14:6), and we see that Jesus, the Lamb, was slain since the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8 NIV84). The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God, and the Gospel is THE word of truth. Many people think of the Gospel as God's plan B, after Satan and people somehow achieved something terrible, perhaps behind God's back or while He was sleeping. Then when God woke up and saw what we had all done, He was moved to find a solution to what He had not anticipated would ever happen. That would be a Plan B, and that is what many people believe. NO! The Gospel IS God's eternal plan, Plan A. Eph. 3:10-11 says His eternal purpose was that through the church (those who believed the Gospel), God's manifold (infinite) wisdom would be known to the rulers and authorities (probably angelic beings) in heaven.

The Gospel is God's one and only way of saving the people He created and loves infinitely. Religion teaches us to save ourselves by confessions of belief, confession of sins, obedience, good works, self-sacrifices, prayer, pilgrimage, defeating sin, defeating Satan, etc. Those false beliefs of religion seek to make us a savior. Religion makes us god since we have said only God can truly be the Savior. So, when religion teaches us to get blessings and salvation by our "good" behavior or works, in a clever way, religion is proposing that yes, in fact, we can be **like God**, as Satan told Hawa at the start.

People Want to Be Saviors

People like to be a savior. It makes them feel powerful and valuable. People like salvation by works because it makes them the Savior (and hence makes them God, or like God).

People like salvation by or because of obedience, rather than salvation by grace because it makes them the Savior (and hence makes them God, or like God).

People like personal sacrifice (limiting ourselves by giving our money, our time, our obedience, our denying ourselves of something, etc.) because it makes them the Savior (and hence makes them God, or like God).

People don't mind mixing works and obedience *with* belief in the Gospel because in the end, in most peoples' thinking, it is always the person's works that are more powerful than Jesus' death, so they still can maintain (knowingly or subconsciously) that they are God the Savior. They imply by such syncretism that Jesus' sacrifice alone could not save them, but when they add their own works, or obedience, or whatever they add, then (maybe) they can be saved. Thus, their part of their salvation becomes more important and more effective than Jesus' part. They replace Jesus' salvation with their own salvation. And they replace Jesus, who is God, with themselves, thinking they are like God.

The Spirit of Antichrist

The term, *Antichrist*, means not only **against** Christ, but **in place of** Christ. The spirit of Antichrist seeks to remove Jesus by replacing Him with a different “*Christ*,” the Antichrist.” The spirit of Antichrist is perhaps nearly the same belief as “*being like God*,” which is The Lie that Satan sold to Hawa. She would, in becoming like God the Savior, replace God the Savior with her own version of god-like salvation. The first lie to humans was probably also the spirit of Antichrist.

Why does Islam have an Antichrist but not an Anti-Muhammad if Muhammad has the truth more than Christ? Islam, by including an Antichrist in its teachings, indirectly implies that Jesus, the TRUE Christ, is indeed THE TRUTH. And that suggests that Jesus is actually the Savior, the greatest one of all. Otherwise, why isn't there an anti-Paul-the-apostle, an anti-Buddha, an anti-Krishna, and so on?

Peter speaks of false teachings that deny the Lord (or *Master*) Who bought them (2 Pet. 2:1 NIV84). Jesus already bought all people when He died for them on the Cross. But Peter, in speaking of false religious beliefs, says that people are deceived into denying the very Lord Who already bought them and had thus made their eternal salvation possible. Since the term “*Lord*” is close in meaning to “*God*,” in denying the Lord, they are denying the true God and His salvation by denying His death that bought their salvation.

No One is Like Jesus

Jesus' humbling Himself to the death on the Cross qualifies Him, alone, to have the Name which is above every name (Phil. 2:5-11). But in our religious acceptance of THE LIE that we can be like God, we cheat the only God, Jesus, of the glory that He alone earned, deserves, and eternally possesses by Himself.

Much of our thinking is based on a belief that we are **like God**. We question and judge what God does. We advise God to change what He has done or is doing to align with our desires, our supposed “superior wisdom.” I suspect much of what we call prayer is actually unbelief—us trying to convince the God Who has more power than us to change what He is doing to align with our assumed “greater knowledge” and “greater goodness.” I think much prayer and teaching about prayer seem to assume we have greater knowledge and greater goodness than the God who is named Jehovah / Jesus.

We claim we have free will, but only the True God, the One with infinite power, can have a truly free will, 100% of the time. Our prayers are often an attempt to correct God for His errors. Our fears are actually us making judgments about the circumstances of our lives that God caused or allowed, and the subsequent undesirable outcome we fear may happen. Fear is unbelief. Fear is us judging the true God (and His power, knowledge, and goodness).

Religion focuses on our behavior and challenges us to be the best that we can be. That is never enough for a perfect God, the True God. The Gospel assumes no one

can behave well enough to achieve heaven by their own goodness. So, Jesus takes responsibility to do what no human is capable of accomplishing—HE saves US.

The Gospel, which is the truth, is about what we believe. Do we really believe that we are God, or like God, and can lift ourselves to heaven? If we are God, why do we find ourselves living on earth rather than in heaven, the infinitely better place? Or do we believe the truth, that we are NOT God and can NOT lift ourselves to heaven but need Someone with infinite power to be our Savior, to save us from all danger?

One God But 45,000 Versions of Christianity?

Some say there are about 45,000 Christian denominations on earth. How can that be with one God and one Bible, unless people do not feel it necessary to adhere to that one Bible, the word of the TRUE God, and feel free to determine for themselves what is true? That is what Hawa did, and people still do. In other words, these people assume THEY are like God and are the truth, or a judge of what is the truth, instead of Jesus (the One true God) being the only TRUTH.

I have met many who came out of Islam, but I think didn't really come far enough. In their churches, they found a modified version of Islam rather than true Christianity. They find Islam-like teachings in the church saying they still are the Savior, at least partially, if not totally. I believe I have seen a surprising number of MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) get salvation. In other words, they had thought they had become Christians, but I think they had not.

Many of the human authors of the New Testament warn that in the end times, many will depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1) and have only a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5) as a result of false teachers and false teachings (2 Pet. 2:1, 1 John 4:1). Jesus said, "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) I am concerned that many who have sacrificed much, have left Islam (or other religions), have been thrown out by their people and who are being persecuted, still might not have become true Christians, and therefore, still might be on the wide road that leads to destruction—Hell (Matt. 7:13). I'm not saying they must try harder to be "good Christians." No! No one is a Christian by "trying." I am saying they ought to ask God to make sure their beliefs are really the Gospel truth. Truth, not trying harder, is what will get someone to heaven.

End Time Apostasy

I am not alone in thinking this way. Here are two quotes from thegospelcoalition.org web site. Apostasy means leaving the truth for a belief that is not the truth, not the Gospel. Apostasy will greatly increase in the end times:

1. *"The apostasy will occur within the ranks of the members of **the visible church.**"*
2. *"The point Paul appears to be making is that the visible church community, within which true saints exist, will become so apostate that **it will be dominantly filled with people who profess to be Christian but really are***

not. The church will continue to profess to be Christian but most in it will actually not be true believers.”

I believe Satan loves religion and religious buildings and religious titles and religious rituals, religious laws and religious words, and religious sacrifices, but he hates Jesus and His sacrificial death on the Cross. Which belief is yours? The only true Savior is Jesus Christ, not a “god-like” Hawa, or you or me trying to do what only God can do. The only work capable of saving us is Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, not our “god-like” works and personal sacrifices.

The offense, or stumbling block, of the Cross (Gal. 5:11 NIV) is that I am NOT God, but a sinner. I am so lost, and salvation is so impossible for me as a human, doing my best on my own, that it is embarrassing and offensive that I am so weak, so compromised, so evil, so helpless, so useless, that I can NOT even save myself.

Paul said that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and he said he was the worst of them (1 Tim. 1:15). The better someone understands the Gospel of grace, the more likely that person is to admit that he, like Paul, maybe the worst of sinners. Sinners need a Savior. People who believe they are like God don’t need salvation and don’t need the Savior.

It is probably reasonable to assume that the essence of sin is being the opposite of, or different from, or opposed to, or falling short of God and His perfection. When Paul said he was the worst sinner, he was actually affirming that he had rejected Satan’s lie to Hawa that he was **like God** and accepted that he was a sinner instead. Religious leaders who punish sinners, I think, have forgotten they are sinners too. Paul did not forget that. What about us?

If we can be like God, then there is no need for the true God. Hence, evolution (replacing Divine creation) and atheism (replacing the Gospel). Then it becomes the planet that needs saving, rather than us, and we become the potential saviors of the planet. We worship and serve the creation rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25).

The World & Religion, Are Wrong

Jesus said, “The world is wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.” (John 16:8 NRSV). Jesus didn’t say some of us were wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. It seems we were all wrong about these most important issues. Faith in Christ and His Gospel amount to us admitting we were wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. No one likes to admit they are wrong. No one likes to admit they are weak and can’t solve their own problems. But a Savior (Jesus, Who IS God) is unnecessary if we can save ourselves. I believe that is the essence of the lost human condition until God opens our minds to our lostness and His salvation.

The Tree of Knowledge of good and evil is important to think about. Religion likes to judge **what** is good and what is evil, and even more, judge **who** (what **people**) are good or evil. But maybe the main judgment issue is that Satan has already been judged (John 16:11) and I suspect that judgment is based on Satan’s selling The Lie

to Hawa and Adam. Judgment is supposed to be done by God, but when people assume THEY are like God, then judging good and evil things and people seems appropriate and comes naturally to them, especially religious people who do not understand the Gospel.

Religious people love to judge other people. True Christians shouldn't. Why do you judge your brother? (Rom. 14:10). Judge not, or you will be judged (Matt. 7:1). Religious people love even to judge God. We ask or think, "Why did you do this, God?" Prayer is sometimes judging God. In prayer, people try to convince God to change what He has already done or wills to be done because we disagree and have judged God to be wrong.

Conclusion

In conclusion, do we think we are **like God**? I suspect we do. It is a very common, although false belief. Do you think if you are saved today, but if you sin tomorrow, you will lose your salvation? Then you are not totally believing in Jesus as the only Savior. You are believing in part that you are a savior, or The Savior, and that the other Savior, Jesus, failed, but where He failed, you think you will succeed. If that is your belief, and that is a common belief, then you too, believe, to some degree, that you are **like God**. Then may the REAL God cleanse you and me from this most evil of all beliefs—that we are God or like God and let us believe instead that only Jesus (Who is God) can ever save us and that He will save us by His death on the Cross, without us helping Him.

I believe Paul was given insight into the Gospel above all the other writers of scripture. He wrote:

1 Timothy 1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners** — of whom I am the **worst**.*

1Tim. 1:16 *But for that very reason I was shown mercy **so that** in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would **believe on him** and receive eternal life.*

1Tim. 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, **the only God**, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV84).*

He who knew the Gospel the best did not boast about his good works or self-righteousness, but about Christ coming to **save** him. Rather than claiming to be **like God**, Paul was willing to call himself the **worst sinner**—the very opposite of the true God. For Paul, no one could think of himself as being **like God**, because Paul had no doubt that the **Only God** is Jehovah / Jesus.

Do we accept that we are NOT like God? If we agree that we are not like God, doesn't that rule out salvation by good works, judging one another, divisions within the church, competition for power and fame, and much more? Wouldn't that reduce or remove all false teaching and all religion? The Gospel alone would remain. I'm realistic enough to know that is not going to happen, but I am also convinced that is the right direction, and we should all move forward together in that direction.

We are NOT like God. To the TRUE God, Jehovah/Jesus, be honor and glory and power, forever and ever! Amen!

About the Author



Dennis and his wife, Susan, were born in Iowa, USA in 1948 and 1952. They both grew up on farms. Sue was saved at an early age, but Dennis was not saved until age 22. The Gospel was new and wonderful to him. He had been baptized as a baby and grown up in a church. He called himself a Christian but had no idea what the Bible said about how to become a Christian.

For 33 years, he served as a missionary pilot here in Africa. He flew evangelists, pastors, teachers, Bible translators, etc. around east, central, and southern Africa. Dennis has flown into several locations in Somalia, but never Mogadishu. Sue was trained as a nurse. She serves people they know and love in various practical ways, as well as evangelism and discipleship. Dennis and Susan both are volunteers and have had no guaranteed salary for 45 years. God was and is faithful to meet all their needs. The author can be reached at ddyvig@gmail.com.

Messiah in Judaism & Islam

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman

Introduction

I am a follower of Jesus the Messiah. I have devoted my life to learning who the Messiah is and what the Messiah calls me to do. There are others—Jews and Muslims—who also have a concept of “Messiah” that is somewhat different from my understanding. Apart from Messianic Jews such as “Jews for Jesus,” historical Jewish focus has been on a Messiah to come who is different from the Jesus of the Gospels. For Muslims, their focus is on al-Masih ‘Isa (Jesus Christ) as well as a Mahdi. This article aims to examine extra-biblical and extra-Qur’anic writings about the “Messiah” from Jews and Muslims. Readers may then draw their own conclusions concerning similarities and differences between the messianic beliefs of Jews and Muslims and how these relate to the common view of Christians concerning Jesus the Messiah.

Messianic Expectations in Judaism

Maimonides, who died in A.D. 1204, wrote the “Thirteen Principles of Faith” as his summary of Jewish doctrine. Although all Jews have not affirmed these principles, they are treasured as basic doctrines by Orthodox Jews. Principle number 12 states, “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Messiah; and although he may tarry...I wait every day for his coming.”⁹⁹ These thirteen principles have been made into a hymn called Yigdal which is sung at the opening of the morning and close of the evening service by many Jews; they sing line 12: “By the End of Days He [God] will send our Messiah—to redeem those longing for His final salvation.”¹⁰⁰

The Hebrew word *Mashiah*, from which we get our word “Messiah,” means “anointed one.” (The Greek equivalent of “Messiah” is “Christ.”) In ancient Israel, kings and high priests were anointed (1 Samuel 16:12-14; Numbers 3:3; Leviticus 8:12). Zerubbabel, the Governor of Judah, who was a descendant of King David, and Joshua the High Priest were called “the two anointed ones [two sons of new oil] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth” in Zechariah 4:14. And the Persian king Cyrus the Great was called God’s anointed in Isaiah 45:1. To summarize, kings of Judah and Israel, a governor, high priests, and a Gentile king were “anointed ones,” according to the Old Testament. But surprisingly, *Mashiah* never occurs as a stand-alone word in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰¹ There is no specific reference to “**the** Messiah,” using that exact terminology in the Old Testament.

⁹⁹ Thirteen Principles of Judaism Faith, Orthodox-Jews.com.

<https://www.orthodox-jews.com/principles-of-judaism.html#ixzz7twV5ve2T>

¹⁰⁰ Yigdal - Wikipedia (accessed 12 March 2023).

¹⁰¹ Article “messiah” in Jacob Neusner, ed. in chief, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period (450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.)*. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996, 425.

After the destruction of Jerusalem which ended the Davidic dynasty, Jews were exiled to Babylonia. Some of the diasporas began to use royal psalms (45, 72, and 89) to express their hope that a king/Messiah would come to restore the throne of David. Also, perhaps as early as A.D., 100, another set of psalms called the Psalms of Solomon included a prayer to God in number 17 for “their king, the son of David... to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles.” This king “will gather a holy people...distribute them upon their land according to their tribes...and judge people and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness.”¹⁰²

Various beliefs in a Messiah began to take form. According to the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period (450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.)*, “Postexilic Jews as a whole did not expect ‘the messiah,’ and those who did hold divergent opinions about the anointed one or anointed ones.” The Mishnah, which was completed around A.D. 200, “finds little of consequence to say about the messiah as the savior of Israel, one particular person at one time...”¹⁰³ By about A.D. 500, the completed Talmud “knows of four distinguished personages as Messiahs. These are: Messiah the son of David; Messiah the son of Joseph; Elijah; the priest of justice (Melchizedek?).”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, a belief in “**the** Messiah” began to develop in the period between the Old and New Testament and continued to develop within Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbi Solomon Schechter reminds us that the rabbis believed that the *name* of the Messiah existed before the world was created,¹⁰⁵ and when the Messiah finally comes, he will kill the *Evil Yezer*.¹⁰⁶ (*Evil Yezer* refers to the inclination to do what is wrong.)

Louis Ginzberg recorded the following beliefs about the Messiah in his seven-volume collection of *Legends of the Jews*:

- Moses met the Messiah in heaven before the Messiah came to earth.¹⁰⁷
- The Messiah would be born in Rome and raised there.¹⁰⁸
- The Messiah would be born on the date of the destruction of the Temple.¹⁰⁹ (According to tradition, the First and Second Temples were destroyed on the 9th day of the month of Av.)
- The Messiah will build the third Temple in Jerusalem.¹¹⁰
- The Messiah will reveal new instructions and laws, a new Torah.¹¹¹
- The coming of the Messiah will “put an end to all sorrow and misery, and usher in the reign of peace and joy among men.”¹¹²

¹⁰² James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1983, vol. 2, 667.

¹⁰³ Neusner, 426.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966, vol. 5, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (Major Concepts of the Talmud)*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Schechter, 290-292.

¹⁰⁷ Ginzberg, vol. 3, 446-447.

¹⁰⁸ Ginzberg., vol. 6, 426.

¹⁰⁹ Ginzberg, vol. 6, 406.

¹¹⁰ Ginzberg, vol. 3, 203.

¹¹¹ Ginzberg, vol. 6, 438.

- The Messiah will wage war, defeat all who are wicked, and establish his rule throughout the world. When the Messiah comes, “the obedience of all peoples be unto him... His loins girded, he will go out to do battle with his enemies. No king and no ruler will prevail against him. The mountains will be dyed red with their blood, and the garments of the Messiah will be like the garments of him that presseth wine.”¹¹³

There are other ancient Jewish writings called pseudepigrapha that mention the Messiah. These were often written in the names of famous Bible characters. Here are some claims made about the Messiah in the pseudepigrapha:

- “Gog and Magog will fight with Israel in the days of the Messiah...”¹¹⁴
- “The last ruler who is left alive at that time will be bound, whereas the entire host will be destroyed. And they will carry him to Mount Zion, and my Anointed One will...kill him and protect the rest of my people...”¹¹⁵
- The Messiah will rule on the earth for a limited time: “And his dominion will last forever *until* the world of corruption has ended and *until* [italics mine] the times which have been mentioned before have been fulfilled.”¹¹⁶ (According to Sanhedrin 99a in the *Talmud*, there was disagreement as to how long the Messiah would reign on earth. Some said 40 years, others three generations, others 365 years, others 400 years, others a “period that runs from the days of Noah until now,” and even others a “period that runs from the day the world was created until now.”¹¹⁷
- According to *Derek Erez Zuta*, chapter 1, the Messiah would enter Paradise while he was still alive.¹¹⁸
- In the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q521, we read, “[...for the heavens and the earth will listen to his anointed one... And the Lord will perform marvelous acts such as have not existed, just as he said, for he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead live; he will proclaim good news to the poor and [...] he will lead the [...] and enrich the hungry.”¹¹⁹
- In the (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch, we read that when the “time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, that then all who sleep in hope of him will rise.” (30:1) “...it is the end of times.” (30:3)¹²⁰

¹¹² Ginzberg, vol. 4, 322.

¹¹³ Ginzberg, vol.2, 143.

¹¹⁴ 3 Enoch 46: 5 in Charlesworth, vol. 1, 298.

¹¹⁵ 2 Baruch 40:1-2 in Charlesworth, vol. 1, 633.

¹¹⁶ 2 Baruch 40:3 in Charlesworth, vol. 1, 633.

¹¹⁷ See “Objections” under principle 12 in The Thirteen Principles of Faith | My Jewish

Learning.

¹¹⁸ Tract Derech Eretz-Rabba. (Worldly Affairs): Tract Derech Eretz-Zuta: Chapter I. (sacred-texts.com).

¹¹⁹ Qumran scroll 4Q521. (textexcavation.com).

¹²⁰ Charlesworth, vol. 1, 617 and 630 ff.

- There was also a belief that the world would eventually be destroyed and then recreated. Before the new world is created, everything, even the greatest angels and the Messiah himself will become nonexistent so that God's unity will be recognized by all.¹²¹

Several of these ideas are found in 2 Esdras, a book found in the Apocrypha section between the Old and New Testaments. We read:

My son the Messiah shall appear with his companions and bring four hundred years of happiness to all who survive. At the end of that time, my son the Messiah shall die, and so shall all mankind who draw breath. Then the world shall return to its original silence for seven days as at the beginning of creation, and no one shall be left alive. After seven days the age which is not yet awake shall be roused and the age which is corruptible shall die. The earth shall give up those who sleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the storehouses shall give back the souls entrusted to them." (2 Esdras 7:28- 32) "...the Messiah whom the Most High has kept back until the end." (2 Esdras 12:32) "Then my son will convict of their godless deeds the nations that confront him... And he will destroy them without effort by means of the law—and that is like the fire."¹²² (2 Esdras 13:37-38)

A Jewish book called *'Otot ha-Mašiah (Signs of the Messiah)* was written sometime between the third and sixth centuries A.D. *Sign number six* says that a wicked king will arise in Edom (Rome) and rule the world for nine months. Then a Messiah from the lineage of Joseph will arise and kill the evil king. *Sign number seven* says that Armilos the Satan [Antichrist] will appear from the Edomites and say, "I am the Messiah! I am your god!" The Lord's Messiah from the lineage of Joseph will be killed. *Sign number eight* says that the Messiah from the lineage of David will appear along with Elijah. He will not have to battle Armilos. Instead, God himself will kill Armilos and destroy the forces of evil. *Sign number nine* says that the graves of the dead in Jerusalem will split open and God will resurrect the dead. The Messiah from the lineage of David along with Elijah will resurrect the Messiah from the lineage of Joseph.¹²³

If there was a pre-Christian expectation among some Jews that a Messiah would come, and that expectation has continued through the centuries until today, we may ask, "Why do Jews believe the Messiah has not yet appeared?" The answer is that the Messiah "was ready to bring Israel redemption at any time. If Israel but showed himself worthy, he would instantly fulfill his mission."¹²⁴

Many false messiahs have arisen throughout history. Jerry Rabow has written a book titled *50 Jewish Messiahs*,¹²⁵ and more names could be added to his list. Bar

¹²¹ Ginzberg, vol. 5, 164, note 61.

¹²² *The New English Bible*. Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 42-43, 62.

¹²³ John C. Reeves | 'Otot ha-Mašiah (Signs of the Messiah) (charlotte.edu)

¹²⁴ Ginzberg, vol. 4, 222.

¹²⁵ Jerry Rabow, *50 Jewish Messiahs*. Jerusalem: Gefen Books, 2002.

Kokhba claimed to be the Messiah, and even the great Rabbi Akiva believed him. When Bar Kokhba led a revolt against Rome from A.D. 132 to 135, the Jews met with disastrous results. War casualties were estimated at 580,000, not counting those who died from hunger and disease.¹²⁶ The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and rebuilt as a pagan city called Aelia Capitolina; Jews were prohibited from living there. “Bar Kokhba, above all, exemplifies arrogance against God. He lost the war because of that arrogance... Israel had to choose between wars, either the war fought by Bar Kokhba or the ‘war for Torah’... Those struggles [in the war for Torah], which were ritual arguments about ritual matters, promised the only victory worth winning.... When Israel fully accepts God’s rule, then the Messiah will come.”¹²⁷ Some Jews saw in Muhammad and the rise of the Islamic state the fulfillment of messianic expectations. Bernard Lewis wrote, “...the advent of the prophet in Arabia and the creation of a new world power that overthrew the might of both Rome and Persia and wrested Jerusalem and the holy land from the heavy hand of Byzantium seemed to presage the imminent fulfillment of Jewish prophecies and the coming of the Messianic age.”¹²⁸ Even though some Jews embraced Islam, the vast majority suffered as *dhimmis*. (*Dhimmis* were Jews and Christians who faced restrictions—sometimes humiliating restrictions, such as being forced to wear distinctive clothing—and they paid special taxes to the Islamic authorities.) Lewis adds, “The mood of exaltation passed as it became clear that the empire of the caliphs, though representing a considerable improvement from the Jewish point of view on what had gone before, was not the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic dreams.”¹²⁹

Messianic expectations did not die out among Jews living in the house of Islam. Occasionally someone would arise and announce he was the Messiah. The most famous example was Sabbatai Zevi who was born in Smyrna (today part of Turkey) in the Ottoman Empire. When he declared himself to be the Messiah, he was both opposed and welcomed by various Jewish leaders in the Muslim world and in Europe. When he went to Constantinople (Istanbul), he claimed he would put the Sultan’s crown on his own head. Even though he was imprisoned, his popularity grew. Large numbers of Jews accepted his claim to be the Messiah, they prayed for him in synagogues, and his picture was printed in prayer books along with that of King David. Finally, Sultan Mehmed IV gave Sabbatai Zevi three choices: 1. Have archers shoot arrows at him; if they missed, this would prove his divinity. 2. Be impaled. 3. Convert to Islam. He chose Islam and put on a turban. A small group of his disciples continue to this day.¹³⁰

Messianic Expectations in Islam

Eleven times in the Qur’an Jesus is called the Messiah (*al-Masih*) although Muslims do not know for sure what this title means. Firuzabadi, who wrote one of the most widely used Arabic dictionaries, claimed there were over fifty explanations for the

¹²⁶ Bar Kokhba | Biography, Revolt, & History | Britannica.

¹²⁷ Neusner, vol. 2, 426.

¹²⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 93.

¹²⁹ Lewis, 94.

¹³⁰ Sabbatai Zevi - Wikipedia.

meaning of the word *masih*.¹³¹ The clearest Islamic opposition to Jesus being the Messiah is when Muslims use the spurious *Gospel of Barnabas*, where we read in chapter 42, “Jesus confessed, and said the truth: ‘I am not the Messiah.’” Rather, in chapter 97, Muhammad is called the Messiah.¹³² Even though the *Gospel of Barnabas* was written to support Islam, it actually denies the Qur’an—and therefore denies Islam—on this point. For this reason, Muslims must reject the *Gospel of Barnabas*.

Most of the narrative in the Qur’an about *al-Masih ‘Isa* (the Messiah Jesus) focuses on events surrounding his birth and childhood. Some things are said about his healing ministry and teaching. And there are a few enigmatic references to the crucifixion and Jesus being taken to heaven. Most Muslims believe Jesus did not die on the cross, based on an interpretation of the words *wa lakin shubbiha la hum* in Surah an-Nisaa 4:157. Does this mean someone else was changed to look like Jesus? Or does it mean that it only appeared to the Jews that they were in charge when Jesus was crucified? Most, but not all, Muslims take the first explanation.¹³³

The next verse, 4:158, says that Allah took Jesus to Himself; therefore, Muslims believe Jesus remains in heaven to this day. If they believe Jesus did not die on the cross, they say he will die after he returns to earth before the Day of Judgment. A smaller number of Muslims believe Jesus first died, whether on the cross or otherwise, and then was resurrected and ascended to heaven; these also believe Jesus will return to earth before the Day of Judgment. Surat Maryam 19:33 refers to the day of Jesus’ death; therefore, he either had to die before he was taken to heaven, or he will die after he returns to earth.

One verse in the Qur’an deserves special attention. It is Surah az-Zukhruf 43: 61. A popular English translation—a revision of the translation made by Abdullah Yusuf Ali—which is printed in Saudi Arabia, says, “And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment) ...”¹³⁴ In *The Study Qur’an*, it is translated, “And he is indeed a portent of the Hour.”¹³⁵ The general consensus is that this verse refers to the second coming of Jesus before the Day of Judgment.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995, 31

¹³² For the full text of the *Gospel of Barnabas*, go to The entire Gospel of Barnabas. (answering-christianity.com).

¹³³ For possible interpretations of 4:157, some fitting more closely with the Gospel, see what the Muslim writer Mustafa Aykol says in *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of Muslims*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017, 153-154. For an analysis from a Christian perspective, see Parrinder, chapter 11, “The Death of Jesus.”

¹³⁴ *The Holy Qur-an, English translation of the meaning and Commentary*, revised and edited by the Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance. Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1413 H.

¹³⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, editor-in-chief, *The Study Quran*. New York: HarperOne, 2015.

¹³⁶ The usual reading of this verse says that that لَعَلَّمْ is ‘alam, meaning “sign” or “mark.” A variant reading holds that لَعَلَّمْ is ‘ilm, meaning knowledge, and the pronoun can be translated as “it.” In the variant reading the verse would be, “Verily it is knowledge for the hour,” meaning the Qur’an gives knowledge about the Hour of Judgment. See Parrinder, 122, 124.

In 2012, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll asking about the Second Coming of Jesus. It “showed that roughly half the populations in twenty-two Muslim-majority countries believe not only that Jesus will return, but that his return is ‘imminent’—that it will happen in their lifetime.”¹³⁷ When would that actually happen? No one knows, not even Jesus. This is a secret known to God alone. According to ‘Abdallah ibn al-Mubarak, Jesus asked, ‘O Gabriel, when will the Hour come? Gabriel’s wings fluttered, and he replied, ‘The questioned knows no more about this than the questioner.’”¹³⁸

Though the Qur’an was silent concerning Jesus’ end-time activities, hadiths, and legends filled in details. One hadith recorded in *Sahih Muslim* has Muhammad saying that Jesus will descend to the “white minaret” in Damascus, but there were no minarets in Damascus at that time. During Muhammad’s lifetime, Damascus was a “Christian” city. Either Muhammad was speaking prophetically about Damascus becoming a Muslim city or the hadith is spurious.¹³⁹ The hadith also says Jesus will kill ad-Dajjal (similar to the Antichrist in Christian traditions), and the earth will produce an abundance of crops.

In a hadith recorded by Ibn Maja, we read:

The messenger of God said: ‘Isa b. Maryam will be a just judge and a well-conducted Imam among my people, making smooth the rough things, slaying the pigs, remitting the jizya, and leaving off taking the sadaqa. Tax will not be levied upon sheep or camel. Envy and enmity will be taken away. The poison of every poisonous animal will be removed so that a little boy may put his hand in the mouth of a snake, and it will not harm him, and a little girl may put a lion to flight, and it will not harm her. The wolf will be among the flocks like their dog, and the earth shall be full of Moslems as the vessel is full of water. The creed shall be one, and there shall be no worship but that of Allah. War shall cease its ravages, and the Quraish shall be deprived of their kingdom. The earth will be like an ingot of silver and will bring forth its vegetation as in the days of Adam.’”¹⁴⁰

The Second Coming of Jesus would bring peace and plenty to earth, but it also would bring fear. His arrival would be a sign of the impending Judgment against sinners. Ahmed ibn Hanbal recorded, “Whenever the Hour was mentioned, Jesus used to cry out in anguish like a woman.”¹⁴¹ Ibn Hanbal called the announcement of the Hour “the Great Scream.”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Aykol, 184. Somalia was not included among Muslims countries that were surveyed at that time.

¹³⁸ Tahrif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001, 53-54.

¹³⁹ *Sahih Muslim*, Book 41, Hadith Number 7015.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1926, 204.

¹⁴¹ Khalidi, 74.

¹⁴² Khalidi, 85.

Equally important in descriptions of end times are references to the Mahdi, a Messiah-type figure who is never mentioned in the Qur'an. Tahrif Khalidi explains, "In broad terms, two central actors made their appearance in Muslim eschatology: the Muslim Mahdi (or Messiah) and Jesus."¹⁴³ Khalidi also said, "Eventually the Sunnites and Shi'ites were to differ as to whether the Mahdi, or Muslim Messiah, was higher in rank than Jesus (the Shi'ite view) or Jesus was higher than the Mahdi (the Sunnite view)."¹⁴⁴ Among Twelver Shi'a Muslims, the Mahdi is believed to be the son of the eleventh Imam, who as an infant, was hidden by God, waiting to be revealed at the end of time. Shi'a Muslims also refer to the Mahdi as al-Qa'im, meaning "he who will rise." Many Sunni Muslims believe the Mahdi has not yet been born—although various claimants have taken the title for themselves throughout history, such as the Nubian Muhammad Ahmad who in 1881 established the Mahdist State in Sudan and fought against the British. By contrast, most Muslims believe the Mahdi must arise from the family of Muhammad.

Ibn Maja recorded the following hadith: "A people will come out of the East and will smooth the way for the Mahdi... The Messenger of God said: They will not become the property of any of them. Then will appear the black flags from the direction of the East. They will make such slaughter of you as was not made by any people... When you see him, swear allegiance to him even if you have to creep upon the snow. For he is the vice-gerent of God—the Mahdi."¹⁴⁵ The black flag has played an important role among Muslims in recent years. It was not only flown by Muhammad, according to tradition, but it has also become a symbol of the revolutionary eschatological struggle for Islam as taught by certain extremist Islamic groups, including the Islamic State and al Shabab.

Conclusion

Messianic expectations among Jews and Muslims have evolved as a protest against oppression, injustice, and sin which too often outweigh whatever is good in this world. Jews and Muslims expect a deliverer to come and make all things right. This article would be incomplete if I did not add a personal note. I believe that there is an alternative to what has been described above. It is my firm belief that messianic expectations will only find their fulfillment when Jesus, the one and only Messiah, comes back, and God creates a new heaven and a new earth. The question for Jewish and Muslim followers of Jesus is this—How can we begin with what Jews and Muslims believe about "Messiah," and attract them to the Jesus of the Gospels?

Perhaps one way to begin is with the subject of eschatology itself. Today Jews and Muslims are especially interested in when the Messiah will come and what he will do at the end of time. The Messiah is seen as a warrior who will destroy all that is wicked. The Book of Revelation also describes Jesus on a white horse who "in righteousness... judges and makes war," and he will come with the armies of heaven someday (See Revelation 19:11 ff.) But if the Messiah is only a warrior, then who can stand before him on that day? It would truly be a time of the "Great Scream." We

¹⁴³ Khalidi, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Khalidi, 229.

¹⁴⁵ Bell, 206-207.

need someone who is more than simply a warrior. We also need a Savior, a Shepherd, a Comforter, a King full of compassion—one who can save us from ourselves and our evil inclinations. Perhaps this is where we should begin in our discussions about the Messiah. We like to begin with the birth of Jesus and then move to his ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, and finally to his Second Coming. Perhaps we should start the other way around—with his Second Coming. Then we can move backwards in the story to tell all the good things Jesus the Messiah has done to save us from our sin and to guide us in a new life. We can emphasize that our warrior King is also the loving Savior who invites us to be with him now and forevermore.

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Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman (pseudonym) has more than 30 years of experience working in the Muslim world, in ten countries, on three continents. He was an associate professor at a Christian university for nine years, teaching courses on Islam and world religions. He also has taught in two other theological schools as well as being a guest lecturer at various Christian colleges. Ibrahim has written over 20 books and booklets and numerous magazine and journal articles. One of his booklets sold over 90,000 copies. His work has been translated into more than 10 languages. He currently lives in East Africa with his family. The author can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.

The Misunderstood Holy Spirit

Stephen Thompson

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is misunderstood by Muslims and by many Christians. For Muslims, they claim he is the angel Gabriel. This is not clear from the Qur'an. For many Christians, he is the genie in the lamp ready to fulfill their every wish. After the Messiah had ascended to heaven, he left the Holy Spirit as "God with us." He is the fulfillment of the promise in Matthew 28:20. He is the comforter. He is active in the unbelieving world convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment. He is a person. He is God. He comes into the life of the believer just like he came on and into the lives of the disciples at Pentecost. Pentecost was the baptism of the Holy Spirit; however, many believers receive an experience of the Holy Spirit as a second blessing but there can also be more experiences of the Holy Spirit as we are changed more and more in Christ-likeness. We are filled with the Holy Spirit as we surrender control of our lives to God, and He empowers us in ministry. He gives spiritual gifts of different types. The Scriptural lists of gifts are not necessarily comprehensive. Jesus was the ultimate gift of God's mercy to humanity; he was *ar-Rahman*. The Holy Spirit is *ar-Rahim*, the God of mercy and compassion at work in the World today.

The Holy Spirit in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name four times. Three times it is to do with enabling or supporting the Lord Jesus (Surah 2:87 and 253; 5:110) and one time, he appears to be the one who brought down the Qur'an for Muhammad (Surah 16:102). The references to Jesus are similar to what we find in the Bible where the Holy Spirit empowered and led Jesus (especially in Luke 4). There is a verse in Acts that especially talks about the anointing and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:38 ESV ... *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.* In the Qur'an, the Spirit (*ar-Ruh*) is often mentioned as well as the angels like he was separate from the angels.¹⁴⁶ Nowhere in the Qur'an is it mentioned that the angel Gabriel is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is "God with us" Today

So what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian or the Church today? Do we understand his role and ministry today? Is he like a genie in a lamp for Christians? Jesus came into the world to save lost sinners (Luke 19:10). He was the ultimate act of God's love and mercy towards humanity (John 3:16). When he left this world most people of that time were far from saved. He left the Holy Spirit to help us in this task.

¹⁴⁶ Hughes Dictionary of Islam <https://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Hughes/s.htm> (accessed 1 June 2023).

Matthew shares an Old Testament prophecy about Jesus that He would be called Emmanuel or God with us (Matthew 1:23). Throughout Matthew's gospel, the Lord Jesus is God with us or Emmanuel as shown by people worshipping Him. Even twice after Jesus' resurrection in chapter 28, Matthew records people worshipping Him (Matthew 28:9 and 17). Then he gives the commission to his disciples that they are to go to every nation and make disciples and he leaves them with a promise in verse 20. The promise is that he will be with them until the end of the age. It is evident in bodily form he was not with them but as the Holy Spirit, also known as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), he is with the disciples. He would fulfill through the disciples the mission of bringing God's love, his forgiveness to all humanity, the good news or gospel.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter

Before he departed, Jesus promised the disciples the Counselor or Comforter (*paraklétos* παράκλητος GK). He repeats this promise several times during his discourse, presumed to be at the Last Supper in John 13 to 17. His first statements about the Comforter are in John chapter 14, verses 16 and 17; these are the most comprehensive in relation to the believer. ESV "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, [Advocate, or Counsellor] to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." He already existed as he was with them (17) and would be in them. He is "another" suggesting "another" like Jesus acting in the World and with the believers. He would be with them for a very long time ("forever"). The other references mention that he is the "Holy Spirit" (14:26) and would be a teacher reminding them of the things which Jesus taught (14:26). He would bear witness or testify about Jesus (15:26 ESV and NLT). It was necessary for Jesus to go away before he could come to be in them, and Jesus would send him (16:7). The Holy Spirit would not be an independent voice but would share what he received from Jesus and tell them about the future (16:13-16).

The Holy Spirit's Ministry in the World

The Holy Spirit has a ministry in the world, and I believe this ministry works in conjunction with the ministry of followers of Jesus. As we go to the World with the Gospel, God's Word, the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin and righteousness and judgment. John 16:8-11 ESV *And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.* Sin separates humanity from God and his purposes. Jesus was the only righteous one, and as such, it is suitable for us to follow and believe in Him. There will be judgment, and judgment deals with those who reject Jesus and with the ruler of this world who is Satan. We can pray for those we meet and share Christ with that the Holy Spirit will work in their lives to convict them of sin and righteousness and the coming judgment.

The Holy Spirit is a Person, not a Force & He is God

The Holy Spirit is a spirit and a person. As spirit, we cannot see the Holy Spirit but we can see his actions in the World. The Lord Jesus described it this way: John 3:8 ESV *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but a person. He teaches (John 14:26). He speaks (Acts 8:29 and 13:2). He is grieved (Eph. 4:30). He can be lied to (Acts 5:3, 4) and much more.¹⁴⁷

He is God. Some examples of how he is revealed in the Bible as God include: He is the creator, Job 33:4 ESV *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.* He is all-knowing, 1 Corinthians 2:11 ESV *For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* He inspired the human authors of the Bible, 2 Peter 1:21 ESV *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son as he proceeds from the Father (John 15:26), and sent by the Son (John 16:7). He does not bring salvation but had a role in enabling the Son to bring salvation (Hebrews 9:14). He was active in creation (Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 104:30).¹⁴⁸

The Trinity is a stumbling block for many and especially our Muslim friends. How can God be one when we are talking about three distinct persons as God? Nabeel Qureshi, a devote Muslim, came to grips with an understanding of the Trinity as he made a distinction between being (God's essence) and person. “The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is one being with three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit and the Believer

So when does the believer receive the Holy Spirit? When we believe and receive Jesus, we are born again: - John 1:12-13 ESV *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in this process. In Titus 3:5 NLT, *he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.* A person without the Holy Spirit is still spiritually dead (Romans 8:9). The Christian is God's temple as the Spirit lives in the believer (1 Corinthians 3:16). When we are converted, we are sealed or confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and he guarantees our inheritance in God's family (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

¹⁴⁷ Justin Taylor, How Do We Know the Holy Spirit Is a Person? <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/how-do-we-know-the-holy-spirit-is-a-person/> (accessed June 10, 2023).

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Menkis, How Is the Holy Spirit Different from the Father and the Son? <https://corechristianity.com/resource-library/articles/how-is-the-holy-spirit-different-from-the-father-and-the-son/> (accessed June 10, 2023).

¹⁴⁹ Nabeel Qureshi, Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus, Zondervan, 2018, 202.

Jesus Baptizes with the Holy Spirit

Jesus' role in sending the Holy Spirit onto and into the lives of the believer is called a "baptism." God told John the Baptist this about Jesus' ministry. John 1:32-33 (ESV) *And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'* The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise from the Father which the disciples had heard from Jesus. After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for this baptism which occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4, 5 and Acts 2). The Holy Spirit was present before Pentecost, and he came on certain individuals but not everyone (for example, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit when pregnant Mary visited her in Luke 1:39-45).

What is the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" Today?

Can this conversion event or experience be called a "baptism of the Holy Spirit?" "Yes" as when a person believes and is converted, he receives the Holy Spirit into his life just like the disciples did at Pentecost. For many, however, there is a second experience which they call the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:1-7 can be used to justify this experience as separate from conversion). For many, this experience results in a new experience of the presence of God in their lives and a release of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (especially the manifestation gifts like tongues). When I was six years old, I invited Jesus into my life, and later at 15, as I came to a better understanding of the gospel and understanding of Jesus as Lord, I had a new sense of peace in my heart. Those who claim to have had this experience and those who have not are still used by God. However, the experience can result in a renewed expectation of God working through one's life. As we are being changed more and more into the image of Jesus, we should all expect to experience the Holy Spirit's working in our lives. 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

What Does it Mean to be Filled with the Spirit?

Another term used in relation to the Holy Spirit is being "filled with the Spirit." The Spirit is not a liquid but a person. Being filled with the Spirit is about being empowered and led by the Spirit, and this most often has to do with wholly submitting to God. God empowered or filled people with his Spirit when he had a special task for them to do and as they submitted fully to him. We can ask the Spirit to fill us but if there are sins or something we are putting before him, how can he guide and use us? A person who is filled with the Spirit is someone who demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-24 ESV *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things, there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* These are contrasted with the evil works of the flesh things which don't mark a life not filled or controlled by the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-21).

The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

In several places within the Bible, there are lists of spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts come from and through the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 ESV, *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* 1 Corinthians 12:11 ESV *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.* There are four main lists of gifts in the Bible (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4). The gifts are not given primarily for personal edification so we can boast but rather to build up the church as the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are given to empower us to do what God wants us to do (2 Peter 1:3, 4).^{150,151}

The gifts can be divided into two or three main groups. There are motivation or gifts of leadership and service, gifts of ministry positions, and manifestation gifts. I don't believe the lists are complete. What about Sunday school teachers or cross-cultural workers? A useful list of motivational gifts is included in Romans 12: prophecy (or proclamation of truth), faith, service, giving, leadership, and mercy. Ministry gifts are found in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 and include: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds), and teachers. The manifestation gifts (mainly in 1 Corinthians 12) include words of wisdom and knowledge, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. There is obviously overlap in some of these areas, and the gifts can be given to various people for various reasons at various times. Also, like in the area of motivational gifts, all of us should be concerned for truth, faith, service, giving, leadership, mercy, and evangelism, even if they are not our main giftings. After the discussion on the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, Saint Paul reminds the Corinthians that without love, the gifts are meaningless (1 Corinthians 13). There should be order in the exercising of the gifts and especially with the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14). How do we know what our main gifts are? Often, they are in an area where we find enjoyment and fulfillment. We can also ask people who know us well what they think our spiritual gifts might be. There are also tests that one can carry out to determine what our gifts might be. This website provides a test you can carry out.¹⁵² What about spiritual gifts we don't have? Should we seek them? In 1 Corinthians 14:1, we are encouraged to seek spiritual gifts and especially prophecy, as an example of a gift that is not self-edifying but will edify others.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Brannon Deibert, What Are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Scripture Quotes and Meaning <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/holy-spirit/what-are-the-seven-gifts-of-the-holy-spirit-scripture-meaning.html> (accessed 17 June 2023).

¹⁵¹ Thomas Schreiner, The Gifts of the Spirit <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-gifts-of-the-spirit/> (accessed 17 June 2023).

¹⁵² <https://giftstest.com/> (accessed 17 June 2023).

¹⁵³ The Amplified Bible in this context defines prophecy as: *-interpret the divine will and purpose in inspired preaching and teaching.*

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit is *ar-Rahim* at Work Today

Hopefully this short article on the Holy Spirit will motivate you to believe more in the Holy Spirit and look for His working in your life and the lives of those around you. In terms of the Muslim invocation “*BismAllah, ar-Rahman, ar-Rahiim*” the Lord Jesus fits very well with *ar-Rahman*, “the most merciful.” God’s love and mercy are revealed best in the sending of Jesus as God’s love gift (John 3:16). The Holy Spirit matches *ar-Rahim*, “the most compassionate” or God’s specific mercy at work in and through the believer.¹⁵⁴ Truly, he is God’s mercy and compassion at work in the world and especially in helping believers in the task of the mission. He is “God with us” today. He leads and empowers us. We need Him.

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¹⁵⁴ The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, The Virtual Mosque, 2010. <https://www.virtualmosque.com/personaldvlp/worship-personaldvlp/prayer/the-entirely-merciful-the-especially-merciful/> (accessed 21 June 2023).

About the Author



Stephen Thompson grew up in East Africa until he was 13. Later as an adult he served with his wife (Rachel) as a global partner with SIM in NEP Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia where he helped the people with water and agricultural projects. Later they lived in Addis Ababa where he managed the *Codka Nolasha Cusub* radio program, ran a discipling program and was an elder at the International Evangelical Church. At present Stephen and Rachel live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand. Stephen has a bachelor degree in agricultural science, MA (English Bible) and a DipGrad (religious studies and social anthropology). The author can be reached at thomsjrj@gmail.com.

The Nature of Belief & the “Insider Movement”

Solomon White

Introduction

As Christianity reaches out to Islam (and Islam to Christianity), both religions will eventually meet the statements which comprise their respective views of God, of holy scripture, history, salvation, and of the contemporary world around them. Both claim Abrahamic lineage, and the original statements of both are strong, with the substance of their interpretations over millennia only confirming a mutual exclusiveness. The question arises of how each might respond to the other: is there an actual shared Abrahamic origin? Do we worship the same God? Are there *functional* commonalities? Going beyond cursory review, the foundations appear different and incompatible with each other, even if only because each asserts its exclusivity and primacy over the other, thereby denying silent or passive stances as options.¹⁵⁵ In the face of exclusivity, how is one to respond in a way true to one’s faith, yet redemptive and charitable toward the other?

Of concern is the “Insider Movement’s” attempt to bridge the gap between orthodox Christianity and Islam, with its recasting of the content and “packaging” of the Christian message to accommodate Islamic religious and cultural defaults, objections, or preferences.¹⁵⁶ In particular, this article looks at (1) scripturally, what is the *nature* of the belief that brings a person to and over the threshold of genuine conversion, and especially at the point of belief’s beginning (before entrenchment or outside supports affect it), and (2) to what extent the Insider Movement’s (IM’s) understanding aligns with this. At issue is not whether IM can present a defensible train of thought (which is where much of the discussion seems to have centered), but on whether the premises of those arguments are sound. If the premises are not

¹⁵⁵ Concerning supposed commonality, one can hardly be too careful of Islamic equivocation, with the classic instances being the pairing of Allah and God, and Jesus and Isa, with each pair being presented as one and the same. (Islam asserts that any differences are from Judeo-Christian “corruption” of the Scriptures).

¹⁵⁶ It is assumed the reader is familiar with the general thrusts and issues of the “Insider Movement” (IM) and the C-Spectrum, including the “C5” designation, where the discussion is most acute (for background on the C-Spectrum, from one of its proponents, see John Jay Travis, “The C1-C6 Spectrum after Fifteen Years.” *Missio Nexus*, <https://missionexus.org/the-c1-c6-spectrum-after-fifteen-years/>. Oct. 1, 2015). It is also understood that there will be a considerable range of beliefs and practices in any sizable group (such as IM), with blurred or porous boundary lines to some extent, but focus here is on the statements and positions of known IM leaders, which are taken as representative of the larger movement. Also, the content here is seen as being interactive with IM leadership, who have expressed strong, entrenched positions, that a response in kind seems appropriate (any interaction with IM followers, who may be young in faith, would be more pastoral in nature). As fair disclosure, direct “field” contact with IM is relatively new: what is here is from my experience in an Islamic country in younger years (and awareness of these core issues then and since), and from further reading. Concerning “orthodox” Christianity, in all cases here it refers to standard, historically held Christianity as handed down from the twelve apostles and the Early Church Fathers, not the Eastern Orthodox Churches in particular. Orthodoxy, as here, is marked by a very high regard for Scripture as it presents itself, and is theologically conservative (or at least defaults to theologically conservative reference points).

compatible with Scripture or are otherwise not sound, it is understood that there will only be further departures from orthodox Christianity in subsequent reasoning and application, and hence, the extended and seemingly unresolved discussion which has been in motion for some time.¹⁵⁷ The gravity of the issues appear to be self-evident and urgent: (1) if the Christian “house” is not in order, it will impede outreach to the house of Islam,¹⁵⁸ and (2) the result of ongoing incomplete or false conversions will systemically betray the cause of Christ. Further, two understandings premise what follows. First, though both religions supposedly trace their deity to the god of Abraham, who each religion says he is radically different (that they cannot be the same entities), and second, that when saying Jesus is “Lord,” it is saying He is absolutely supreme, to the exclusion of all others, and not one among many.¹⁵⁹ If the deities of Islam and Christianity are not seen as being one and the same or Jesus is not “Lord” in an exclusive, singular sense, a much different discussion must ensue than what is here (where these are taken to be the case), with discussion starting from much different points of departure and on different terms.

Scripture often speaks to the need for integrity at the initial point of turning to Christ (i.e., belief and conversion), and this is a major, underpinning premise here. The Lord himself says: “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first” (Rev. 2:4-6).¹⁶⁰ The Apostles and Gospel writers clearly testify to what they knew from the beginning, from the start of their faith, as being the anchor and reference point. John testifies, “that which *we have seen and heard* we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn. 1:3); Peter says as well, that “we cannot but speak of *what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20), and “of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). Luke testifies of “these people who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have*”

¹⁵⁷ Bill Nikides concurs: “discussions [between IM and orthodox Christianity . . . will] never be addressed satisfactorily, . . . [as] *we rely on presuppositions that we rarely articulate openly*. . . . It is imperative . . . that we begin to unearth the ideas and the ideologies that guide our actions, [as] it is at the level of presuppositions that we fundamentally [agree or] disagree” Bill Nikides, “Building a Missiological Foundation: Modality and Sodality” in *Muslim Conversions to Christ A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, ed. Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 82-83 (emphasis added). Many major issues swirl very nearby, but attempt has been made, with few digressions, to stay within the here-stated scope.

¹⁵⁸ In His “High Priestly Prayer” Jesus addresses this: “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, . . . *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*” (Jn. 17:21, emphasis added), and Paul as well, in chiding the Corinthians: “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13; 2 Cor. 11:4; etc.).

¹⁵⁹ “And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Php. 2:8–11. In the next verse Paul continues: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” thereby directly linking Christ’s supreme Lordship with the utmost care we are to take concerning our own salvation, that it is subject to a much higher authority. Also see: Matt. 28:18; Jn. 17:1-3; Heb. 2:5-9; 12:2; Rev. 11:15; 19:16; Ps. 89:27b (speaking of the line of David, not Ishmael); Eph. 1:20-23, and others.

¹⁶⁰ Except as noted, all Scripture texts are from *The Revised Standard Version* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1971). Throughout this article, any emphases in Bible quotations have been added.

(Acts 10:47) and that “God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit *just as he did to us*” (Acts 15:8). James: “Receive with meekness the implanted word” (Jas. 1:21), referring to the word one initially received at conversion, and Paul as well: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.... If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8–9). References throughout Scripture to “backsliding” or error, by definition, finally anchor in what was initially established and references to foundations to what has been previously established. “What we have seen and heard” is not to allow a self-centered or self-defined locus; rather, that such testing is contingent on our own salvation being one of purity and power, of genuine salvation and encounter with Almighty God, one which has the marks of authenticity and exceeds mere experientialism or conjecture. Also, it is the Holy Spirit who establishes oneness: it is beyond human invention or effort (however legitimate), and transcends debate and schism.

From these and many other Scriptures, it is only appropriate to assess new people, ideas or “graces” by the proven, confirmed truth already received: are new influences of the same spirit as what one originally received from the Lord (i.e., in both character and truth)? Is there a “different gospel” present?¹⁶¹ When something “foreign” passes before us, it is to be identified as such and rejected: one must stand on the bedrock of confirmed truth.

Positively, there are the Lord’s words about himself, the Good Shepherd:

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.... All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.... I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me (John 10:3-4,8-9,14).

The Good Shepherd relates directly with His sheep, to the exclusion of others. He knows them by name – there is a relationship where each is individually known by the other. That relationship is the basis for rejecting others (thieves and robbers) – they are foreign to those who know the Lord. Negatively, the Old and New Testaments concur: “If a prophet arises among you [with a ‘foreign’ message,]... the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all

¹⁶¹ Paul is gracious in dealing with other leader’s faults, but he says the “different” (ἕτερος) gospel at Galatia is “accursed” (ἀνάθεμα) – Gal. 1:8 Mark Dever, “False Conversions: The Suicide of the Church, Session III” (T4G/Crossway, 2012, <https://t4g.org/resources/mark-dever/false-conversions-the-suicide-of-the-church-2/>). Dever further advocates preaching the Glory of God’s name to make a quick and effective separation between those who love the Lord and those who do not, and it might be added, to preach the glory of the risen Christ as well – a healthy antidote for any division or impurity, and a none-too-distant word for many of the issues here.

your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 13:1–3), and “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). Of note is that both Scriptures are specifically addressing the possible presence of a false prophet, as with Muhammad. There must be purity and depth to provide a healthy seed from which ongoing Christian life and productivity can emerge. These Scriptures dramatically underscore how initial belief and conversion are seen: it is urgent, determinant, and definitive, and cannot be overlooked or brushed aside by theological preference, by reasoning that one will “outgrow” casual or slack dispositions, or by a supposed need for “tolerance” or “acceptance.”¹⁶²

The Nature of Belief, & of the Faith Which Saves

What comprises genuine “belief,” and to an extent, what comprises “conversion” (as the culmination of “belief”)?¹⁶³ Believing seems to be an irreducible “given” in one’s becoming a Christian – one believes, and in the process of embracing the object of belief, is “converted.” But particularly, what is the *nature* of this belief – its substance? As eminent a thinker as Alvin Plantinga has readily acceded: “*Isn’t it obvious...? To accept Christian belief...is to believe that there is an all-powerful [God]... of course!*”¹⁶⁴ (emphasis added). Though there may be other later supports, the starting point for Christianity is to believe. There may be identifiable

¹⁶² Given that the fidelity of initial belief and any resulting conversion is a core concern of this article, also see these scriptural supports: Rom. 5:17; 8:14–15; 1 Cor. 2:11–14; 15:2–5; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:9; 3:2; 5:2–3; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6–7; 4:17; 2 Th. 3:6; Heb. 2:3; 10:26–27; 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Jn. 2:26–27; 2 Jn. 10–11; and Old Testament references as well. Contemporarily and beyond IM, it is more than a little concerning that “biblical scholars have paid relatively little attention in recent years to conversion . . . in the New Testament” Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light Aspects of Conversion In the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 1. We tend to accept what correlates with our experience, and propagate the same (“where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” Lk. 12:34). This is not to unduly question others, but it causes one to wonder how much impact their own conversions have personally meant to them, and may explain why the lack of clarity in difficult situations, both with IM and more broadly across the Body of Christ. A vital conversion and ongoing walk are prerequisites to “test[ing] the spirits” (1 Jn. 4:1) and is essential in matters such as discussed here. In his landmark work on conversion, A. D. Nock observes that Christianity does not rest in the “sanctity of custom hallowed by preceding generations,” but is a “prophetic [i.e. revelatory] religion” A. D. Nock, *Conversion The Old And the New in Religion From Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America. Inc., 1933), 3, 12. See more on conversion at footnotes 9 & 15 (below).

¹⁶³ Conversion, belief’s oft intertwined twin, also seems to be a crux issue in the discussion with IM; also the issues of baptism and suffering (not discussed here). To briefly address conversion, “Scholars generally point to five prominent accounts of individual conversion stories in Acts. These are the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40); Paul (9:1–19; 22:6–16; 26:12–18); Cornelius (10:1–11:18; 15:7–11); Lydia (16:14–15); and the Philippian jailer (16:25–34). . . . Stephen Smalley (1964: 200–201) has compared these accounts and noted that they contain a relatively consistent pattern incorporating six stages of conversion. (1) There is always some form of *preparation* for the conversion. (2) Mediators *preach* about Jesus in some fashion. (3) The individuals make *inquiry*. (4) There is usually evidence of God’s *activity* in the conversion. (5) *Baptism* is uniformly mentioned. (6) Each conversion entails specific though not uniform *results*.” Witherup, Ronald D. *Conversion in the New Testament*. (Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press. 1994). 63. See more on conversion at footnotes 8 & 15.

¹⁶⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Oxford University Press, 2000), 14. Plantinga unwittingly confirms the comments here by his inability to define belief without using the term itself. As he says, it must simply be accepted and believed, a type of “First Principle” for the Christian life.

precipitating conflict(s) which trigger belief, and belief may be intellectually supported – such may be significant factors leading to or assisting in conversion¹⁶⁵ – but there is a point where belief cannot be reduced further or gotten “behind” to control, elucidate or define – it is an accepting and then an embracing (or rejecting) of the object of belief; no more, and no less.

Meriam-Webster’s definitions of “believe,” with those of “trust” and “faith” as integrally related terms, are taken to be foundational. Being universally used, they also stand quite free of sectarian bias.¹⁶⁶

belief/believe: a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing [resulting in] a conviction of the truth of some reality, as to its goodness, efficacy, or ability.

trust

- : assured reliance or dependence on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something, including something future or contingent
- : to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of
- : to place confidence in: DEPEND (*trust* in God)

faith

- : belief and trust in and loyalty to God
- : firm belief in something for which there is no proof
- : complete trust
- : to strain, to draw, and thus *to bind or make fast* (emphasis added).

In these definitions the issue of dependence arises as a critical element, with terms such as trust, reliance, confidence, and “bind[ing] to make fast” used to convey this. These are personal qualities which, though their consequents may be highly tangible, are themselves unseen and physically unmeasurable. By definition, these further necessitate an object to whom or in which credence is placed. Though God (the locus in this article) is mentioned, the object of belief or trust is also identified as being someone, an object, something future or contingent, or truth(fulness). The definitions all speak of the one in need placing their “weight” and care in the hands of an entity beyond their control, and if only by this effectual acknowledgment of both their need and the one being trusted as a greater power, there is a surrender of control into a monodirectional allegiance. It is an existential matter (so far as the need at hand may extend), and one must cross a line, a tipping point of no return, to

¹⁶⁵ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 46-48, 53, 55, 165-166. Rambo’s identification of belief’s sequential steps to conversion are also helpful.

¹⁶⁶ The following definitions are consolidated or abridged from: Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996), as found at m-w.com and in the Logos Bible Software – Standard. The last line of “faith” (“to strain, . . .”) is from Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language (Webster’s Dictionary 1828 - Online)*. New York: S. Converse. <https://webstersdictionary1828.com>, accessed November 8, 2022.

activate the saving agent. If correctly placed, such trust results in an “assured reliance” that something is certain or true, with little capacity to turn back to the state one was previously in or to further assess the initial premises. Ongoing thought is now built into, around, or from under the object of belief, from within the trust extended to it and somewhat without reference to outside factors. The new trust becomes one’s new “belief” and “truth” system, whether the initial points of departure were sufficiently tested or not.

With reference to the divine, as the transference of trust and resulting dependence moves forward, a second dynamic occurs: the likeness and nature of the trust’s object develop in the one extending the trust. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18), and “everyone, when he is fully taught, will be like his teacher” (Lk. 6:40). Faith is not a theological statement which one must adopt and conform to but is the active agent working in a person (which, if genuine, will confirm legitimate theology). Though likely happening implicitly and quite sublimely, this also has the effect of dictating the nature of the trust being extended, which increasingly conforms to that sought by the one being trusted – it causes the *nature* of the belief (the specific concern here) to conform to the desire of the one being believed.¹⁶⁷

Two senses of “belief” must be distinguished: of concern here is the active placing of trust in someone or something, especially in the present, active sense, not the resulting “beliefs” in the sense of a body of doctrines or resulting “convictions.” It is the verb form – the active inner movement – not the noun form, which is of interest.¹⁶⁸ It is the active acceptance and ownership of something or someone beyond us and not previously believed or embraced, culminating in (or because of) a personal encounter with the divine and divine truth.¹⁶⁹ Though the intellect may be

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Rom. 8:29; 12:2; Eph 4:22–24; Col. 3:9b–11, James 1:25. “...conform[ed] to the desire of the one being believed” raises the larger issue of just who that is.

¹⁶⁸ It has been observed that Muslims, coming out of a rigid doctrinal framework, may not be as strong with the verb form of “belief.” That is accepted, with patience for any whom this describes, though the nature of an encounter with the living Christ may well trigger such belief (witness the apostles). While Islam may not recognize this modality (Allah is too remote to allow such), it is part and parcel of Christian conversion – that one must move to a completely different paradigm of operation. The verb/noun distinction is important when addressing Islam, as this personally engaged and more tender belief is in contrast to the entrenched and more solidified “beliefs” (i.e., doctrines) which develop later, and which in the case of Islam in particular may also become violent. Witherup notes this active sense is especially prevalent in John’s writings (Witherup, Ronald D. *Conversion in the New Testament*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994. 75-77).

¹⁶⁹ In Christianity, this transfer of allegiance would be “conversion” – the culmination and solidification of belief – which as an outgrowth of the nature of “believe” is briefly touched on here (also in footnotes 8 & 9). Coming through the necessity of repentance (μετάνοια), which by definition is a “complete change of face [i.e. direction]” (Nock, *Conversion The Old and the New*, 191), conversion (ἐπιστροφή) is by definition of both Greek words a “turning around—that is, reversing direction and going the opposite way” Richard V. Peace, “Conflicting Understandings of Christian Conversion: A Missiological Challenge.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 28, no. No. 1 (January 2004): 8. “Conversion requires an existential decision or judgment either for or against Jesus (cf. John 3:19; 5:22; 12:31; 16:8)” Witherup, *Conversion in the NT*, 85-86. It disallows inclusion (with other things), but by nature is exclusive, and so is *not* a matter of blending or accommodating

consequentially or even heavily involved in triggering or supporting “belief,” belief itself is something more than an intellectual emanation: it is a volitional movement of the will and spirit which one must make towards something “beyond,” one which is executed by the “governor” within us (the will), and to which the intellect, emotions, and body must respond when bidden – it demands all our being. Concerning deity, this belief is beyond what any cultural, ethnic, economic, ecclesiastical, or psychological protocol might impart (though such may be catalysts or provide supporting understanding). In short, these attributes begin to define a *dynamic* and *personally owned* inner movement of belief, trust, and faith.¹⁷⁰

In summary, several observations might be made:

- Though the consequent actions or results might often be physically visible or measurable, the qualities and movement of belief, trust, and faith are not.
- There is a placement of one’s self in the care of a greater “other.”
- The one believed is greater than the one believing (by virtue of providing what the one believing does not have).
- The activation of trust is an existential necessity (so far as the scope of the triggering concern may reach).
- As genuine belief continues, the one believing becomes like the one believed (with eventual material changes in the way one lives).

Moving from Merriam-Webster’s “secular” definitions, we turn to the New Testament, and specifically to belief in the Almighty.¹⁷¹ The classic NT definition is that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear” (Heb. 11:1-3). Through the rest of chapter 11, the examples of living faith and belief consistently flesh out the observations above about what constitutes belief: Abel sought for God’s approval, and offered his “more acceptable sacrifice”; Noah saw impending calamity, and built the ark; Abraham “looked forward to the city which has foundations” and left Ur, then Haran and his extended family; and so on.

the old and the new to each other (cf. “wineskins,” Mk. 2:21-22). A closely related and astute observation for the IM/orthodoxy discussion is that “whatever else one can say about the nature of conversion, it is clear that God created human beings in such a fashion that they are able to experience conversion [. . . as here defined,] that the essence of conversion is not found in the experience itself *but in the content of that experience*.... The question then must be: In conversion, *from what [and] to whom has a person turned?*” Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 23 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁰ “Judaism and Christianity demanded renunciation and a new start. They demanded not merely acceptance of a rite, but the adhesion of the will to . . . [a] faith, a new life in a new people” Nock, *Conversion The Old and the New*, 14. Again, Allah’s remoteness in Islam *de facto* denies this possibility (within Islam).

¹⁷¹ The OT would also have much to say – in it, “faith is described rather than defined...[and] two models are clear, Abraham and David . . . [who] are paradigmatic for an understanding of faith... [in] their *unswerving loyalty* to Yahweh *even in the face of what appear to be insurmountable obstacles*” Joseph P. Healey, “Faith: Old Testament,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 745 (emphasis added).

The writer also states it in the negative: “If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return” v. 15 – if one wants to turn back to where they came from, they may, but such is not a walk of faith. Faith is not static, but is focused on a person, a reality and a relationship beyond temporal realities – Godly faith does not exist without a living being at the other end – one who triggers both faith and movement (life direction) in the believer. The bullet points above play out in each scenario, and are expressly stated in the chapter:

- Belief is not visible: “faith is...the conviction of things not seen” v. 1.
- Placement of one’s self in another’s care: each cited example, by definition.
- The trusted is greater than the “trust-er”: “God . . . rewards those who seek him” v. 6.
- Active trust is an existential necessity: “they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God . . . has prepared for them a city” v. 16.
- The one believing becomes like the one believed: though not explicitly stated, this would need to be true.

The writer of Hebrews continues: “These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (v. 13). Each saw the meaning of life in the non-tangible realities of their respective life situations and potential, embraced these, and moved on toward something beyond themselves. They were not looking for how things would work out in this life, but rather, in the next. As with the examples in Hebrews, if in fact belief has brought a significant change which the individual has personally owned, it seems they would verbally “own” what the belief is about, to the exclusion of what they previously believed and have been converted from, and with a readiness, especially when confronted, to vouch for it.

Active examples from the New Testament confirming the points above would be myriad, of which a sampling of both precept and example, with slight elaboration, would include:¹⁷²

But to all who received him, who *believed* in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1:12–13).

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord *and believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and *he confesses with his lips* and so is saved (Rom. 10:9–10, also v. 17).

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born

¹⁷² Contrary to convention, note that indented portions may conclude with brief comment specific to that quote. If so, the quoted material is marked with quotation marks, as well as the footnote number.

of the Spirit is spirit (Jn. 3:3–6).

“For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my slave, “Do this,” and he does it.’ When Jesus heard this he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Lk. 7:8–9). The centurion “saw” the unseen – what could happen – and moved with it in temporal reality.

[The man crippled from birth] listened to Paul speaking, “and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and walked (Acts 14:9–10).

“And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen’s faith at his death confirmed that he looked for something beyond himself, beyond this life.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world...and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:3–4). Genuine faith embraces God’s “unseen” promises to escape from temporal corruption to eternal glory. These verses also provide specific direction on *how* to live an overcoming life “24/7” – a relevant insight for the IM/orthodoxy discussion.

“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”” (Matt. 22:37). If, at the core, we love Yahweh with *all* we are, is there anything left with which to love Allah?

Recognized theological sources confirm these assertions (note the concurrence among them):

Belief, believe (πιστεύω): to believe, also to be persuaded of, and hence, to place confidence in, to trust, [which] signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence [i.e., transitory consent or acceptance].¹⁷³

πιστεύω...[is] used in the NT of the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of [the] soul.¹⁷⁴

“The Greek words which come from the root *pist-* [πιστ-] have a broad range of meanings, which correspond to belief, confidence, trust, faith/faithfulness.

¹⁷³ W.E. Vine and F.F. Bruce, “Belief, Believe, Believers” in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981), 116.

¹⁷⁴ James Strong, “#4100 πιστεύω,” *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

.... In the NT, in otherwise theologically quite different writings, pist- [πιστ-] predominates as a self-definition of what the essence of the Christian proclamation is.”¹⁷⁵ In the Greek, belief, trust and faith all derive from the same root (πίστις/ πιστεύω). Despite multi-faceted applications, the NT writers unanimously agreed on its meaning.

“[Faith] is the noun corresponding to the verb ‘believe.... [The] NT equivalent, Gk. *pístis*, is very common in the NT, and bears the sense...of the reliance or trust that is the basis of man’s faithfulness.... When this is the sense, the verbal form (“believe”) is often accompanied by a preposition which brings out the meaning. Gk. *en* and *epí* with the dative express reliance on the thing or person in whom confidence is put, while the distinctively NT use of *eis* or *epí* with the accusative expresses the movement of confident committal to the object of faith.”¹⁷⁶ Note “movement”: genuine biblical faith is both active and directional.

Faith is the attitude whereby a man abandons all reliance in his own efforts to obtain salvation, be they deeds of piety, of ethical goodness or anything else. It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ, of reliance on him alone for all that salvation means.¹⁷⁷

[Faith] is the human response to Divine truth...¹⁷⁸

Though the terms in question – believe, trust, faith – have significant other definitions, the above are taken as core foundations. These defining statements repeatedly point to the bulleted points above; especially that to believe is to reach beyond the temporal world.

When extending belief or trust to the “beyond,” one issue remains: whether trust can be extended more than one direction. While in temporal things a dually directed trust might be possible, in working with questions concerning an Absolute Being (as here), it is not. Even if a person does not choose the “right” one, two cannot exist: categorically and by definition there can only be one Absolute Being, and by definition of “mono” theism as well.¹⁷⁹ Further, multiple or competing trusts are

¹⁷⁵ Dieter Lührmann, “Faith: New Testament” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Frank Witt Hughes (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 750, 752.

¹⁷⁶ G. W. Bromiley, “Faith,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 270.

¹⁷⁷ L. L. Morris, “Faith,” in the *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 358.

¹⁷⁸ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., “faith” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 598.

¹⁷⁹ This is critical when interfacing Islam: if the deities of Islam and Christianity are one and the same, trusting both would be possible, but if Allah and Yahweh are attested by both as Supreme but are *not* the same (as believed here), it is not possible to “straddle” the two as one, regardless of the attempts to do so. That Christianity is a covenantal relationship further disallows “mixing,” and Islam acknowledges this separation of deities as well (albeit, under the charge of “corruption”). In offering reasons for early Islam’s martyring of Christians (which may also have been politically motivated), Sahner notably states: “[one] was to forge boundaries between groups at a time of

specifically contraindicated for both Christian and Muslim: in the case of Christianity, Jesus is the only one who saves from self and sin, and as He defined himself, He is exclusive. Anything which weakens one's connection to, or the identity of Christ, immediately dissolves Christianity – in those cases it no longer exists.¹⁸⁰ “[In Late Antiquity] it was essential for those who converted to signify [their change of belief] to the relevant communities – the one they joined *and the one they had left*.... Whatever the circumstances, conversion was only...validated when it was socialized”¹⁸¹ (emphasis added) – it *only* functioned via extraction, with a recognition that the two allegiances were separate and incompatible. Scripture's testimony:¹⁸²

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to [e.g., trust, believe] them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.” (Ex. 20:3–5; also Lev. 20:26; Deut. 6:4-5). We are not to have *even an image* of another supposed deity, and while “before me” means in precedence to or superiority over Yahweh, it also means being in front of or anywhere that He might see it (i.e., everywhere). Anything that may even be an object of worship is an abhorrent affront and reprehensible to Him.

unprecedented social and religious mixing,...to ensure that conversion and assimilation went *exclusively* in the direction of Islam” Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5 (emphasis added). There *are* differences between the two religions, and between the two deities – if we don't see them, Islam does.

¹⁸⁰ “Ultimately, the Bible does not allow for retaining any identity that conflicts with one's commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus made it very clear that commitment to Himself takes precedence over all other affections and identities (see Matt. 10:32-39; Lk. 14:25-35)” Khalil Ullah (pseudonym). “The ‘Insider Movement’: A Brief Overview and Analysis” (blog) www.biblicalmissiology.org/blog/2020/08/19/the-insider-movement-a-brief-overview-and-analysis/#return-note-550-1 (Aug 19, 2020).

¹⁸¹ Arietta Papaconstantinou, Neil McLynn and Daniel L. Schwartz, eds. *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond*. (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), xxxi.

¹⁸² Though Yahweh as Absolute Being is recognized in some circles, the current-day prevalence of politically correct thought (in the West), both in society and in the church, rails against such a singular supreme authority and allows pluralism, but Scripture affirms otherwise in both precept and testimony. Other pervasive drivers militating against this, despite any surface verbiage, include “easy believism,” “belonging before believing,” nominalism, the “style” and the prevalence of “worship,” Contemporary Christian Music, as well as other trendy influences (IM seems to be akin to this orb). This also raises profound issues of boundaries, that differences and not commonalities, however small, are what define, differentiate, and separate identities. “Insider movements risk underestimating the impact of failing to differentiate enough...between Christianity and Islam.... In the effort to keep people connected to their cultural roots, there may be a real loss of the religious distinctive *that was the real reason for a coming to faith in Jesus*” Darrell L. Bock in Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill Nikides, eds. *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting An Islamized Gospel* Revised First Edition (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries Publications, 2012), vii-viii (emphasis added, and individual authors from this source, not the editors, are identified in subsequent citations). Concerning “popular theology's” use of “born again” terminology, Witherup notes the expression is only used once in the NT (Jn. 3 – Nicodemus, though other references allude to this), and that the more prevalent “born from above” more directly challenges genuine faith as a temporal affair (Witherup, *Conversion in the NT*. 80).

Poetically, David beautifully expresses the singular worship God seeks: “Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* And there is *nothing* upon earth that I desire besides thee.” (Ps. 73:25).

“You are my witnesses,” says the LORD.... “Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.” (Is. 43:10–11).

John the Baptist’s charge, to “repent [make a clear separation], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand . . . [and to] make [your] ways straight...” (Matt. 3:2-3), clearly says the old and new are not a continuum or admixture: there must be a complete sundering and redirection.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Begone, Satan! for it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him *only* shall you serve”’” (Matt. 4:10). By any interpretation, the total of Christ’s example is not one of accommodation, indecisiveness, or neutrality – it was unequivocal in its commitment and focus.

Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the [ed.: not “a”] Holy One of God.” (Jn. 6:67–69).

Do not be *mismated* with unbelievers. For what *partnership* have righteousness and iniquity? Or what *fellowship* has light with darkness? What *accord* has Christ with Belial? Or what has a *believer in common with an unbeliever*? What *agreement* has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will live in them and move among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people [ed.: “my,” meaning not shared with Allah].
Therefore come out from them,
and *be separate* from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us *cleanse* [i.e., *separate*] ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; also, 1 Cor. 8:6).

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is in vain that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously

over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us’?” (Jas. 4:4–5). James clearly states that a rejection of duality is not a secondary matter but is at the peril of God’s jealousy and wrath.

Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mk. 8:38). Christ’s words speak of an extroverted and open witness, of a readiness to speak out about one’s newfound allegiance and denying “neutral” ground (in contrast to IM’s encouragement to a publicly surreptitious or reticent witness in the face of anticipated opposition). Most recognize the denial of Christ identified here but likely miss the corollary that to not stand for Christ is to also remain with this “adulterous and sinful generation.” It is a double message, pointing to both a severance from the world *and* a total embrace of Christ. Is there an open, declaratory, and extroverted witness, or is it suppressed and halting?¹⁸³

A person may *think* they can have dual loyalties, but in reality, this is not possible. Attempted dualism appears to be a major component of IM, which falls on its own statements as well as in the face of both Islam and Christianity. Even if one can “get two birds with one stone,” it is still one stone (i.e., one heart and life to love from), and once thrown is beyond the control of the one sending it (as above). Jesus clearly states dualism’s end: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24). Finally, a person will not be able to avail themselves of both: one will become dominant and control. As hard as some may try, humans were not created with a dual capacity (this is also in recognition of the before-stated premise, that Islam and Christianity, if only because of each one’s claims to exclusive sovereignty and the inescapable conflict that makes between them, are not compatible).¹⁸⁴

Insider Movement Statements on the Nature of Belief & of the Faith Which Saves

Statements by the Insider Movement (IM) about the nature of “believing” do not appear profuse or direct, pointing, to some degree, to the need for discussion of this content as well as to IM’s tendency for vagueness about it. This dearth also appears to be from a lack of prioritization, as well as from IM’s spending much energy in defense of other, more immediate, and more measurable parts of the IM effort. What is the belief that leads to conversion? What is its nature? Though IM understandings certainly come out of a nuanced and broad continuum, the statements below from prominent IM advocates are taken as representative:

¹⁸³ This is addressing the readiness and willingness to publicly testify. When a believer is a new Christian or there are credible threats of physical harm, these factors may weigh in heavily, but the willingness to testify openly should be present.

¹⁸⁴ “Cultural Islam (as well as the religion proper) envelopes everything that [a] person is! Islam is not a religion that can be bifurcated” Baugh, Jim. “What’s Inside the Insider Movement, Part 2,” *Journal of Biblical Missiology* (blog). <https://biblicalmissiology.org/blog/2019/04/15/whats-inside-the-insider-movement-pt-2-of-4/> (April 15, 2019). “Not forsaking Islam brings confusion.... Do we truly believe that Jesus is the only way, truth and life or is there still some room and fondness in our hearts for Mohammed too?” Hilki Berisha, *Chrislam*, 313.

“An ‘insider movement’ is any movement to faith in Christ where (a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where (b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible...[Also, that] ‘insider movements’ are distinct from the C-scale . . . all that matters is that no *new* communities...are formed to extract believers from their pre-existing families and networks.... ‘Movement’ [is defined as] any situation where the Kingdom of God is growing rapidly without dependence on direct outside involvement.”¹⁸⁵

Rebecca Lewis. Christian clusters are *defined by pre-existing socio-cultural groups*, irrespective of whether they are Christ- or Scripture-compatible (and didn’t Christ come to redeem these very socio-cultural mechanisms, including ours?). This also *asserts* that “believing” happens (as well as “living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ” and “the authority of the Bible”), but is moot as to its nature or to any definition to know that it is so – such questions are unaddressed.

The way the terms “Christian” and “Christianity” are generally used in [our book] differs from the narrower meaning that evangelicals typically give them (i.e., denoting true saving faith in Jesus; being “born again”). Rather,...the terms “Christian” or “Christianity” [are used] to designate socioreligious categories, as do many cultures of the world.¹⁸⁶ **Harley Talman, John Travis.**

Though the authors are clear that these are the definitions for this particular book, questions abound, starting with insufficient reason for such a cataclysmic rejection of normative definitions (why not use other conventionally understood terms which *do* express their concerns?). It is a shift onto an entirely different set of premises, to ones which may not be recognized by the unsuspecting.

What makes a particular Muslim ‘C5’ is that he has received Isa (Jesus) as Lord and Savior, meets regularly with other such believers, and yet is still seen as ‘Muslim’ through his or her own eyes, *as well as the eyes of fellow Muslims*. A C5 believer will certainly have different beliefs from other Muslims (e.g., Isa did die on the cross, Muhammad is not a prophet in the biblical sense, salvation is in Isa al-Masih and not in works). However, C5 believers remain in the Muslim community (i.e., they do not officially become members of a traditional church), and they still participate in Muslim cultural *and*

¹⁸⁵ Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 75-76. The question has been raised whether IM has scriptural precedent (examples) for such a paradigm. This writer is unaware of their providing any, nor of Scripture’s providing such.

¹⁸⁶ Harley Talman, and John Jay Travis, eds. *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, Digital, 2015), Chapter 1 “Coming to Terms with Terms.” This is a relatively late work in the IM chronology that its statements are not unaware of counter-concerns or lacking in time to reflect, so must be taken seriously.

religious practices—except for those contrary to Scripture”¹⁸⁷ (emphases added). **John Travis**.

Despite the undeveloped caveat (“except for those contrary to Scripture”), this focuses on the outward, temporal manifestations only (“religious *practices*”), and not on the heart (the allegiances to which those practices are dedicated).¹⁸⁸

I am not obligated [as a convert from Islam] to practice all of the customs of Islam, nor believe all of its religious doctrines. But the day I reject Islam outright, I [also] disavow myself of my culture, my family, my community and my people. There are many ways to bring the Gospel into this confessional home.”¹⁸⁹ **Mazhar Mallouhi**.

This not only confirms sociological determinants over spiritual ones, but goes beyond: he is plainly saying Islam is the determinant, if only reflexively, of what should be. Mallouhi also fails to recognize that (1) culture can be distinguished from religion, and religion from culture, and (2) that Christianity, not Islam *is* the Middle Eastern religion (Christianity was there long before any vestige of Islam, and is still there, operating in its own unique culture and communities).

Dudley Woodberry “suggests they take the five pillars of Islam and ‘contextualize’ them according to biblical truth. He believes that ‘Jesus followers’ in Islam could still ‘confess the Shahada, perform ritual prayers in the mosque, give, fast, and even apply a hajj principle if these pillars were re-applied to align with the teachings of Jesus.”¹⁹⁰

“Confess” the shahada? Even if its first half is accepted, affirming Muhammad is categorically outside orthodox Christianity. Both by virtue of its content as well as its being a vow, the shahada is exclusive by definition, that any “contextualization” or synthesis fails to recognize its true nature. Also, where is “if these pillars were re-applied to align with the teachings of Jesus” defined, as to how that might work out?

“[Christians and Muslims] are monotheists. They believe in one God, one God who is a sovereign Lord and to whom they are to be obedient.... I think that Muslims and Christians who embrace the normative traditions of their faith

¹⁸⁷ As quoted in Joshua Massey, “Editorial: Muslim Contextualization I,” *The International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Volume 17, Number 1 (March 2000).

¹⁸⁸ Jesus is clear: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matt. 23:25–26, and note the context of the whole chapter). There is also question of whether the ongoing Islamic practices are free of dangerous spiritual, if not demonic influences (if there is an “angel of light” operative here, per 2 Cor. 11:14, such would be expected).

¹⁸⁹ As quoted in Jeff Morton, “The Inside Story: Missiology,” *Chrislam*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ Baugh, “What’s Inside, Pt. 2,” referring to Dudley Woodberry, “Contextualization Among Muslims Reusing Common Pillars,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Vol. 13:4, (Oct.-Dec. 1996), 171-186. The date of the Woodberry comments is early. It is not known if this was his long-term perspective, but it generally encapsulates an ongoing IM perspective.

refer to the same object, to the same Being, when they pray, when they worship, when they talk about God. *The referent is the same*¹⁹¹ (emphasis added) **Miroslav Volf**. “I doubt that any of these things [salat, praying toward Mecca, recognition of Muhammad, etc.] would bother God.”¹⁹² **Charles Kraft**; and “for many Muslims, being a Muslim is an inseparable part of their self-identity...*regardless of what they actually believe about God*”¹⁹³ (emphasis added). **Rick Brown**.

Granted, these quotes by recognized IM leaders are extreme, but they are instances of the latitude IM at times takes to reach its goals, an issue in itself (Matt. 7:13-14, which should be noted as being a preface to Christ’s instructions about identifying false prophets).

IM’s own statements of reservation or qualification must also be acknowledged:

“The greatest misuse of the C-Spectrum is the way some have added to or redefined the meaning of C5 to include Islamic practices and beliefs that they assume Jesus-following Muslims must be retaining. This has created a straw man that critics can then attack. The following are examples I have heard of altered descriptions or additions to C5 that clearly depart from my original definition: viewing Muhammad as on par with Jesus, viewing the Qur’an as having higher authority than the Bible, using only the Muslim holy book for discipleship, and forcing frequent mosque attendance. No C5 group I am acquainted with holds to any of the above beliefs or practices.” “As C5 groups engage the Bible under the guidance of the Spirit of God, they come to their own convictions about Muslim beliefs and practices,...and those not in conflict with the Bible are generally continued.”¹⁹⁴ **John Travis**.

“[The issue] is not contextualization. The core issue is this: Is the very nature and integrity of the gospel being revealed and upheld, or is ‘a different gospel’

¹⁹¹ Volf, in Mark Galli, “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?” *Christianity Today* 55, no. 4. (April 15, 2011), from Baugh, “What’s Inside, Pt. 2.” Volf’s stature as a missiologist is of note; also, it seems he is outside the IM assemblage, and so is free of vested bias or interest.

¹⁹² Jeff Morton, “The Inside Story: Missiology,” *Chriislam*, 31.

¹⁹³ Jeff Morton, “The Inside Story: Missiology,” *Chriislam*, 32.

¹⁹⁴ John Jay Travis, “The C1-C6 Spectrum after Fifteen Years: Misunderstandings, Limitations, and Recommendations,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* Vol. 51, no. No. 4 (October 2015): 358–65. Though serious questions remain, this article attempts to take initial but real steps to diffuse IM/non-IM issues. Coming “after Fifteen Years,” this would be another work coming after sufficient time to reflect, to respond to critiques or to redirect, that its statements must be taken seriously. Massey, expanding on Travis, states “How [MBBs] view Islam is not prescribed by us, but left to [MBB believers] as they are guided by the Word and the indwelling Spirit” (Massey, Joshua. “God’s Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ.” *IJFM* 17.1, as quoted in Roger Dixon, “Moving On from the C1-C6 Spectrum,” *Chriislam*, 92). Dixon responds: “practitioners who are ...experts in religion lead adherents. To insinuate that new believers are making their own theological conclusions without outside help reveals ... lack of experience in evangelism and pastoral ministry” (“Moving On from the C1-C6 Spectrum,” *Chriislam*, 96). God is very able to guide His children, including the young in faith and the feeble or unprotected. However, to presume that He does so is a dismissal of our responsibility to them, and gross negligence and abdication on our part, and especially in an environment which both orthodox and IM recognize as being so hostile.

being preached and believed, as Paul warns [in Gal. 1:6-8]?¹⁹⁵ **Rebecca Lewis.**

Travis and Lewis might well be pressed for further clarification, but they acknowledge serious concerns, which are taken as sincere (and with Travis expressing some outright pain). Phil Parshall would also be recognized as having made some qualifying, reserved statements.

Though the above IM statements may sound innocuous or benign and have “spiritual” verbiage freely imbued, the repeated emphasis is on sociological and cultural determinants: *assertions* that faith is happening are made (or implied), but the *criteria* by which faith is identified are notably absent, leaving theological definition as a secondary and somewhat unacknowledged or orphaned afterthought. With faith undefined, IM has effectively changed the terms of the discussion to something of its own making and agenda. Because of these points of departure, theological concerns, such as the nature of belief and who the object of belief is, appear peripheral and tangential – they are not defining under-girders or crucial determinants. John Travis, an IM proponent and the C-Spectrum initiator acknowledges this (whether intentionally or not): “The C-Spectrum is framed around two central issues: (1) the socioreligious identity of fellowships of Jesus-followers who were born Muslim and (2) the linguistic, cultural, and religious forms they use.”¹⁹⁶ Though he refers to religious elements, they are on par with socio-cultural elements as parallel standards, not as ones asserting obeisance. This creates a scenario where Christ is not Lord of all – a scenario utterly rejected by any expression of orthodoxy.¹⁹⁷

The posture of theological ambivalence, if not also one of a quite cavalier disposition or nominalism at times, is alarming. Though orthodox Christianity may seem too “harsh” or nonpliable, IM not only swings well in the opposite direction, but does so with apparent impunity and disregard for “center.” The issue of sociological factors taking overt precedence over the core and mass of biblical theology is truly stunning. Any Christian who has been through genuine belief to authentic conversion, as discussed here, would need to take an extended, serious pause about this. Space limitations do not allow further discussion, but regardless of the array of individual understandings of its adherents, the issues of belief and conversion for IM as a movement are not foremost or critically assessed, functionally or theologically/philosophically: IM is working from other benchmarks. For IM, engagement and the way forward may be labeled “Christian,” but however informally

¹⁹⁵ Lewis, Rebecca. “On Religious Identity The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 41. See fn 7 re: a “different gospel.”

¹⁹⁶ Travis, “The C1-C6 Spectrum after Fifteen Years,” 358–65. After also stating that “it is assumed that each of these types of Christ-centered communities follows Jesus as the risen Lord and Savior and the Bible as God’s word,” Travis notes that “any group along the C-Spectrum could, however, become sub-biblical if adherence to scripture becomes weak.”

¹⁹⁷ As discussed here, the issue is not whether IM converts are (or are not) “eternally secure.” Rather, it is the way Christ and Christianity are presented, and how these relate to the outside world (in this case, Islam).

or passively, are in effect framed in non-orthodox terms.¹⁹⁸

Observations From Those Outside the Insider Movement

Though these may not speak directly to IM's disposition on the nature of belief, they present an evaluation of how IM's stances are understood by those observing from the "outside."¹⁹⁹

A variety of definitions have been put forward [or presuppositions employed] by IM advocates. Most of these definitions appear relatively innocuous and reasonably orthodox,...[but] none of them offers a full disclosure — and anything less than full disclosure on issues central to the gospel represents deception of the highest order (Gal. 5:7-12) Due to this lack of full disclosure, IM cannot be dealt with on its own terms. If clarity is to be achieved, a definition based on the Scriptures is necessary."²⁰⁰ **Philip Mark.**

It is strong language, but that "IM cannot be dealt with on its own terms" precludes IM from being an integral outreach partner.²⁰¹ "The Word of God has dynamic and transforming power that does not depend on an existing cultural inventory of understandings, beliefs, prejudices, and commitments."²⁰² **Joshua Lingel.**

Societal and cultural drivers are to fall under the dominion of God's Word, not parallel to or superseding it (otherwise, again, Jesus is not Lord of all).

It is important for the Christian believer not to be seduced by the temptations of this world when he himself is living a lie... [With IM believers] forced . . . to conceal what they truly believe,...the society will be beckoning their converts to return to normative Islam....Christians who have taken [the IM] route have

¹⁹⁸ The tragic irony is that embedded in this is equivocation, the very fallacy which Islam quite freely uses *vis a vis* Christianity (cf. fn 1). Has IM inadvertently and imperceptibly "slid" closer to Islam than it realizes? Even though rejecting some of Islam's claims, has an assimilation of Islam's ways developed, beyond IM's realization? "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13, KJV).

¹⁹⁹ The Cape Town Covenant, the 2010 manifesto stemming from the Lausanne Movement, would represent a sufficiently broad document and a very broad caucus for working out issues such as IM presents. Due to its general nature though (necessary to garner the acceptance of such a large constituency), its only statements pointing to IM specifics are very noncommittal, and do not really engage the issues here, with its statements being: (1) its statement on IM (79-80), 2) its call to accept suffering for Christ's sake (77f), and 3) its call to "Walk In Distinctiveness, As God's New Humanity" (93-94) ("The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," *Lausanne Movement* (2010). <https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.) A group of Muslim Background participants concurred, strongly objecting to the Cape Town stance and demeanor ("A Letter to Lausanne Leadership," *Chrislam*, 311).

²⁰⁰ Mark, Philip. "Insider Movements Defined . . . Biblically," *Journal of Biblical Missiology* (blog), (October 26, 2020).

²⁰¹ In the Galatians text, oft cited in the IM discussion, Paul's express intent *is* that people "stumble" over the cross ("scandal" – σκάνδαλον, Gal. 5:11), so they realize what they haven't been seeing and need to heed.

²⁰² Joshua Lingel, "Islamizing the Bible: Insider Movements and Scripture Translations," *Chrislam*, 158.

been lured time and time again into the fallacy that they can[, at the time and place of their own choosing,] extricate themselves or co-exist with th[ese] compromises...in order to live as Muslims. In actuality, they cannot.²⁰³ **David Cook.**

If living a lie and already compromised, how will one ever overcome additional lying or compromise (not to mention being proactive in the things of the Lord)? The antidote is to return to the impenetrable truth. At the point of dishonesty, backsliding or apostasy, the discussion ceases to be conceptual: if true, any genuine, functional belief is gone, and there is a serious empirical, material concern.

A specific turning point or decision is often required and/or experienced [in religious conversion], and...is often dramatized and commemorated[/]sealed with a public demonstration...[such as] baptism and testimony,...[which] provide a means by which to consolidate a person's beliefs and involvement in a group."²⁰⁴ **Lewis Rambo.**

Baptism, as an explicit outworking of inner belief, is noted for its positive and concrete identification with Christ. This is in contrast to the more demur or co-existent stance IM seems to advocate. Also, how can one make the baptism vows, to renounce all carnal life and the world and not separate from Islam?

[Some] make sharp distinctions between Christian and Jewish conversion and the form of conversion in the ancient pagan world, suggesting that Jewish and Christian conversion is radical, complete, and decisive, while pagan religious change is merely an 'adhesion,' or an add-on, to a person's life."²⁰⁵ **Lewis Rambo.**

²⁰³ David Cook, "Can Christians Be Muslim?", *Chrislam*, 304-305. The forthrightness of Cook's statements is not taken as demonizing or belittling, but point to the seriousness and straightforwardness which seem needed here. These also lead to the question: Where are the precipitating compromises that IM advocates have personally made which open the door to this? Where has their salvation been incomplete (maybe not in an eternal security sense, but as a fullness of Christ's power in their hearts, minds and lives), that allows for this? This is not meant to be "judgmental" or critical, but this seems to be an urgent question needing to be asked with gentleness but firmness (and maybe asked of orthodoxy as well), and is an integral part of the impetus for this. Much rests on these pillars.

²⁰⁴ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 124. When, for whatever reason, some IM influenced "Muslim Idiomatic Translations" of the Bible dismiss the necessity of baptism (Adam Simnowitz, "Translation Chart for Muslim Idiom Translations of the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Missiology*, <https://biblicalmissiology.org/blog/2013/03/04/translation-chart-for-muslim-idiom-translations-of-the-bible/>, Mar. 4, 2013), it is fitting to consider these Scriptures: Jesus' own example (Matt. 3:13-17), Matt. 28:19; Mk. 11:30; Jn. 4:1 (Jesus baptized new disciples, it was not just His disciples or John who were baptizing); Acts 1:5 & 11:16 (water baptism is a step to something greater which the Lord directed, and so is mandated); Acts 2:38; 10:48; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 3:21. In changing "baptism" to "ablutions" in Muslim Idiomatic Translations, this (1) completely changes the sense of the original, and (2) it again makes Muslim protocols the reference point, not Christ and His clear directives.

²⁰⁵ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 5. Though writing well before its advent, Nock seems to aptly describe IM.

Generally, IM appears to follow the “adhesion” model, which A. D. Nock defines: “These external circumstances led *not to any definite crossing of religious frontiers*, in which an old spiritual home was left for a new *once and for all*, but to men’s having *one foot on each side of a fence which was cultural and not creedal*. They led to an acceptance of new worships [sic] *as useful supplements and not as substitutes*, and they *did not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old*. This we may call *adhesion, in contradistinction to conversion*” (emphasis added).²⁰⁶

“[Most IMers] believe remaining inside Islam...is not...temporary, but permanent.”²⁰⁷ **Jay Smith**. I.e., there is no intent to *irrevocably* move toward the orthodox Scriptures and doctrine, or to the larger body of Christ; nor (to this writer’s knowledge) is there stipulation of when or how such would happen.²⁰⁸

“[The IM] understanding of Islam allows new believers to...*explore* what it means to be a follower of Jesus”²⁰⁹ (emphasis added). **Jeff Morton**. Indeed, “explore” appears to be an apt descriptor, or “dabble”? Regardless, a superficiality or materially non-committal stance seems operative toward things which might be theologically defined; also, the downplaying of any eternal significance of such concerns (Jn. 5:29; Dan. 12:2).

“The C1-C6 Spectrum promotes...a model of faith, that includes both Islamic and Christian worldviews in the same structure, ...[where] it is possible that a person would belong to a *new faith tradition* not recognized by its larger society”²¹⁰ (emphasis original), **Roger Dixon**. This posits not one or two, but three religions: Christianity, Islam, and now a hybrid, with the hybrid being seen as spurious by the other two and thus making it a separate entity, not a blended subsidiary of either.

As an extension of the attempted dual allegiance which IM appears to advocate, some of its proponents would assert that early Christians did not need to give up legal citizenship on becoming Christians (i.e., they retained Roman, Greek, or other citizenship). However, such is a faulty analogy and mixes completely different types of identities (civil vs. spiritual allegiances). Though temporal concerns were certainly faced by early Christians, when in conflict with spiritual ones, spiritual matters *always* superseded these: they did not worship Roman or Greek gods or institutions.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New*, 6-7.

²⁰⁷ Jay Smith, “An Assessment of IM’s Principle Paradigms”, *Chrislam*, 281.

²⁰⁸ Heb. 5:11-14 “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food.”

²⁰⁹ Jeff Morton, “IM: Inappropriate Missiology?”, *Chrislam*, 136.

²¹⁰ Roger Dixon, “Moving On from the C1-C6 Spectrum”, *Chrislam*, 90.

²¹¹ The scribes and chief priests tried to sleight Jesus with this same reasoning, to which He responded “...then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And...marveling at his answer they were silent” (Lk. 20:22–26). From Fred Farrokh, “Report on Evangelical Missiological Society National Conference,” self-published (September 21, 2015): 2, as reported in Baugh, “What’s Inside, Pt. 2.”

Further Sources & Issues

Already there seems to be a serious divergence between the nature of belief as commonly and biblically understood, and IM's understanding of it. It is only right to give orthodox Christianity equal opportunity to speak, especially the Early Church Fathers and the Creeds. These are exceedingly rich and clear on what belief is, and their commentary is not only as staunchly "orthodox" and tightly defined as IM's is adaptive or permissive, but is headed in a divergent direction: where the Fathers are stringently careful to tighten the definition of faith (as in Matt. 7:13-14), IM appears to loosen, if not deconstruct it. To "believe" was not self-defined (or even regionally or "denominationally" defined), and as challenges arose, more definition was given, not less.²¹²

The earliest Creeds – the Apostle's, Nicene, and Chalcedonian Creeds – were written for the very purpose of protecting Christendom from wider, more relaxed interpretations or insurgencies, to narrow the doorway of and to truth, and to clarify the object of who is trusted for salvation. "The first object of [the] creeds was to distinguish the Church from the [rest of the] world ... [and] orthodoxy from heresy."²¹³ They were clear, firm lines of demarcation between Christendom and all else, and cannot be read without realizing the explicit attempt to more clearly authenticate and validate genuine, primal, virgin, and exclusive Christian belief. There comes a place where Christians must *increase* their affirmation of historic truth, not dilute it ... unless they can clearly expand those documents with reasoning and evidence which not only encompass and undergird, but surpass the clarity of the earlier declarations (a tall challenge indeed.)²¹⁴

Beyond the creeds, the corpus of the Early Church Fathers' writings speaks of an unmitigated orthodoxy, not innovation – they looked back to what had been for additional buttressing, not to the future (or themselves) to see how things might be amended or "developed." Their statements focus almost completely on (1) a singular, exclusionary focus on Christ, God (Yahweh), and the one body of Christ, and (2) that the Scripture and Apostolic teaching are very clear and without variance. Here are a few samples speaking of the purity, the forthright declaration, and the singular focus of a heavenly, Christ-honoring faith:

²¹² The escalating definition confirms a solid and commonly recognized, pre-existing and core entity capable of being defined, and that could be yet more clearly articulated. It may not have been physically quantifiable, but it was not a creation of the Councils or of the Church Fathers.

²¹³ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The History of Creeds*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1878), 8.

²¹⁴ ... and to do so in the IM's short ca. 50 years? "It is naïve for missiologists ... to believe they have greater insight than those ... minds of the past that mastered indigenous theology and culture" (Dixon, Roger. "Moving On from the C1-C6 Spectrum," *Chislam*, 92), and who, it might be added, were much closer to the impulses of the original faith. Without more qualification than IM seems to give, its statements are wanting for more support.

“We cannot secure our salvation unless ... we make our own the profession of the faith that we carry in our heart.”²¹⁵ **Augustine of Hippo**. I.e. faith will not be genuine until individually owned *and* openly expressed (“profession”).

“If they believe not in the blood of Christ, judgment awaiteth them also.”²¹⁶ **Ignatius**. Faith is *only* in the blood of Christ. Where does Islam facilitate this saving agent? It does not – it is militantly against it – and out of allegiance to Christ, Christians are universally compelled to confront such.

“...faith is capable of making us to be adopted through the Spirit.”²¹⁷ **John of Damascus**. “Adoption” completely replaces one father with another (in this case, deities) – it is not a facilitation of two co-existent fathers (see also Rom. 8:23; Gal. 4:1-6).

“...that ye all *by name* come together in common in *one* faith, and in *one* Jesus Christ”²¹⁸ (emphasis added). **Ignatius**. In addition to the one Lord Jesus, apparently Ignatius was encouraging Christians to be known as Christians, plainly and openly, and as one body.

The Fathers also state the categorical integrity and sufficiency of Scripture and the Apostle’s teaching, with both as the *sole* authority for the Christian life, witness, and pure faith (in contrast to later extrapolations or permutations). These are exceedingly strong, potent statements where neither the intent nor the meaning can be mistaken:

Let no one, however, entertain the suspicion that... His commandments are not to be literally obeyed. Origen.²¹⁹

“Since many, however, of those who profess to believe in Christ differ from each other, not only in small and trifling matters, but also on subjects of the highest importance, as, e.g., regarding God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit; and not only regarding these, . . . Now it ought to be known that

²¹⁵ Augustine, in Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Credo Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003. 36.

²¹⁶ “Ignatius to the Philadelphians,” in Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 6.1 (157).

²¹⁷ Saint John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, Book IV, Chapter 11, 346.

²¹⁸ “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” in William, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. *The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers, St. Clement, St. Polycarp, St. Ignatius, St. Barnabas; the Shepherd of Hermas and the Martyrdoms of St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, Written by Those Who Were Present at Their Sufferings. Being, Together with the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, a Complete Collection of the Most Primitive Antiquity for about One Hundred and Fifty Years after Christ*. Hartford: Parsons and Hills, 1834, 4:16 (123).

²¹⁹ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 4.1.19 (368–372). Origen, concurring with other Early Fathers, is both clear and direct about the integrity of both the Scriptures and the apostle’s teaching, that all is already fully apparent and accessible to all, and that there is no room for argumentation or variability (cf. Rom. 1:16-32). See also: Origen, “*De Principiis*,” 4.1.9: 358, 360-361 and 4.1.12: 360–361. The same is also true of the use of reason (as in the “Celsus” quote below). 1 Tim. 6:3-5 further confirms this.

the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to everyone, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge.... The particular points clearly delivered in the teaching of the apostles are as follow[s]...²²⁰ **Origen.**

In other words, the apostles teaching alone was seen as having “utmost clearness,” it was “particular,” and was for “everyone” (including the “somewhat dull”). It did not need further elucidation or adaptation, and it assumed any intention of walking in the way of the apostles would fully and immediately recognize its truth. The issue was who would obey, not the clarity of the teaching (unlike today, where these are too often reversed).

And a few citations from more recent leaders:

The Reformation’s battle cry of “justification by faith alone (*sola fide*)” only points to belief and trust being singular in composition. With the Reformer’s thinking crystallized as *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Scriptura*, the Christian life and way is by faith *alone*, through grace *alone*, and on the authority of Scripture *alone*.²²¹

“Alone” fully excludes Islam – Islam has nothing to offer in these matters.

Samuel Zwemer rightly notes the examples of Matthew, Peter, and Paul who, at the *outset* of their walks with the Lord forsook all or made open, declarative confessions – actions which were not tepid or halting. Zwemer also notes that “there are Nicodemus disciples who come to see Jesus by night because they are afraid of men.... Faith in the heart, but lips that are silent. Love for the truth but it always stops short of confession.... Light but no fire.”²²² While there may be true believers within IM, the stances IM promulgates seem to quite strongly discourage and shun (even deny?) such outright, declarative statements of faith.

There is a resoundingly clear testimony by the historically established, orthodox Christian leaders of “one God, one Savior, one orthodox faith.” Their statements are far from neutral, with belief being vigorous, single-hearted, and eternally focused; it only recognizes Christ and the ultimate worth and significance of His life. In contrast with IM’s rather nascent neutrality, there is nothing neutral, conciliatory, accommodating, passive, appeasing, obliging, co-existing, or adaptive in the Fathers. They are urgent, singular, separative, and exclusive, exercising the utmost critical and careful evaluation and judgment, recognizing the cross as not only the example Christ set but as the example we are to emulate and follow (thereby negating any avoidance of temporal difficulties - be they cultural, social, religious, or other - which appears in part to be IM’s reason for “ameliorating” a more harsh, traditional gospel). With IM, conversion does not appear so clear-cut in its

²²⁰ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” vol. 4, 239.

²²¹ Lemke, Steve. “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, AND Sola Scriptura*.” Hindson and Mitchell, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Church History*. 310.

²²² Samuel Zwemer, “A Word to Secret Believers,” *Chriislam*, 307.

proponents or in its followers. Let conversion be clear and complete and to Christ alone.

Summary & Concluding Statements

There is much more to be said (even about the content already provided) and there are further questions to be pursued: the role of grace, what constitutes genuine conversion, the role of baptism (as an outward confirmation of inner belief), the role of the sending church and its provision of accountability, and the expected IM responses to what is here. There is also the issue of suffering, which IM seems to sideline, but if willing to walk through would purge these issues of their dross, exposing the true matters of life, death, the heart's affections, and identity.

This article is not to particularly question whether IM converts are truly saved or not (that is left to work out in direct encounters), and the same questions might well be asked of orthodox believers. However, IM's weak commentary betrays a deeper question of what is really understood by "believe." In some IM circles this question may be receiving attention, but IM's known and self-attested foundations suggest this is insufficiently attended to. Irrespective of whether one is IM or orthodox, there are questions which stand: has there been a true re-birth? Is there a "new man"? Is the "fruit of the spirit" apparent? Is there a repulsion – an abhorrence – of one's sin and their past? Is there a hunger for God's Word? Is there endearment to and vocal embrace of the Lord Jesus? Where have IM believers taken open and exclusive, contested stands for Christ?²²³ When an IM agent completely removes themselves from a situation, does that arena become increasingly vigorous and Christ-driven (not just Christ "centered"), or does it lose its distinctiveness and revert back into Islam (i.e., has there, in fact, been a permanent previous change of life and heart)? Is there a mundaneness, a "business as normal" disposition, and an unchanged life (indicating "adhesion" and a non-dynamic "belief")?

Christians, in great zeal and haste, eagerly go to the ends of the world to fulfill the "Great Commission" (Matt. 28:18-20), but a further response to IM (as well as orthodoxy) would be to consider the Lord's subsequent and rarely invoked command, where he "charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, ... [and that] you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:4-5). Is that manifestation of power present, that a moving of God is readily apparent (and not just a popular movement)? Is ministry only with the baptism of John (v. 5, as good as that is)? Observing these verses with as much zeal and "haste" as the Great Commission would provide the restraints to enable a more complete review of one's giftings and tactics and might do much to resolve the issues above (regardless of whether arising from IM or from orthodoxy).

IM's dispositions suggest some of its advocates may be trying to separate themselves from unfortunate earlier experiences in their traditional, "orthodox" churches of origin. Has there been a reaction to or failure to understand the validity

²²³ See Jn. 3:1-15; Eph. 2:15; Gal. 5:22-24; James 3:13-18; Matt. 5:3-16; Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; Matt. 5:6; Heb. 9:28; Mk. 8:38; Heb. 10:32-35; 1 Pet. 4:12-16.

and legitimate disciplines of the church, which they are now trying to “escape”? Further, IM’s failure to implement “extraction” from Islamic society may reflect failure to become Christians themselves, to separate (“extract”) from their own cultures of origin and the evils of the “Christian West.” In sum total, it is understood that there is a clear, even stark, distance between IM and orthodoxy – not only in the particulars of content but even more so in the spirit, nature, and direction of their statements.

There is an equally strong call to orthodox Christians as well, for self-examination: how is it that those so close to us in the household of faith can veer so questionably, as it seems IM has done? Is the character of our faith like that of the Early Church Fathers? Is it pure? Is it holy (...*how* holy?)? Is it above reproach, where friend and foe alike recognize the integrity of our walk and identity? These are urgent, non-negotiable responsibilities resting at orthodoxy’s door as well.²²⁴

Questions remain for IM, of which some of the greatest are: “Where does IM urge people to take a stand, to make an open declaration of one’s commitment to Christ?”, and “Where is identification with Christ as the Living Word (Jn. 1:1-5), and with His cross and resurrection paramount and to the exclusion of all competing positions?” Cast differently, as an inward-looking question, “Does the resurrection power within one’s own conversion and salvation surpass one’s cultural or other societal identities?” If not, it is not resurrection power, but if so, it should prevail over the very issues IM is trying to assuage – it will render them moot. What have we been saved (or converted) from? What have we been saved to? How far is the distance between those two points? Is the separation from the old complete, or is there a lingering, even a turning back (see: Heb. 11:15)? Although our life stories may not be as dramatic as those of the Biblical giants, we can still bear witness to the power of the supreme and almighty God. It’s important for all Christians, including orthodox ones, to have a clearer, more vigorous, and urgent encounter with the Lord. We shouldn’t be expected to “tone down” our faith for Islam, but rather focus on our personal relationship with God.²²⁵ Jesus said, “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst;...[it] will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:14). Can old or man-made “wineskins” hold this new “water” (Mk. 2:21-22)? Is conversion something that touches and receives from the eternal, from the Almighty in Heaven, the true Maker and Giver of Life? If so, believing in Him should bring the signs of His life, signs which surpass and exceed any temporal measure (or religion).

Someone finding the “pearl of great price” will recognize its worth and sell all for the sake of that one pearl, and interest in other causes will fade. Having found the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:13-14), or the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:35-51), or “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6) – why, having found these, would one turn back to something so inferior? Why would one divide their allegiances and affections? Why would one not sell all? The portrait of the believer in Scripture is of eternal realities predicating the temporal, not vice versa.

²²⁴ See Gal. 6:1-5.

²²⁵ Any such “toning down” is a form of dhimmitude and should be seen as such. It is Islam’s agenda, not Christ’s.

As above, “The sheep hear [Christ’s] voice, and *he calls his own sheep by name* and leads them out. The sheep follow him, for *they know his voice*. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for *they do not know the voice of strangers*” (Jn. 10:3-5). Someone who has encountered the Lord will follow Him, step by step, and will recognize His likeness in others who follow Him: they will be drawn to Jesus, to each other, to Jesus *in* each other, and they will increasingly be formed into His likeness. There will be a vibrance which exceeds any “religion,” theology, or institution: they will recognize Him for who He is, that He exceeds all else, and that He is the Rock of their individual and corporate salvation:

Job: “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.” Job 42:5.

Paul: ...for I know whom I have believed.” 2 Tim. 1:12.

Stephen: “full of the Holy Spirit, [he] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’” Acts 7:55–56.

The two on the road to Emmaus “said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’” Lk. 24:32.

Many knew God - Enoch (Gen 5:22-24), Noah (Gen. 6:9), Moses (Ex. 3), Solomon (2 Chron. 6:14), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-8) - and proved Him true. All knew “whom they believed”; there was no consideration of competing entities. They “knew that they knew” and had seen the Almighty! How can one encounter the living, resurrected Jesus and not be radically changed from who they were into a new man?! Those who had split allegiances, though, paid dearly for it, and their names have gone down in ignominy if not outright disaster: Balaam (Num. 22-24), Samson (Judges 13-16), the Rich Young Ruler (Lk. 18:18-27), Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), to again name a few.

The only power which will finally avail in the discussion here is not that of a theology or a dialogue but of those who, in spirit and in truth, are following the Good Shepherd. His words endure: “No servant can serve two masters;Come, follow me” (Lk. 16:13; 18:22).

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About the Author

Solomon White (pseudonym) has interfaced with Somalis and the Somali environment and has been working more recently with Islamics from a more academic perspective. With increasing travel and living experience in the eastern Africa region and with various people groups there, he looks forward to increasing interaction with those in an Islamic context. In particular, Solomon especially looks to undergird Christians coming out of Islam, the people who are supporting them, and those looking to answer the challenge of Islam. Solomon can be reached at s.white.amen@gmail.com.

David W. Shenk: An Ambassador of Christ's Peace

Micah Brickner, Joe Hollinger, Julia, Tsai, and Jennifer Weaver



David W. Shenk, 85, of Lititz, PA., went to be with the Lord on January 31, 2023. David was an ambassador of Christ's peace who devoted his life to serving God through missions and the church.

In his memoir, "A Gentle Boldness," David concluded by reflecting on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:20. David wrote that he and his wife Grace "were seeking to celebrate the peace of Jesus ... Jesus commissions us to be his ambassadors of peace." Indeed, that is what David has been: an ambassador of Christ's peace!

"David's legacy will continue to have a profound impact on me and the work of EMM for years to come. His commitment to Christ — and his gentle and bold approach to relationships — modeled a spirit-empowered life that effectively ministered across numerous cultural and religious landscapes," said Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) President Marvin Lorenzana.

"Only God knows how many people worldwide were inspired to say 'yes' to Jesus because of the faithful example and gifted teaching of David Shenk. We count it a great gift from God that he spent most of his 85 years connected to EMM, and we grieve his passing even as we gratefully celebrate his life and ministry," said EMM Mission Team Director Lorri Bentsch.

David had a life-long passion for relating lovingly and respectfully to Muslims while confessing Christ as Lord, which led to the founding of the EMM Christian-Muslim Relations Team in 2012. Current team leader Jonathan Bornman said, "David's legacy is the people he has impacted and connected with over his lifetime. His life and his written materials have blazed a trail for helping the church and all Christ followers to share a Jesus-centered faith in a multi-faith world."

David grew up in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) as a child of EMM missionaries Clyde and Alta Shenk. From 1959 to 1961, he served as a youth worker in New York City. In 1963, he returned to Africa with his wife, Grace, and their two daughters to Somalia. He taught and developed a curriculum along with UNESCO and the Somali Department of Education.

In 1973, David and his wife Grace relocated, with their two daughters and two sons, to Nairobi, Kenya, where he served as pastor of the Nairobi Mennonite Church and professor at Kenyatta University College. His vision for supporting the majority-Muslim suburb community in Eastleigh, Nairobi, led to the formation of the Eastleigh Fellowship Center, which provided library services and English lessons for Muslims. Today, Eastleigh Fellowship Center is a thriving hub of dialogue and friendship

between Muslims and Christians and offers numerous education and sports programs.

While at Eastleigh, a student asked David to recommend a Bible study about the gospel that Muslims would understand. David realized that he knew of none and resolved to write one: "The people of God," which has now been translated into 40 languages.

As a professor at Kenyatta University College, David developed a friendship with a Muslim colleague, Badru Kateregga. In 1980, the two partnered to publish a book titled "A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue," which has now been translated into at least 12 languages.

A time of transition in David's career and family brought him back to the United States where he served as director of EMM's Home Ministries, based in Salunga, PA, from 1980 to 1986 and as director of Overseas Ministries from 1987 to 1998. He went on to become dean of Lithuania Christian College (now LCC International University) from 1998 to 2002. Beginning in 2003, David served worldwide as a global consultant for EMM, focusing on Muslim ministries.

David was the author or co-author of 18 books, including "Global Gods," "Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church," "Teatime in Mogadishu," and "Christian. Muslim. Friend." His final book, a memoir, is titled "A Gentle Boldness: Sharing the Peace of Jesus in a Multi-faith World."

Photos

1. David W. Shenk, 85, of Lititz, Pa., went to be with the Lord on January 31, 2023.



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/4jRTSjkG9m5GJHq98>

EMM archives

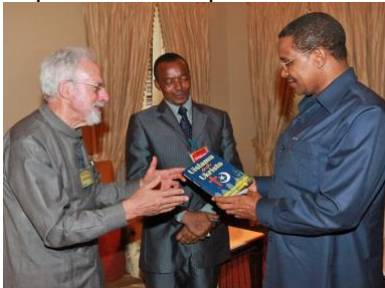
2. Paulus Hartono (left), along with David W. Shenk(right), presenting "A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue" to an Indonesian militia officer (center).



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/1aysCqzdkmhzoNeU8>

David W. and K. Grace Shenk family collection

3. Bishop Amos Muhagachi (center) and David W. Shenk (left), presenting “A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue” in Swahili to Jikaya Kikwete (right), then President of Tanzania, who requested 200 copies.



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/8RucZFeE4YR45xmK8>

EMM archives

4. Professor Badru Kateregga (left) and David W. Shenk (center) reminiscing on their jointly written book: “A Muslim and a Christian in dialogue,” at Kampala University in Kampala, Uganda.



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/LdJJnuJY6svaav3M8>

David W. and K. Grace Shenk family collection

5. The Shenk family being commissioned by EMM to go to Somalia in 1972 – David & Grace, Karen, Doris, Jonathan and Timothy



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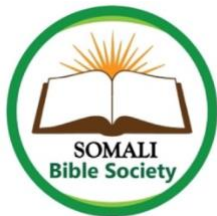
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