

Imagining Union with Christ

Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God, by Rankin Wilbourne. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2016. Print.

Contemporary English-language scholarship on organic matters like union with Christ, divine indwelling, and deification has long trailed behind its French and German-language counterparts. This impoverishment is beginning to be rectified by an increasing number of substantial contributions. Regrettably, as is so often the case, scholarly conversations tend to remain just that—conversations among scholars. For academic advances to make a difference in the life of the church and in the lives of believers, “accessible” books need to be written. Scholars are typically either incapable of doing so or unwilling to do so (often because they consider such a task beneath them). They often need help, and Rankin Wilbourne lends his hand in *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God* (hereafter, *Union*). Wilbourne is the Lead Pastor at Pacific Crossroads Church in Los Angeles, and he is convinced that union with Christ is the great forgotten truth of the Christian faith wherein lies the solution to all of the Church’s contemporary problems. He does not have much that is new to say about our union with Christ itself (as he himself readily admits). Instead, he draws on a number of influential Reformed scholars who have recently endorsed union with Christ (for example, Todd Billings, Robert Letham, and Constantine Campbell, all of whom have recently written books on union with Christ). *Union* distills what they have to say and presents it in more approachable form to a broader Christian audience:

There has been an explosion of interest in both theological circles and academic circles. My hope as a pastor, and my goal with this book, is to return union with Christ to the central place it held for much of Christian history—not as a province of scholars, but as a living reality, central to the life of all believers. (113)

Wilbourne’s pastoral instinct is everywhere on display. He writes to those who are confronted with the “gap” between their own experience and the life of a believer as described in the New Testament (29). He recognizes that many believers know that they should change but also know that their own self-effort is of little avail. They are comforted by the fact that Christ is their righteousness

before God and that His blood cleanses them from every sin but are also convicted by the fact that they remain the same year after year. Union with Christ, Wilbourne proposes, is the secret to closing the gap, and he argues that union with Christ is not only in the Bible, but “it’s also the best lens with which to read the *whole* Bible” (81).

That Wilbourne has to defend the legitimacy of union with Christ as a biblical doctrine says much about the basic understanding of the Bible in contemporary Christianity. Commendably, he points out places in the New Testament where union with Christ is implied or explicitly mentioned. In particular, he notes the ubiquitous “in Christ” language of Paul, “abiding” in John, and a variety of other images that the New Testament uses in speaking of the believers’ relationship to Christ (members joined to the Head, branches in the vine, bride and Bridegroom, etc.) (87-91).

Union then argues that the pre-modern Christian church unanimously affirmed and developed the New Testament’s understanding of union with Christ. Not only so, union with Christ was never understood to be a marginal teaching or one with significance only to spiritual elites; rather, the Christian church has traditionally understood union with Christ to be at the very heart of Christian salvation. Despite this assertion, *Union*’s treatment of the patristic and medieval periods is rather slender. There are a few quotes from Irenaeus, Augustine, and Athanasius (98-99), and Bernard of Clairvaux is the lone voice from the medieval period (103). Wilbourne’s treatment of the Reformed tradition is stronger: Calvin, John Owen, and Henry Scougal appear throughout the book, and a wide assortment of other authors are sporadically referenced.

Wilbourne suggests that union with Christ disappeared from the Christian tradition sometime in the eighteenth century (34). It does so, he proposes, due to the rise of modernity with its denial of the supernatural (119), its emphasis on self-centeredness (120), and its obsession with the pragmatic (124). His observations speak to the lack of appeal that union with Christ has for modern society but not really the reason that it disappeared from the church. Wilbourne’s narrative could have been stronger had he pointed out that a great number of theologians themselves were all too willing to reframe the gospel in order to make it better fit the sentiments of modernity—a reframing that has had deleterious effects

on the church's understanding of the nature of salvation and a host of other things.

The second half of *Union* moves from the question of what union with Christ is to address the impact that union with Christ should have on us, focusing on the particular practices by which Christians have long endeavored to live in their union with Christ and reflecting on the myriad of ways in which union with Christ relates to the Christian life.

Defining Union with Christ

Union attempts to define union with Christ by stating that, at the most basic level, "union with Christ means that you are in Christ and Christ is in you" (43). It then attempts to explain the meaning of each of these statements. For *Union*, to be "in Christ" is for Christ to represent us, just as David and Goliath represented their respective peoples in fighting each other (44). "All of Israel...was 'in David'" (44), and, therefore, when David won the victory, all Israel won the victory. Likewise, all the believers are in Christ, and therefore, when Christ died on the cross, we all died together with Him.

*U*nion struggles when it comes to presenting the meaning of Christ being in us. In the end it seems to hold that for Christ to be in us is for us to experience the fact of our being in Him: "We are already in Christ, definitively and objectively. And now, we are to grow up into him, experientially and subjectively" (58). This happens by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "To be united to Christ is to have the Spirit of Christ within you. The Spirit is the real, living bond between Jesus and us" (51). *Union* does not say much more than this about the Spirit. It holds that the Spirit's work in a believer makes union with Christ an experiential reality, but not much is said about how this happens.

Real or Psychological Transformation

While any reference to the Spirit's work within the believer is a welcomed contribution in contemporary theology, at least two concerns are raised when *Union* explores how our union with Christ becomes an experiential reality. Although *Union* insists that our Spirit-wrought union with Christ has a real effect on us: "Christ's power and life enter into our lives to transform us, not only to deal with (atone for) our past, but also now to liberate us with a strength and power and dignity unlike any other" (51), there are, however, numerous passages throughout the book that make it difficult to escape the conclusion that *Union* reduces the transformative power of our union with Christ to only the impact that this new "mindset" has on us. "Union with Christ," he notes at one point, "is a whole new mindset" (132).

This is not just an occasional theme in *Union*. Wilbourne spends the whole of his introduction talking about the importance of imagination for living in union with Christ, and one of his many examples is drawn from the Old Testament:

When Moses tells the people to say from generation to generation, 'It is because of what the LORD did for *me* when *I* came out of Egypt' (Exod. 13:8), he is calling them to use their imaginations—to put themselves in the Exodus story and to make it their own. (18-19)

In the concluding pages of the book, he returns, again, to the theme of imagination: "It's one thing to know the truth, but it's another thing altogether for this truth to come alive, capture our imaginations, and change our lives" (282).

*I*t is not entirely clear, then, whether union with Christ for Wilbourne has a real organic effect through the operation of the divine life in us or is simply a psychological manifestation. His use of Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck to support his account indicates, at least, that the latter, rather than the former, is his primary emphasis. Dweck's work focuses on the power of adopting a "growth mindset" rather than a "fixed mindset" as the key to success in the world, and Wilbourne cites one of her books, saying, "Here is a bestseller, written by a renowned social scientist from a secular perspective, but saying something very similar to the apostle Paul in the New Testament" (306). While the New Testament speaks of the living Christ transforming the believers by His life union with them, *Union* more often speaks of "having your imagination taken captive and reshaped by a new story" (20). The gospel is certainly a beautiful story, and our transformation certainly includes the renewing of the mind, but the means for our transformation is clearly the divine life of Christ that is received at the moment of our regeneration, not just a story about Him.

Deification or Humanization

Even if Wilbourne sees union with Christ as having a real (rather than a simply psychological) effect on a believer, there remains another basic problem, at least, if he thinks he is restoring the biblical and historical teaching of union with Christ. For many of the authors quoted in *Union* (and many more in addition to them), our union with Christ results not only in the healing of our fallen human nature but in our participation in the divine nature. In fact, for many of them, participation in the divine nature is the primary purpose of the incarnation. As the church fathers loved to say: in Christ, God became what we are so that we might become what He is, or, in a stronger form, God became man so that man might become God. Wilbourne thankfully speaks of deification in his book, but it is clear

that this thought makes him uncomfortable. He qualifies it first by saying, “Without becoming gods, yet we are becoming more and more like the God-man, Jesus” (165). In the very next sentence Wilbourne even qualifies this qualification: “In Christ, you are becoming more and more like God’s vision of you, for you” (165). To “become God,” for Wilbourne, is to become like the God-man, Jesus—but only in His humanness. To be “deified,” then, seems to Wilbourne to be nothing more than a fancy way of saying that we become fully human: “Your win is to become a human being, to become more like Jesus: dependent and obedient, humble and compassionate. Above all, your win is becoming someone who loves” (168). Deification, then, does not actually mean deification at all for Wilbourne except insofar as the human being that we are becoming like just so happens to also be God.

Restoring the Ancient Teaching of the Church

This is plainly not what the church has traditionally held to be the peak of Christian salvation. We all need to be healed from the impact of sin in us, but the salvation wrought by the indwelling Christ does not end there; rather, in His salvation the indwelling Christ grants to us a participation in His own divinity and sonship. This uplifting does not make us something *other* than human—we remain human for eternity just as the incarnate Son who has been deified in His assumed humanity—but it does not leave us *merely* human. This has been the teaching of many of the great teachers of the Christian church, because it is the clear teaching of the New Testament. Peter does not tell us that we are partakers of Christ’s human nature; he tells us, explicitly, that we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Themes like sonship, transformation, and sanctification should be understood in light of this basic fact and not reduced to the more palatable language of moral betterment. The indwelling Christ does not simply make us righteous human beings; He imparts Himself into us as the very righteousness of God. It was this righteousness, not His own, that Paul longed for in his union with Christ (Phil. 3:9).

The Reformed Approach to Retrieval

To a significant degree, *Union* simply manifests a prevailing tendency in contemporary Reformed theology to attempt to retrieve material on such matters as union with Christ, deification, and sonship. While a number of scholars have willingly endorsed and recommended such notions, most are unwilling to consider them in anything other than a metaphorical or ethical sense. Deification,

Spirit-wrought incorporation into Christ, and other such themes are cursorily presented but then stripped of any ontological meaning other than becoming like Jesus insofar as He is a perfect human being.

It might be the case that this tendency affects only contemporary Reformed theology and is not present in those whom Wilbourne considers to be the old theologians of the Reformed tradition, but similar concerns are often raised concerning Calvin. As a number of scholars have pointed out, Calvin mentions, on occasion, the believer’s incorporation into Christ by the Spirit and even endorses some version of deification, but when he comes to the section entitled “The Sum of the Christian Life” in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (a place where we might most hope to find it), such language appears hardly at all. Instead, we are told that “the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory” (3.7.1). Calvin, to be sure, appeals to some form of divine aid in arriving at this “great thing,” but, in general, the Christian life is presented primarily as a replacement of our human vices with human virtues—primarily the virtue of piety, according to which we submit ourselves in gratitude to the sovereign will of God and love our neighbor in self-denying humility.

A similar understanding of the sum of the Christian life seems to be at the center of much of Reformed theology today, and the Reformed retrieval of more sublime salvation themes is, regrettably, often employed not to displace faulty understandings of the Christian life but to simply adorn it. In the end, appeals to such language do not change the underlying conception of salvation at all. At the most, they effect new dignity on old themes, but such a reductionist treatment of deification, sonship, and union with Christ does more damage than good. When these themes are completely ignored, an accurate biblical account can be present to actually uplift the common understanding of salvation. But when it is revived only to be reduced to an imaginative and inadequate understandings of salvation, there is an attendant misdirecting of a believer’s pursuit of the experience of union with Christ.

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Works Cited

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960. Print.

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The Real Heaven Misaiming from God's Real Economy

The Real Heaven: What the Bible Actually Says, by Chip Ingram with Lance Witt. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016. Print.

The introduction to *The Real Heaven: What the Bible Actually Says* by Chip Ingram with Lance Witt (hereafter *Real*) articulates the question that first sprang to my mind, “So why another book on Heaven?” (9). There are several points made by *Real* that are insightful and worthy of affirmation. However, *Real*'s short-hand answer—“In the following pages you will discover a simple, clear, practical, and Biblical view of God's greatest hope and promise for His children...HEAVEN” (12)—exposes a flawed premise that heaven is the central aim of God's hope and promise. Teaching such a concept causes God's children to misaim from God's economy (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-6) and distracts them from God's eternal purpose.

Although *Real* presents its thesis in a theological framework, it is written in a conversational tone, with a pastoral goal of giving hope and comfort to suffering believers and to motivate change in their present-life priorities. The book is sparsely footnoted and then only for directly quoted material. For some of its theological underpinnings *Real* appears to rely particularly on *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn and perhaps, to a lesser extent, on *The Glory of Heaven* by John MacArthur.¹

Misapplying John 14 to Heaven—an Actual Place “like Miami and London and Tokyo”

Real says that “in the Bible, the word ‘Heaven’ is used to describe three different places...sky, stars, abode of God” (30) and states that its intent is to use the third definition: “It is the place where God resides, and this usage is primarily where we are going to focus” (31). *Real* takes the position that heaven is only a place and for the most part neglects the possibility that the term *heaven*, as used in the Bible, may also refer to a state.

Real appeals to John 14:1-3 to convey that heaven is first a source of motivation and comfort and second a physical place. According to *Real*, Jesus spoke these words to His disciples because He “knew that a crystal clear view of eternity and of their future home in Heaven would sustain them through the most difficult of times” (26), especially through the martyrdom they would later suffer. It considers that *prepare a place* in verses 2 and 3 means that the place Jesus was going to prepare is “not a theoretical concept or a state of mind” or a “figment of

somebody's imagination” but an “actual place,” just like “Miami and London and Tokyo are actual places” (32). In emphasizing the aspect of heaven as a place, *Real* would have done well to at least acknowledge the limitations of such a concept when applied to the dwelling place of the infinite and eternal God. For example, John MacArthur's caveat is helpful in this regard:

Heaven, in the end, is a *place*—the place where God dwells...the heaven of heaven, the third heaven...It transcends the confines of time-space dimensions...His dwelling place—heaven—is not subject to the normal limitations of finite dimensions. (qtd. in Kangas 13)

Real's assumption that John 14 refers to a physical place, heaven, has no contextual basis. In the entirety of the Lord's discourse in John 13 through 16, there is not one mention of the word *heaven*. When Thomas queried the Lord as to where He was going and how His disciples could know the way, the Lord responded not with reference to a place but with references to persons. John 14:6 indicates that Jesus was going not to a physical place but to a person—the Father—and that Jesus—a person—was the way to the Father. In verse 3 the Lord said, “[I] will receive you to Myself [a person], so that where I am you also may be.” According to verses 10 and 11, “Where I am” is the Father: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?” (v. 10).

In the context of verse 2, the “Father's house” with “many abodes” should be understood not as a physical place but as a corporate person. According to verse 23, the Father and the Son will come (as the Ones abiding) to make an abode (same word as *abodes* in verse 2) with the believer, indicating that the abode is also a person—the believers corporately. A few verses later, Jesus said, “Abide in Me and I and you” (15:4). Here and in verse 5 the Lord and the believers are simultaneously and mutually the abiders and the abode. Therefore, in the context of John 14 through 16 the Father's house with many abodes is actually a mutual abode of persons in which the believers abide in the Triune God and the Triune God abides in the believers (14:17, 20).

With respect to timing, the Lord's disciples entered into this abode not at the time of their death but on “that day,” which in the context of chapters 14 through 16 is the day of the Lord's resurrection (14:20; cf. 16:23, 26; 20:19). To characterize the Father's house as a physical place called Heaven is to ignore the context of John 14.

***Real*'s Heaven Located in Heaven Only during the Church Age**

Real applies a structure of dispensational eschatology to trace its theme of heaven in the Bible. Eden was “a kind

of Heaven on earth” (45). After the fall of man, believers, when they die, go to a place that *Real* calls the “Intermediate Heaven” (63). According to *Real*, heaven in eternity future will actually be on earth.

In answering the question, “Where did Heaven REALLY begin?” *Real* provides a graphical chart that gives “a comprehensive overview of God’s passion to be with His people” (54). The chart divides the biblical record into four periods: Garden of Eden (Gen. 1—2), Fallen World (Gen. 3—Rev. 20), 1000 Year Reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1-6), and New Heaven New Earth (Rev. 21—22). In the garden of Eden God is “with man in a perfect earth.” In the fallen world God is “separated from man in a cursed earth.” In the one-thousand year reign God is “with man in a temporary earth.” Finally, God is “with man in a New Heaven on a New Earth FOREVER.” On this chart three events are graphically portrayed: the cross, the rapture of the church (represented by an upward arrow prior to the one thousand years), and Christ’s return and final judgment (represented by a downward arrow after the one thousand years).²

Real Misaiming concerning Heaven Being a Restoration and Upgrade of Eden

Real connects Eden in Genesis 2 with the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 and 22 to support its thesis that the heaven of eternity future will be a real and perfect physical place *on the earth*: “The New Heaven and New Earth are not some ethereal place. They are the restoration and redemption of the very real place that God created in Genesis” (51). Hence, it views the so-called heaven in eternity future as primarily a physical place on earth that is a restoration and upgrade of what God originally created in Genesis 1 and 2.

Real’s heaven also changes its location depending on the dispensational age. *Real* locates heaven on earth in Genesis 1 and 2: “God’s original Heaven on earth [is] called the Garden of Eden” (63). In the same way that the garden of Eden was heaven on earth, the future new heaven will be on the new earth. As to the placement of heaven in between these two bookends, *Real* is less explicit.

Real Misaiming concerning the Location of Heaven in the Old Testament

Real describes what is included in the period of the fallen world from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20. First, this period includes the “Old Testament law, sacrifices, and the

prophets” (55). Later, it posits the question, “What does the Bible say about the Christian who dies between Genesis 3 and Revelation 20?” (63). Strictly speaking, there were no Christians in Genesis to Malachi.

Real in its dispensational presentation of heaven’s location does not demarcate clearly between the Old Testament and New Testament dispensations and is therefore silent as to the location of its so-called heaven before the church age. The Old Testament refers to Sheol as the place of the dead (Psa. 6:5), and godly people such as David expected that their soul would go *down* to Sheol when they died (30:3). The Septuagint translation renders the Hebrew word for *Sheol* as the Greek word for *Hades* (Kittel 1: 146). Kittel says,

The NT is also in agreement that Hades lies at the heart of the earth. In contrast to heaven as the highest height it signifies the deepest depth (Mt. 11:23; Lk. 10:15); it is the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40: one goes down into it (Mt. 11:23; Lk. 10:15; cf. R. 10:7). (1: 148)

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We may thus reasonably conclude that in the Old Testament age the godly people went to Sheol, located not in heaven or on earth but below the earth. *Real* does not explain where the heaven that was on earth in Genesis 2 went after the fall in Genesis 3, and neither does it discuss where the Old Testa-

ment saints went when they died.

Real Misaiming concerning an Intermediate Heaven

Real says that after the Old Testament,

the Messiah comes in the person of Jesus. He lives a perfect life and makes the ultimate sacrifice of dying on the cross for our sins. Three days later He rises from the dead and then later ascends back into Heaven. Then the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and the church is born. (55)

Thus, the believers now have Christ’s continued presence through the Holy Spirit who “comes to indwell all believers” (87). The church, which is the “community of Jews and Gentiles who have been spiritually born again” (88), has been given in this age the task of “going into all the earth to share the good news of the gospel” (55). According to *Real*, today we are living in the “church age...the age in God’s plan” that began in Acts (88).

According to *Real*, “the Bible is clear that when Christians

die, they immediately go into the presence of God. That is often referred to by scholars and theologians as the Intermediate Heaven” (63). *Real* does not explicitly identify any of these scholars or theologians.³ *Real* explains that the soul and spirit of the believer are there:

It is important to understand that upon your death your spirit is immediately in the presence of Christ, but you won't have a resurrected body yet. That will come later...Our souls live in this Intermediate Heaven in the presence of God until Revelation 21 and 22. (68-69)

Real locates this Intermediate Heaven in heaven based on several passages. The first is Luke 16:22-31, where, according to *Real*, Abraham's side “represents where the righteous go when they die” (64-65). The second is 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, concerning which *Real* says, “To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord...In the moment your soul departs your body, you will be in His presence” (67). The third is Revelation 4:1-6, which *Real* quotes: “There before me was a door standing open in heaven...‘Come up here’...There before me was a throne in heaven” (72-73). According to *Real*,

Jesus pulls back the veil just a little bit and allows John to actually see what happens in the afterlife to those who are Christ-followers...This is not a picture of the New Heaven and the New Earth, but it is a picture of what is going on now in the Intermediate Heaven. (72)

Real also refers to Revelation 6:9-11, presupposing that the location of the altar is in heaven: “John says that under the altar in Heaven are ‘the souls of those who have been slain.’” *Real* derives from this an implication that those in heaven perhaps have “some level of knowledge regarding what is happening on the earth” (80).

By asserting that the New Testament believers go to a so-called intermediate heaven that is located in heaven (not under the earth), *Real* is logically implying that either Sheol (Hades) has been transferred from under the earth to heaven or that the Christian believers are in a different place than the Old Testament saints. The latter conclusion would be inconsistent with Luke 16:25, and the former would be inconsistent with Acts 2:34. In light of the New Testament, Acts 2 indicates that the Lord went to Hades when He died (cf. vv. 27, 31), and the Lord's word in Matthew 12:40 indicates that this place is in the “heart of the earth.” As of the time of Peter's message in Acts 2, David was still in Hades and had not yet ascended to heaven (v. 34). These theological difficulties and conundrums weaken *Real*'s a priori premise that Christians go to a place called Heaven when they die and that this so-called place is located in heaven.

Real Misaiming concerning the Rapture and the Reward

Real speaks of a future day when Jesus will come and rapture “all believers living on the earth and take them to Heaven” (88). *Real* assumes a pretribulation rapture (55). According to *Real*, “Jesus will ‘rapture’ the church from the earth” (86), coming in the clouds to snatch the “believers off the earth” (103). Prior to the rapture of the living believers, the dead in Christ will rise first. “Their spirits have already gone to be with the Lord in Heaven. But now, at the rapture, their bodies will be resurrected and they will be given a glorified body” (89). Here again *Real* presupposes that the dead believers go to heaven before they are resurrected, yet the biblical data does not support this assumption. The biblical record is relatively sparse with respect to references of someone actually going to heaven. As John Brooks points out in his review of MacArthur's *The Glory of Heaven*, “While there are over six hundred verses that speak about ‘heaven’ or the ‘heavens,’ there are only a handful that touch the matter of a person going to heaven” (51). After carefully examining ten such instances, he concludes that “there is no clear indication that a believer will go to heaven *after* his death but *before* his bodily resurrection” (52).

According to *Real*, the rapture will be followed by a seven-year period called the tribulation; the first three and a half years will be peaceful, and in the last three and a half years Antichrist will unleash “his fury on the earth” (92). During this period, the Christ-followers will attend what *Real* describes as “a couple of celebration events that take place in Heaven” (92). The first will be “a judgment of *rewards*” (93), and the second will be the marriage supper of the Lamb as described in Revelation 19, during which “the groom Jesus is...once and for all united with His bride, the church” (102).

According to *Real*, “the judgment seat of Christ is an awards ceremony, not a time for punishment” (93). *Real* interprets *suffer loss* in 1 Corinthians 3:15 not as a “judgment of shame and humiliation” (93) but as regret for not receiving the reward others will have (98). “Heaven will be wonderful for everyone, but it will not be equal. What you do in this life will have direct impact on the quality of life in Heaven” (146).

In arriving at the conclusion that after the judgment seat of Christ there are differences in rewards for Christians but no punishment, *Real* neglects contextual data that should lead to a different interpretation. *Real* indirectly associates the judgment seat with the parable in Matthew 25:14-30: “God Himself will look you in the eye and bless you with His words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’” (97). *Real* does not quote the verses showing that this was the Lord's positive appraisal only of

the two good and faithful slaves in verses 19 through 23; *Real* neglects to mention that there was a third slave who was also entrusted with the Lord's possessions and had to give an account to his master at the same time (vv. 24-25). The Lord appraised him as an "evil and slothful slave" (v. 26) and commanded, "Take away therefore the talent from him" and "cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (vv. 28, 30). Thus, *Real* does not explain how this outcome could not be interpreted as anything but punishment with an element of shame and humiliation.

Real Misaiming concerning the Millennial Kingdom

Real states that during the one thousand years "Christ will replace the Antichrist as the ruler over the earth" (107) and that "Jesus will be judge and king on this earth" (55). It is during this time that the promises made to Abraham and David will be fulfilled (108). According to *Real*,

on the earth during the millennium there will be a very unique collection of people. First, there will be people who survive the tribulation and will enter the millennium in their earthly, physical, unglorified bodies. Second, there will be the Old Testament saints and New Testament saints who now have their glorified bodies. (107)

In arriving at the conclusion that after the judgment seat of Christ there are differences in rewards for Christians but no punishment, Real neglects contextual data that should lead to a different interpretation.

This statement appears to be inconsistent with *Real's* previous statement that the souls of the Christians "live in this Intermediate Heaven in the presence of God until Revelation 21 and 22 when the New Heaven and the New Earth arrive" (69). *Real* is somewhat ambiguous about the location of heaven and its occupants during the millennium. *Real* seems to imply that heaven will not come down to earth until the time of the new heaven and new earth after the millennium. However, *Real* also says that the Lord and the believers will be on the earth during the millennium.

Real goes on to say that at the end of the one thousand years "Satan will be released for one final time before he is forever cast into the lake of fire" (109). *Real* considers this to be "a powerful polemic against the humanistic notion that mankind is basically good" (108). As a result of Satan's temptation, "people who have lived in a totally righteous environment, with the best education, with perfect justice, and in the presence of Jesus Himself will still choose to turn away from the God who loves them

and will reject Christ" (109). God will then "judge Satan, angels, and the wicked dead at the Great White Throne" (110).

Real Misaiming concerning the City and the New Heaven and New Earth

According to *Real*, "Revelation 21 introduces a new chapter when it comes to Heaven. Up until Revelation 21, Christians who have died have experienced Heaven, but it is different than the New Heaven talked about in Revelation 21" (112). In *Real's* view, the heaven that God has planned for the believers "is very much like the paradise He created in the beginning for Adam and Eve"; it will be a "Heaven that is similar to this earth...only infinitely better" (56). On the one hand, it will be "a real place" (58), "new in the sense that it is qualitatively an upgrade to the old earth" (59). On the other hand, it is highly relational in that "God's dwelling place is now with His people,...'with' us" (59). *Real* goes on to attribute a personal rather than just a merely physical aspect

to heaven: "The real essence of Heaven is about more than just a place, it is about a person. It is about coming home to our heavenly Father who loves ordinary people" (60). However, these personal references are for the most part objective and do not convey the more intrinsic union of life, mingling of natures, and incorporation of persons spo-

ken of and prayed for by the Lord in John 14 through 17.

According to *Real*, "this New Heaven will descend upon a New Earth. The New Heaven is both a country and a city" (112). *Real* contrasts the believers' life today with their life in the future Heaven on earth: In this life, "God has given us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a gift. The Holy Spirit comforts, convicts, guides, fills, teaches, and helps us as we seek to live the Christian life" (126); however, in heaven we will know the will of God one hundred percent of the time, we will "never feel distant or disconnected from God," and we will "understand the ways of God like never before" (126-127). We "will be in constant union and communion with God" (136).

Real, nonetheless, also concludes that there are many physical aspects to heaven, some of which will be "beyond our wildest imaginations" (114) and that heaven is a "literal place" (153): it will be a "real place with exquisite beauty and meaningful work and intimate relationships and good food and no death" (123). "There is no sea. For those of you who love to sail, I am sure there

will be plenty of big lakes for you” (133). *Real* goes on to extrapolate that

if you have nations, you have organization and infrastructure. If you have kings, you have roles and authority and jobs. If the glory of nations is brought to the city, that means there is commerce, art, culture, music, and manufacturing. (137)

Here *Real* closely mirrors Alcorn’s imaginative description in *Heaven*, which, as David Yoon aptly summarizes, “portrays a vision of our eternal destiny as the magnification of human amusement, and promotes human culture that replaces God, who is the unique fountain of our enjoyment” (82).

Real Affirming the Major Items of the Fundamental Christian Faith

Real provides a helpful set of apologetics in support of its foundational premise that the Bible is the “inspired and infallible Word of God” (163). It presents a fundamental objective faith, including the “Biblical reality of the triune Godhead” (88) and the person and work of Christ, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead on the third day (55). Furthermore, *Real* refers to the indwelling Spirit: “In this life, God has given us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a gift” (126): Christ is the Savior who “lives within by His Holy Spirit” (155). *Real* acknowledges that “the church of Jesus Christ is made up of all believers who have put their faith and trust in Christ” (34), those who are “spiritually born again” (88). During the church age the church has been “given the task of the Great Commission—going into all the earth to share the good news of the gospel” (55).

Real Applying a Sketchy Dispensational Framework and Using Imprecise Terminology

Real’s attempt to overlay a dispensational structure on the historical sequence of biblical events is somewhat helpful. This aids in seeing a connection between the Eden in Genesis and the New Jerusalem in a new heaven and new earth in Revelation. However, *Real*’s conclusion that the future so-called heaven will be a restoration and upgrade of the paradisiacal garden in Genesis neglects the central biblical theme of God’s original intention to dispense the eternal life, the life of God, into man to make man a partaker of the divine nature (John 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 5:11-13). The goal of God’s economy is not merely the garden of Eden redux but a new creation consisting of the redeemed old creation with an additional element—the divine life.

Although a realization that there will be a millennial kingdom helps explain and anticipate many prophecies and their fulfillment, *Real*’s failure to distinguish between

the Old and New Testament dispensations is a significant flaw. Furthermore, *Real* confuses the biblical correlation of believers who are raised to the heavens with the physical resurrection and instead associates this rising with physical death. This is a serious oversight that reinforces an extra-biblical concept. *Real*’s repeated use of the term *Real Heaven* seems to be at best sloppy and at worst disingenuous. This is particularly evident in *Real*’s discussion of Revelation 21 and 22, in which *Real* seems to use the terms *heaven*, *new heaven*, *new earth*, and *city* interchangeably.

Real Distracting Believers from the Central Line of God’s Economy

Real adds to the genre of books that begin with the a priori assumption that heaven is where Christians go to when they die, and conclude that this place will ultimately be more than what we can imagine. In the first chapter *Real*’s author acknowledges that his “theological training has lacked any serious emphasis and focus on Heaven” (27), which spurred him to review some classic theology books. The result of his inquiry led him to conclude that “a well-thought-through doctrine of Heaven is largely absent from some of our greatest theological works” (27). Although a cautious skepticism of systematized theology is warranted, the paucity of theologians who speak about dying and going to heaven should at least give the rest of us pause. Perhaps the theologians recognize better than most that there are few biblical underpinnings to support the most popular conceptions of heaven. Both what the Bible says and what the Bible does not say should guide our study. For example, Paul was forbidden to speak what he heard when he was caught away to Paradise (2 Cor. 12:4). Likewise, there were certain things that Daniel and John were asked to seal or not record (Dan. 12:4, 9; Rev. 10:4). Rather than use imagination to try to speculate on the details of these “unspeakable words” (2 Cor. 12:4), Bible students should instead focus on what is revealed (cf. Deut. 29:29). Regrettably, *Real*, which purports to be about “what the Bible actually says,” goes well beyond the divine revelation when it speaks of such things as heaven’s inhabitants sailing on lakes and engaging in art and commerce.

The biblical focus is neither on heaven nor on earth as places but on the city as a person. In Revelation 21:1 John saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” which replace the first heaven and the first earth. According to verse 2, the holy city, New Jerusalem comes down *out* of heaven as a bride, implying that the new heaven remains above as a sphere distinct from the new earth. Furthermore, the bride-city, New Jerusalem, is personified, being designated as the wife of the Lamb (v. 9), and although she expresses her heavenly source and characteristic (cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:16; 12:22), she is distinct from heaven and earth. This corporate person is the “tabernacle of God”

(Rev. 21:3), implying that she is the dwelling place of God. Furthermore, God and the Lamb are the temple of the city (v. 22), signifying that this city is also the dwelling place, the habitation, of the redeemed saints. In Revelation 21 and 22 heaven and earth are the environment, but the central focus is the city. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate fulfillment of John 14–16; it is the mutual abode in which the Triune God dwells in man and man abides in God. God’s economy does not accomplish a mere restoration back to Eden but a new creation in which God and man, the fruit and the eater, the dweller and the dwelling place, are one. This city should be considered as the greatest sign in the universe that God, through the process of His divine economy, will accomplish His eternal purpose to produce a divine-human entity possessing His divine life and nature and expressing His divine attributes to the praise of His glory. Our real comfort and motivation today should come from our cooperation with God’s operation to be part of this new entity in fullness.

by James Fite

Notes

¹*Real* includes and discusses a chart from Alcorn’s *Heaven* (101, 122). The author of *Real* shares how he was impacted by a conversation with his believing dad, who in his latter days confessed a fear of dying: “My dad’s experience and fear was a wake-up call for me as a son and as a pastor. I wasn’t able in that moment to quickly and clearly articulate what Heaven is like and what people will experience in Heaven” (15). This subsequently led the author to give his dad a book. *Real* does not identify the book, but in the first radio program of a series by Ingram (“Why Heaven Matters,” part 1), the author says that the book he gave to his dad was *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn. In a study guide that accompanies the radio series, the author of *Real* recommends two books as resources: Alcorn’s *Heaven* and MacArthur’s *The Glory of Heaven* (Ingram, “Study”). For *Affirmation & Critique*’s review of *Heaven*, see David Yoon’s article, and for a review of *The Glory of Heaven*, see John Brooks’s article. Kerry S. Robichaux uses MacArthur’s book in his conversation regarding the “two variant conceptual representations (the fantastic and the agnostic)” of heaven (5) to illustrate persistent a priori assumptions that many, if not most, writers have made concerning heaven. Concerning *The Glory of Heaven*, Robichaux states, “There is no actual attention given to the very basic claim that heaven is our destiny” (15).

²Elsewhere, *Real* says that after the tribulation, Jesus “physically returns to the earth” and that this event is “the second coming of Christ” (103). *Real* does not address the seeming inconsistency between this timing and that on the chart (reproduced twice—on pages 54 and 88) showing Christ’s return at the end of the one thousand years.

³*Real*’s statement seems to be an unattributed quote of Alcorn’s *Heaven*, which says, “When a Christian dies, he or she enters into what theologians call the intermediate state, a transitional period between our past lives on Earth and our future resurrection to life on the New Earth” (41). Elsewhere in *Heaven* (56, 478), Alcorn references Kittel, who uses the term *intermediate state* in discussing Paradise as “the abode of the souls of the redeemed in the intermediate state between death and resurrection” (5: 769).

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The Distilled Essence of a Moral Life

Proverbs 3:5&6: The Distilled Essence of the Christian Life, by Bob Beasley. Hartville: Living Stone Books, 2016. Print.

Bob Beasley’s *Proverbs 3:5&6: The Distilled Essence of the Christian Life* (hereafter *Proverbs*) is an exposition of Proverbs 3:5 and 6 that attempts to explain why these verses are crucial to many believers. Taking as a

premise that Proverbs 3:5 and 6 represent the distilled essence of the Christian life, *Proverbs* expounds these verses in the light of what it considers to be the focus of the Christian life. *Proverbs'* exposition, however, actually promotes the living only of a moral life, which misses God's goal in creating, redeeming, and saving humanity so that God and humanity may become one in Christ for His eternal expression. When the emphasis is on morality alone, all the admonitions in Proverbs 3:5-6 can be pursued by unregenerated humans such as Nicodemus in John 3, who was very moral but who did not have the divine life that comes from being born of the Spirit. Unbelievers can be moral, but unbelievers do not have the life of God. *Proverbs'* failure to see the centrality of the operation of the divine life in the life of a Christian is its greatest flaw.

A Life of Morality

Proverbs examines verses 5 and 6 by breaking the verses into four sections and considering each section in a chapter. In the first chapter, "Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart," *Proverbs* defines what it means to trust in the Lord, identifies why believers fall short in trusting in the Lord, examines items for which we should trust in Him, highlights in the Scriptures some who trusted in God, and elaborates on the benefits of trusting in the Lord.

*P*roverbs equates believing to trust and states that to trust in the Lord is to "rely upon, or have confidence in, the ability of God to accomplish what He has said He would accomplish" (11). In other words, "trust is an assured expectation that a promise will be kept" (11). *Proverbs* argues that one reason we do not trust in God perfectly is that "we do not know Him as well as we should" (11). Thus, it briefly contrasts God's revelation of Himself as the "I AM" in Exodus 3 with the various concepts concerning God brought forth during the Enlightenment and in Deism.

Proverbs asserts that the first step to trusting God is to trust Him for salvation: "We need Him to save us from His own eternal wrath" (15). It argues that salvation from God's wrath is purely and completely His work and is not anything that we can do in ourselves (17). Then *Proverbs* considers scriptural examples of those who trusted God, including Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Rahab, and Daniel; it does this to illustrate that "true faith...is to disregard mistreatment and disgrace and the things of this world for that which can never fail nor lapse—the eternal promises of an almighty and gracious God" (28).

Proverbs explains that in addition to trusting God for salvation, we need to trust in Him for our daily needs. Presenting Joseph's testimony in Genesis 15:18-20 and Isaiah's testimony in Isaiah 46:9-11, it suggests that to trust in God for our daily necessities is actually to trust in

God's sovereignty. That is, trusting in God for our daily needs is to trust in His sovereignty in ordering all the things that come to us, whether good or bad, for our benefit in His purpose of shaping us into the image of His Son (30-31).

Proverbs also asserts that "trusting in God means trusting God's Word," based on its understanding that we can know what God is like, His plans for the world, and His plan for us only through the Scriptures (32). It briefly presents verses such as John 18:36-38 and 10:35 concerning the Scriptures being truth. *Proverbs* concludes the chapter by considering some of the promises related to believing in God and the benefits of trusting in God. It suggests that some of these benefits are a life of certain hope for the future, eternal purpose, rest and contentment, present security, fulfilled needs, peace, strength and encouragement, the Father's discipline, spiritual and intellectual joy in God's Word, freedom and delight in godly wisdom, freedom from fear of death, and freedom from guilt and shame.

*I*n chapter 2, "And Do Not Lean on Your Own Understanding," *Proverbs* focuses primarily on what *your own understanding* in Proverbs 3:5 refers to, identifies why we rely on our own understanding, supplies examples of leaning on our understanding, and how to recognize and deal with idolatry as an instance of leaning on our own understanding. *Proverbs* illustrates that to lean on our own understanding is to set our mind on the things of man, as Peter did in Matthew 16 (52). It also explains that to lean on our own understanding is to consider the circumstances we encounter from our perspective while forgetting God's mighty works, as in the case of ten of the twelve spies who spied out the land of Canaan in Numbers 13 (54-55). It concludes that leaning on our own understanding is to walk by sight, in the understanding of our imaginations, rather than by faith (56).

Proverbs asserts that "our sinfulness makes us prone to walk by sight and not by faith" (56); it makes us lean on our own understanding. *Proverbs* proposes that a realization, or lack thereof, of the doctrine of human depravity, the notion that fallen humanity is totally corrupt and dead in offenses and sins, is crucial to whether or not we walk according to our own understanding, our comprehension of Christ's salvation, and our understanding of the entire Bible (56, 59-61).

Proverbs maintains that the problem of leaning on one's own understanding is expressed in idolatry (63). It explains that idolatry is to "look to things other than God for our 'solace'" (64); it is "trusting some created thing other than the God who created the universe" (66). After identifying idolatry in the experience of Adam and Eve; of Cain; of the builders of Babel; of Jacob, Rachel, and

Leah; and of Herod the king, *Proverbs* outlines what it terms “the ‘family tree’ of idolatry” (73)—a lineage of idolatry that finds its source in Satan and pride, continues through “deep-seated” idols in the heart that “become ultimate objects of trust and hope for the depraved mind,” and concludes with “nearby” idols, which are the means to attain or arrive at the deep-seated idols (74). *Proverbs* suggests that we can recognize idols in our lives by examining what we highly esteem, hope for, desire, daydream about, delight in, are zealous for, and more. It also proposes that we can deal with our idols by fearing God, which is to have faith in Him, enjoy Him, actively obey Him, and hold a reverential awe for Him. It concludes the chapter by identifying other examples of idolatry, such as luck, chance, superstition, astrology, presuppositions, and traditions.

Chapter 3 of *Proverbs*, “In All Your Ways Acknowledge Him,” is devoted to God’s revelation of Himself and our acceptance of that revelation. *Proverbs* claims that acknowledging God in all our ways means, “In every way that makes up your life, acknowledge God for who He has as revealed Himself to be” (93). It emphasizes that although we cannot know God perfectly, “we are to receive and believe what can and should be known about Him” through God’s creation, the Bible, and the life of Jesus (94). *Proverbs* cautions against a preferential acknowledgment of God’s revelation concerning Himself—recognizing the aspects that we prefer and neglecting those that we do not (94). *Proverbs* states that God has revealed Himself through creation as a general revelation of Himself, through the Bible as His written word, and through Jesus Christ as His living Word (95). *Proverbs* suggests that God’s revelation in creation mainly reflects His eternal existence, power, and beauty (95-96).

In the examination of God’s special revelation through the Bible and Christ, *Proverbs* posits that God’s revelation can be further divided into God’s moral character—the sum of His moral qualities, which we may share—and His incommunicable attributes (98). In the category of the attributes that may be shared, *Proverbs* explores God’s being holy, good, just, impartial, jealous, wrathful, wise, loving, gracious, merciful, and patient; it concludes that exploration by asserting that God’s goal for every Christian is for him or her to be conformed to the image of His Son, to be like Him in His moral character (115-116). In the category of God’s incommunicable attributes, *Proverbs* explores God’s being incomprehensible, infinite, Spirit and Truth, free, invisible, all-powerful, almighty, omnipotent,

omniscient, all-seeing, immutable, unchangeable, omnipresent, sovereign, self-existent, simple, and indivisible. It concludes the chapter by stating that we will work and reign with such a God for eternity (136).

Chapter 4 of *Proverbs*, “And He Will Make Straight Your Paths,” focuses on the paths that are made straight upon the fulfillment of the requirements in the earlier portions of Proverbs 3:5 and 6. *Proverbs* explains that once the requirements of trusting in the Lord with all of one’s heart, not leaning on one’s own understanding, and acknowledging God in all of one’s ways are met, “the LORD places your feet on permanent, unending paths and directs your actions and the events of your life in His will and way” (138). In other words, “God will make your paths pathways of righteousness” (139). *Proverbs* devotes the rest of the chapter to investigating the paths of faith, humility, suffering, worship in Spirit and in truth, obedience, prayer, fellowship, peace and forgiveness, service, stewardship, justice, vocation, evangelism, and joy. It concludes the chapter with Ephesians 2:10 and emphasizes that God has brought the believers out of a meaningless existence into His plan for the ages.

When the emphasis is on morality alone, all the admonitions in Proverbs 3:5-6 can be pursued by unregenerated humans such as Nicodemus, who was very moral but who did not have the divine life that comes from being born of the Spirit.

God’s Purpose in Creating Humanity

Any meaningful study of the distilled essence of the Christian life necessitates a presentation in some fashion of God’s purpose in creation, His

purpose prior to the fall of humanity; His purpose in His salvation; and what the Christian life as well as its essence are. These five items are intrinsically related, for the Christian life must be a living in God’s salvation for the fulfillment of His intention and purpose. A crippling flaw of *Proverbs* is that it lacks a full picture of God’s purpose in creating humanity. All that *Proverbs* mentions in relation to this is that “God created mankind in His own image, in holiness and righteousness, with perfect physical and mental capabilities” (58). Much of its understanding pertaining to God’s purpose is related to humanity’s fall. Thus, *Proverbs*’ consideration of God’s salvation does not go beyond restoring humanity to its original state in Genesis 1. *Proverbs* explains,

In the Fall, Adam sinned and immediately part of God’s image in him was greatly tarnished and another part was totally annihilated. The part of God’s image that became disjointed or distorted we might call the “material” part...The part of God’s image that was absolutely destroyed was the spiritual part...Jesus’s mission was to restore God’s image in mankind. We who have received the new birth and who trust Christ as Lord and Savior are

having the spiritual and material images renewed in us...We...have to await the complete restoration of God's image when Christ comes for His own...The goal of Christian maturity is to be conformed to the image of our Creator and Redeemer—Jesus Christ our Lord. (58)

Even when *Proverbs* speaks of conformation to the image of Christ for God's glory, its understanding of that image is actually Christ's moral character or moral perfection (115-116, 99). Thus, a reader is left with the wrong impression that created humanity prior to the fall satisfied God's intention, that God's salvation is sin-centered, and that all of God's work in the Scriptures and in the believers today is merely to restore humanity to its created state (96).

According to the Bible, however, God's purpose was not fulfilled by the creation of humanity, and God's salvation is much more than a restoration of humanity to a sinless state of moral perfection. In brief, God's eternal purpose is to be joined with humanity as one entity in the divine life for His full expression in life and for the exercise of His authority. This purpose is signified in God's creation of Adam (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7); placing him before two trees (vv. 8-9); charging him concerning his eating (vv. 16-17; cf. 3:2-3); producing Eve from Adam's bone (2:19-23); joining Adam and Eve together as one (v. 24); and commissioning them to be fruitful and multiply and to fill and subdue the earth (1:28). The fact that all these events occurred prior to the fall of humanity in Genesis 3 reveals that created humanity needed to possess God's life in order to fulfill God's intention. In other words, even though God created humanity in His own image and according to His likeness, created humanity's expression of that image was incomplete; that expression was without the substance of God's life, because humanity had not partaken of the tree of life. Moreover, just as the created animals were not suited to be a counterpart for Adam because they did not possess his life, so also created humanity could not be joined with God as one entity without possessing God's life. This brief outline of the first two chapters of Genesis indicates that God's intention is not morality centered but life centered.

The Essence of the Genuine Christian Life

In addition, God's salvation in Christ Jesus, as recorded in the Scriptures, addresses not only sin and death within humanity, the effects of the fall, but also humanity's lack of God's life, a lack that was present prior to the fall (Rom. 5:10, 17). Thus, God's salvation is not sin centered, limited to addressing humanity's fallen condition as *Proverbs* seems to convey, but life centered for the fulfillment of God's intention to be one with humanity. In and through His salvation in Christ, God brings the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect far beyond the confines of sinless moral perfection to

becoming the same as God in life, nature, expression, and function but not in His Godhead, being joined to God as one (2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:4; John 17:21; 14:12).

The Christian life must be a life in which the divine life and oneness with God play a primary role. It must be a life in which God in Christ as the Spirit enters into humanity as the divine life (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:10), spreads within his soul (v. 6), and swallows up his body for the full expression of God as life (v. 11; 2 Cor. 5:4; 1 Cor. 15:53-54). At the same time, it is a life in which God is joined as one entity to redeemed humanity in their being and living so that God and the regenerated believers have one life, one living, and one expression (12:12; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:20-22; 4:4-6; Col. 1:18; Rom. 11:17; John 15:4-5; Eph. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 1:21). Such a life is the reproduction and enlargement of the life and living of the Lord Jesus—a life of being in the Father and having the Father in Him—in His believers (John 17:21). The essence of the Christian life, then, is having Christ as the divine life worked into the believers by virtue of their being in Him and the vital life relationship between Him and them.

The Key to God's Salvation in Life—the Divine Spirit with the Human Spirit

According to the New Testament revelation, the divine Spirit and the human spirit are critical to the initiation, progress, living out, and consummation of the Christian life (Rom. 8:16, 14, 4; Gal. 5:16, 25; 2 Thes. 2:13; Rom. 15:16; Rev. 21:10-11). The divine Spirit and the human spirit are intimately involved in every step of the Christian life in God's salvation—regeneration (John 3:5-6), sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11), renewing (Titus 3:5), transformation (2 Cor. 3:17-18), conformation (Rom. 8:26-29), building up (Eph. 2:21-22), and glorification (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 4:14). Without the interaction of these two spirits, neither God's salvation nor the Christian life would be operative. The true distilled essence of the Christian life and the key to God's salvation in life is the divine Spirit with the human spirit (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17; cf. John 4:24).

God is Life

Perhaps as an inevitable consequence of failing to see God's purpose in creation and the divine life as a primary factor in God's salvation, *Proverbs* never mentions or considers God's attribute of being life—the divine, uncreated life. In the chapter on acknowledging God according to His revelation, a chapter on God's attributes, even when considering verses such as John 5:26, which says, "Just as the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself," *Proverbs* is able to point out only that "Jesus is claiming to have the quality of aseity—eternal existence" (95). It is understandable that one cannot

exhaust all the items of what God is and that *Proverbs* does not intend to give “a complete list of God’s attributes, but only those [it] believe[s] to be most important to our study” (99). However, it is counterproductive in a discourse or exposition on the distilled essence of the Christian life to miss the fact that a primary attribute of God is life or to consider that God’s being life is unimportant to such a study. The importance of God’s being life to the Christian in God’s salvation is well attested to by the fact that the New Testament completely devotes one of the four Gospels—the Gospel of John—to address the matter. God is life, and He has come in Christ so that we may have His life and have it abundantly (11:25; 14:6; 10:10; 20:31; cf. 1 John 5:12).

Conclusion

Proverbs’ study of the distilled essence of the Christian life misses the center and goal of God’s intention and purpose with humanity, and it inevitably makes the pursuit of mere morality the goal of the Christian life. *Proverbs* appeals to a natural human desire for morality and perfection, while leading believers to stray from God’s true intention in His salvation. If many believers truly treasure *Proverbs* 3:5-6 for the reasons given in *Proverbs* or begin to apply these verses to a pursuit of morality, as presented in *Proverbs*, then many have missed the essence of the Christian life, and many more will continue to miss it. May our Lord Jesus Christ rescue all His children from aiming for anything other than His goal.

Improving turns its attention to believers who are so secure in their salvation that they avoid any consideration of the consequences of unfruitful and even sinful living as Christians.

by Joel Oladele

Overemphasizing Good Works for the Kingdom Reward

Improving the Quality of Your Eternal Life: A Primer on New Testament Exhortations to the Believer, by Thomas M. Lancaster. The Woodlands: Grace Theology Press, 2016. Print.

Too many Christians misconstrue salvation to be a single event, grace as a singular gift for justification, and their destiny to be heaven. Few believers consider

the ramifications of their daily Christian living upon their life in eternity. Any sin-forgiven and blood-washed believer who assumes thereby to be heaven-bound will be perturbed by the enlightening study in *Improving the Quality of Your Eternal Life: A Primer on New Testament Exhortations to the Believer* (hereafter *Improving*). *Improving* calls for Christians to pay the “cost of discipleship” (114) to run the race with endurance as means not to secure eternal life itself, which is given freely in response to faith and is irrevocable, but in order to lay up for themselves an “abundant eternal life” (2). *Improving*, however, fails to connect salvation, the running of the Christian race, and life in eternity with God’s eternal purpose, the crucial *modus operandi* in everything God has intended and accomplished, including saving us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Unguided by the ultimate reason to run the race and mature in their Christian life, believers will be encouraged to endure merely for the incentive of a personal reward. Furthermore, bereft of the view of God’s way of full salvation, which proceeds organically after their initial receiving of forgiveness and grace through faith in the gospel, believers risk disapproval at the judgment seat even after a lifetime of good works.

At the outset, *Improving* dismisses any doubt of the security of a believer’s eternal salvation and rejects “perseverance justification,” the false teaching that a Christian must persevere until the end of his life in his walk with Christ in order to be justified (6). Rather, *Improving* unequivocally states,

Justification is by *faith alone in Christ alone*; totally independent of evidence of change in a person’s lifestyle or the extent to which he produces righteous works. Justification cannot be earned, deserved, maintained or lost by the believer; and requires of him no proof of contribution. It is free; being totally secured by Christ’s death on the cross. (7)

In the remainder of the book *Improving* turns its attention to the intended audience—believers who are so secure in their salvation that they avoid any consideration of the consequences of unfruitful and even sinful living as Christians. To this end, *Improving* presents vigorous exhortations in each chapter by juxtaposing terms that distinguish mere believers from the overcoming Christians worthy of the kingdom reward.

The Lamb and the Judge (ch. 1): Knowing that their eternal destiny is secure, numerous believers are oblivious to

the repercussions of an unprofitable Christian life and ignorant of the greater call to have their Christian walk match their faith in Jesus, who is not only the redeeming Lamb but also the Judge of all believers at the judgment seat. *Improving* laments the “departure from the true doctrines of the Christian faith” that are at the core of the spiritual decline in American Christianity (11). Numerous “churches” in America place higher priority on church growth than spiritual maturity (11), in part due to a “departure from correct eschatology” (14). Consequently, Christian education frequently overemphasizes a loving God, the Lamb, while obscuring His call for believers to forsake all to follow Him and who will evaluate their works as the Judge (12-13). *Improving* does not regard justification as the goal of Christianity and, instead, presents the running of the Christian race with endurance as the goal (13). The consequence of not running with endurance carries risk at the judgment seat of Christ and affects the quality of a believer’s eternal life. Before Christ each believer’s works will be examined to determine the “level of privileges (service, responsibility, etc.)” one will receive in the coming age (14). *Improving* argues that Christians should not fear exclusion from eternal life, the exclusive punishment of unbelievers, but rather the disqualification from all privileges that would have been bestowed upon them as a reward for a life of faithful service.

T*he Called and the Chosen* (ch. 2): *Improving* dismisses the “imagery of an ethereal, dream-like abode where all sins are forgotten, everyone is joyful, and people in white robes walk across clouds”—an imagery that has “captivated” many believers’ imagination of the eternal life (21). Instead, *Improving* points to the tremendous restoration work during the earthly aspect of the millennial kingdom that is the responsibility and reward of the believers who will have made themselves worthy to reign with Christ. These Christians, in addition to being called, will also be chosen, a distinction earned by the hard work of those who “grow into maturity, endure, and overcome,” who “endure in their faith, who demonstrate (in this life) the capability of handling their Lord’s estate; whose devotion is un-affected by trials and persecution, and the cares and allures of this world” (26-27). The training, education, and equipping to become a “loyal, reliable, selfless and trustworthy” (23) candidate for this divine appointment is presented by *Improving* as the goal of the daily Christian life in this age (22-24).

The First and the Last (ch. 3): According to *Improving*, how a Christian prioritizes his or her life in this age with respect to Christ directly affects how Christ will rank him or her in the kingdom. Believers who put Jesus first, who love Him above family, work, obligations, comfort, safety, and their very lives and who are willing to forsake all that they have will correspondingly reap the full experience of God’s reward. Moreover, the attitude of a

believer in giving Christ the foremost priority should be with appreciation, being grateful to be of service to “a gracious and loving Master” (39). *Improving* draws its lesson from parables in Matthew 20 and Luke 14 and 18, where what a believer may prize today as being “first”—commercial benefit, self-promotion, honor, and position—the Lord will regard as “last” in the coming age. Conversely, the Lord prizes such qualities as “submissiveness, humility and selflessness” (37), the fruits of walking in the Spirit, considering these attributes worthy of exaltation in His coming kingdom.

The Gift and the Inheritance (ch. 4): The gift of eternal life emphasizes the “timeless aspect” (43) of justification purchased by Jesus’ blood and freely bestowed upon us through faith, whereas inheritance underscores the “abundant aspect” (45) of our eternal life. All believers receive the foundational gift of eternal life; this basic inheritance is secured through their status as a child of God. *Improving* indicates that the benefits that all believers share include “an abode in heaven with Christ,” “a meaningful role in serving by doing the works of God,” “answers to prayers,” “the indwelling Holy Spirit,” and “inner peace in a hateful world” (45). However, the book, citing Romans 8:17 and 29, speaks of believers being destined to also receive a double portion by being joint heirs with Christ, the Firstborn, if they are faithful disciples and separate themselves from the care for this world (44-45). To receive our inheritance, the full reward, requires our laying hold of eternal life by pursuing righteousness, fighting the good fight of the faith, forsaking the world, and being willing to suffer the trials and persecutions.

R*obes and Wedding Garments* (ch. 5): By faith in Christ, a believer receives a “robe of righteousness” purchased by Christ’s blood for the spiritual covering of his sinful nature (55). Enveloped in his robe of righteousness, a believer is identified with Christ, justified before God, thereby indicating his or her status as a child in His family. *Improving* speaks of this robe as “the *minimum* clothing,” a “foundational undergarment” (56), relative to the adornment of the wedding garment, which represents the faithfulness and endurance one exhibits after justification. The wedding garment, according to *Improving*, signifies the “*manifestation of the works of the believer*” (60) and is the requisite attire for the wedding feast, its purpose being “entirely eschatological” (56). *Improving* specifies that every believer must make his or her own wedding garment: “This garment is not freely give; it is purchased and adorned by the believer. It is the product of a life lived obediently to the will of God” (55). The production of the wedding garment emphasizes a believer’s love for Christ and involves the putting off of the old man—subduing the flesh—and the putting on of the new man by pursuing righteous acts such as tender mercies,

kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, love, and selflessness (61).

Confessing and Denying (ch. 6): *Improving* contrasts a believer's confessing and denying lifestyle. "Confession," *Improving* defines, "is the outward act of a believer in proclaiming Christ in his life, both in words and actions, to everyone around him" (68). Hence, the term, based on portions such as Matthew 10, does not merely mean "believing unto justification" but applies to a "believer's walk with Christ *after* he is justified" (69). The opposite of confessing Christ is to deny Christ "by living a carnal, worldly, and selfish life" (68) and includes

failing to proclaim the word of God among men; shrinking back in his faith due to persecution; choosing the admiration of his family over the admiration of Jesus; placing his own life goals above following Jesus; and loving himself more than Jesus. (69)

Christians who have lived a life of denying Christ will be denied, among other rewards, the privilege to reign with Christ. Thus, for *Improving* the goal of a Christian should be to "build" a life in eternity with "materials that endure"—by the way he lives, because he is building God's temple, a "building that is designed for praise and worship" of the One who dwells within (71-72).

The Least and the Greatest (ch. 7): A Christian seeking to improve the quality of his eternal life should heed the exhortation of Jesus concerning the least and the greatest in His kingdom of heaven, which *Improving* understands to be an "earthly kingdom set up by the God of heaven" (80). *Improving* speaks of the greatest in Jesus' kingdom, the realm of His "personal administration" (76), as being those who are humble, having no appearance of pride, gracious to present the salvation message, and who avoid anything that will stumble others and cause the gospel to be offensive to unbelievers (78-79). The "greatest" in His kingdom have a "*righteous lifestyle* that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" (80). Furthermore, based on Matthew 20:25-28, greatness is measured by "the degree to which they serve others" (81). Unlike Gentiles who "lord it over" their subjects and who prize their titles and exalted positions, those who inhabit the kingdom of the heavens are willing to be "unrecognized and un-thanked by those who are being served" (81); such ones see others' needs more than their own, having a true heart of a servant with the attribute that "drives servanthood"—compassion for others (82). In contrast, the selfish, proud,

offensive, merciless, and uncompassionate shall be the least in the kingdom.

Abiding and Burning (ch. 8): The term *abiding* is used in *Improving* to describe believers who are in "*intimate fellowship* with their Savior," and the term *burning* is used to describe those who "*resist* the call to be transformed into His likeness and purpose" (86). Both terms are found in John 15:1-11, the context used by *Improving* to establish a contrast between intimate fellowship with Jesus leading to a fruitful life in this age and an abundant one in the next and the passing through of a consuming fire. By placing our faith in Jesus, we are in Him; that is, we are in "full fellowship with Jesus, having access to all the spiritual blessings and privileges in the heavenlies" (88). *Improving* further explains that despite having such blessings and privileges, our fruit-bearing capacity is dependent upon our obedience in our walk with Jesus. By heeding Christ's call to abide in Him, we are holding fast to Him through faithful obedience, which is an "integral part of intimate fellowship with Jesus" (90). Furthermore, according to

Improving, abiding in Christ involves our walking in the way that He walked and in our growing up into Him as the Head. Practically, this requires dying to the self. On His part, God will "prune," removing all our impurities; on our part, we must maintain our fellowship by regularly confessing our sins. Altogether, this allows us to bear much fruit. The first

consequence of not abiding in Christ as the vine is being cast out, resulting in a loss of fellowship with Christ and separation from a place of blessing and privilege, thus hindering believers from bearing fruit. Subsequently, the cast-off branch will wither when apart from the source of life. Eventually, a willfully disobedient branch will be gathered and burned, suffering loss at the judgment seat of Christ for the "aspects of his life that are worthless to the plan and purpose of God" (94).

Salvation and the Kingdom Reward in God's Eternal Purpose

Improving faithfully highlights a crucial aspect of the Christian life that is less well known among Christian circles because it is often neglected in Christian teachings. Although *Improving* refrains from wholly discrediting the unbiblical notion of heaven, it clearly attempts to warn believers about a sinful or worldly Christian living on earth, discouraging an understanding that focuses merely on an expectation of an ethereal paradise. However, *Improving* neglects to also elucidate that the goal of God's actions and accomplishments is the fulfillment of His

Improving argues that Christians should not fear exclusion from eternal life but rather the disqualification from all privileges that would have been bestowed upon them as a reward for a life of faithful service.

eternal purpose, which is for His good pleasure and for which He has an economy (Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11).

God's eternal purpose is to gain a corporate expression of the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man with His image and, simultaneously, to deal with His enemy, Satan, through matured believers who will exercise His dominion as His co-kings. For the fulfillment of His eternal purpose God created man, sent His only begotten Son to die vicariously for sinners, became the life-giving Spirit to indwell His regenerated believers, produced the church as the Body of Christ, and dispensed Himself as life and everything into His believers for their growth in life unto maturity so that they may be the overcomers to end the present age, usher in Christ's second coming, and reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom.¹ *Improving* neglects to establish God's eternal purpose and plan as the crucial context for not only our justification but also our Christian walk. This limits the meaning of our precious salvation and relegates our living as believers to a self-seeking pursuit of a kingdom reward at best and fear of punishment or loss at worst. God provides the kingdom reward as incentive not so that we would simply cease our sinful and worldly living but that He may bring His eternal purpose to its ultimate fulfillment—the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth.

Organic Salvation and the Kingdom Reward

Despite a well documented study, *Improving* overly emphasizes outward works and erroneously places the onus of enhancing the quality of eternal life on individual efforts. Each chapter encourages believers to have a righteous living and good works. While *Improving* is doctrinally accurate in its rejection of a work-dependent justification, it mistakenly promotes a works-oriented Christian life, especially one that is based on individual determination rather than the growth in the divine life. In contrast to this limited view, the Bible reveals that God's salvation of fallen humanity, based upon Christ's redemption, is judicially secure. It begins with regeneration by the divine life, continues through a gradual and organic process of sanctification, renewing, transformation, and conformation with the goal of the believers' eventual glorification, involving a thorough saturation with the divine life issuing in God's expression. Romans 5:9-10 says, "Much more then, having now been justified in His blood, we will be saved through Him from the wrath. For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." After being justified in the blood of Jesus, believers must be daily saved in His life from many negative things until they are glorified.

God's complete salvation is deeper than the outward

manifestation of good works or improved behavior. Matthew 7 is a section concerning the kingdom living of God's people in a Gospel whose subject is God's kingdom. It is important to thus note that verses 22 and 23 say,

Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.

If we could not save ourselves from sin through good works, we cannot earn the kingdom reward merely with good works. The danger of an overemphasis on good deeds risks the Lord's disapproval at the judgment seat.

Improving misses this understanding when it speaks of the building materials in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15:

By prioritizing their lives around the acquisition of earthly "treasures," they have neglected the very purpose for which Jesus saved them to begin with, and produced only that which perishes. Their works will be characterized as "wood, hay and stubble," incapable of surviving the Lord's "test by fire" at the bema seat of judgment. (47)

Improving suggests that works that the Lord will characterize as "wood, hay, and stubble" are works related to seeking earthly riches. This interpretation veers from Paul's revelation of the contrast between wood, grass, and stubble and the materials used to build God's corporate building, which is the church as the Body of Christ in this age and ultimately the New Jerusalem in the next age and for eternity. Witness Lee points out,

Gold, silver, and precious stones signify the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God. It is with these that the apostles and all spiritual believers build the church on the unique foundation of Christ. Gold may signify the divine nature of the Father with all its attributes, silver may signify the redeeming Christ with all the virtues and attributes of His person and work, and precious stones may signify the transforming work of the Spirit with all its attributes. All these precious materials are the products of our participation in and enjoyment of Christ in our spirit through the Holy Spirit. Only these are good for God's building. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 3:12, note 2)

Lee also says,

Wood, grass, and stubble signify the knowledge, realization, and attainments that come from the believers' natural background (such as Judaism or other religions, philosophy, or culture) and the natural way of living (which is mainly in the soul and is the natural life). Wood,

in contrast to gold, signifies the nature of the natural man; grass, in contrast to silver, signifies the fallen man, the man of the flesh (1 Pet. 1:24), who has not been redeemed or regenerated by Christ; and stubble, in contrast to precious stones, signifies the work and living that issue from an earthen source and have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit. All these worthless materials are the product of the believers' natural man together with what they have collected from their background. In God's economy these materials are fit only to be burned (v. 13). (Note 3)

More than seeking riches, a believer may perform good works out of his natural man, the fallen flesh, and an untransformed earthen source, all of which will be disapproved at the judgment seat and consequently burned.

God desires that all Christians in the present age be fully saved by the constant imparting of His being into theirs. This daily and gradual process results in the believer's inward growth in the divine life toward maturity. As revealed mainly in Paul's Epistles, this maturation process involves sanctification, the addition of the holy nature of God (Rom. 5:10; 6:19; 22); renewing, the addition of the new, divine element and the discharge of the old element in our soul, especially in the mind (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 4:16); transformation, the metabolic change by the divine life in a believer's being (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18); conformation, the change of our inward nature and essence as well as our outward form to match the glorified Christ (Rom. 8:29); and glorification, the thorough saturation of the divine life and nature of God, resulting in His glorious expression in humanity (vv. 30, 17; Col. 1:27; 2 Thes. 1:10).² Experientially and practically, this involves a lifetime of cooperation with the life-giving Spirit indwelling the believer's spirit. *Improving* briefly touches on this:

While one's soul is saved through faith at a point in time, his earthly life is to be saved through the process of sanctification. The believer's justification is always secure, but his earthly life can be wasted, or rendered ineffective, if he rejects the prompting of the Holy Spirit (32).

Staying close to Jesus necessarily involves walking as He walked, and "growing up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ." This includes maturing in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, all of which require some degree of dying to self (90).

The quality of a Christian's eternal life is the issue of his

experience of God's full salvation through the Spirit in the present age, not of an accumulation of good works, and his prize for reaching maturity in the divine life will be the full experience of the Triune God that matches the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose concerning man. In Philippians 3 Paul indicates that he pursued to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings so that he might attain to the "out-resurrection from the dead" as his prize (vv. 8-14). This out-resurrection refers to "the outstanding resurrection, the extra-resurrection, which will be a prize to the overcoming saints" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 11, note 2). Witness Lee further says,

All believers who are dead in Christ will participate in the resurrection from the dead at the Lord's coming back (1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). But the overcoming saints will enjoy an extra, outstanding portion of that resurrection...

To arrive at the out-resurrection indicates that our entire being has been gradually and continually resurrected.

God first resurrected our deadened spirit (Eph. 2:5-6); then from our spirit He proceeds to resurrect our soul (Rom. 8:6) and our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), until our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—is fully resurrected out of our old being by and with His life. This is a process in life through which we must pass and a race that we must

run until we arrive at the out-resurrection as the prize. Hence, the out-resurrection should be the goal and destination of our Christian life. We can reach this goal only by being conformed to the death of Christ, by living a crucified life. In the death of Christ we are processed in resurrection from the old creation to the new. (Note 2)

Improving correctly concludes,

The "carrot" Jesus puts before every believer is actually *Himself*. It is a deeper, closer, more fulfilling and enjoyable relationship with Him in eternity. Every reward, whether crown, position of authority, new name, dazzling robe, or other privilege, is representative of this deeper relationship. They are all *from* Him and *of* Him. Simply put, every reward is *more of Jesus* and *more of life* in eternity. This fuller relationship, this richer quality of eternal life, is available to all who are in Christ...and it is His desire that we enter into it. (99-100)

Conclusion

Improving's eschatological study of the correlation

Improving neglects to establish God's eternal purpose and plan as the crucial context for not only our justification but also our Christian walk. This limits the meaning of our precious salvation.

between the Christian life and eternal reward is an honest and refreshing discussion that transcends the popular myth of going to a heavenly paradise. However, in seeking to warn Christians of a dissolute living that would result in loss of the kingdom reward, *Improving* overemphasizes righteous works over the deeper process that God is organically applying to believers through His saving life. God's salvation is aligned with His eternal purpose, which is that all saved and matured believers would become His corporate expression and exercise His governmental authority as the Body of Christ. Our true reward will come from a life spent experiencing and enjoying God until we corporately become the fulfillment of God's purpose and heart's desire for eternity.

by Kin Leong Seong

Notes

¹For a more complete discussion, see John Campbell, "The Economy of God and the Consummation of the Age," *Affirmation & Critique* 13.1 (2008): 75-93. Print.

²For a more complete discussion, see Ron Kangas, "The New Jerusalem in Light of the Book of Romans," *Affirmation & Critique* 8.1 (2003): 35-49. Print.

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The Judgment Seat of Christ

In all His judgments the Lord is righteous. He is wise and just, and He will not allow His people to be loose or wrong...As God's children, we are not free to do things in a loose way. God is very strict with His people. Today, in the house of God, He exercises His family judgment according to His will to correct us that we may grow and experience more transformation. Eventually, at the Lord's coming back, He will judge us to decide whether in the coming age we shall receive a reward or punishment. This judgment will take place after our rapture.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul tells us that every believer before the judgment seat of Christ will "receive the things done through the body, according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." Alford points out that *receive* is a technical word for receiving wages. While we are still at home in the body, we should do things through it to please the Lord, that we may be rewarded for them by the Lord at His coming.

Before the judgment seat of Christ, each of the believers will give an account of himself to God for the Lord to settle the accounts with them. Matthew 25:19 speaks of this: "Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them." A *long time* signifies the entire church age, and the coming signifies the Lord's coming to the air (1 Thes. 4:16) in His parousia. To settle accounts signifies the Lord's judgment at His judgment seat in the air (within His parousia), where the believers' life, conduct, and work will be judged for reward or punishment.

When the believers appear before the judgment seat of Christ, they will give an account of how they have lived before the Lord and what kind of work they have done for the Lord after they were saved. We shall have to tell Him what we have been doing and what we have been gaining for Him. This will be very difficult, for we shall have to relate to the Lord what we have done in our life as believers. This is to give an account of ourselves to God for the Lord to settle the account with us.

At the judgment seat of Christ, the believers will be examined by the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 4:4, Paul says, "He who examines me is the Lord." Then in verse 5 he goes on to say, "So then do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who shall both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then there will be praise to each one from God." *Before the time* means before the Lord's day (1 Cor. 3:13). We do not know what is hidden in our heart. But one day the things in our heart will be made manifest, so that praise may be to each one from God. If our heart is right, good, pure, and for God, then at the judgment seat of Christ we shall be rewarded with a praise from God. Today we can hide the things of darkness and the counsels of our hearts. But all this will be brought to light and made manifest at the Lord's coming back. Then every one of us shall receive a reward accordingly.

From *The Conclusion of the New Testament* by Witness Lee, pp. 1990-1992