

An Errant View of Salvation

That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation, by David Bentley Hart, Yale University Press, 2019.

Relying mainly upon deep and dense personal philosophical speculations, emblematic of the wisdom of the age, David Bentley Hart presents in *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (hereafter *Saved*) an argument for universal salvation that he believes to be unassailable. It is instead an argument for which he provides scanty scriptural support, with out-of-context exegesis. It is also an argument that is condescendingly presented, as if to intentionally alienate his readers. But more importantly, it is an argument that diminishes the characteristic of God—righteousness—that is central to Christians’ acknowledging God’s imperative to separate Himself from sin both now and eternally.

Hart’s View of Universal Salvation

Universal salvation is an ancient and increasingly promulgated doctrine that argues for the eventual reconciliation of all humanity to God for eternity, including believers in their redeemed status and unbelievers in their sinful status. Some advocates for universal salvation even argue that demons, the evil principalities in the heavens, and, ultimately, even Satan himself will be saved. Their argument for reconciliation is largely based on the thought that God’s love and mercy will eventually be freely extended to all, allowing Him to overlook any continuing enactment of His righteous judgment.

Since the Bible presents a picture of a lake of fire that burns forever and ever, into which the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all those whose names are not in the book of life will be cast (Rev. 20:10, 15), universalists take their principal aim at the doctrine of hell (*hell* is a term that does not appear in the Bible but that is commonly expressed as the final destination of unbelievers). Hart begins his challenge to the idea of eternal punishment by appealing to the support for a universalist position in the teachings of some of the early church fathers:

There have been Christian “universalists”—Christians, that is, who believe that in the end all persons will be saved and joined to God in Christ—since the earliest centuries of the faith...They even believed in hell, though not in its eternity; to them, hell was the fire of purification described by the Apostle Paul in the third chapter of 1 Corinthians, the healing assault of unyielding divine love upon obdurate souls, one that will save even those who in this life prove unworthy of heaven by burning away every last vestige of their wicked deeds. (1)

Hart appeals to Basil of Caesarea, placing himself in this same august company, saying, “A large majority of his fellow Christians (at least, in the Greek-speaking Eastern Christian world that he knew) believed that hell was not everlasting, and that all in the end would attain salvation” (2). Throughout *Saved*, the existence of some form of punishment is not denied but, rather, portrayed as being only temporary until the purgative

effects of fire have achieved their purpose of wiping away the offenses that relegated the punished to such a severity of judgment. *Saved* speaks of two distinct eschatological horizons:

the more proximate horizon of historical judgment, where the good and evil in all of us are brought to light and (by whatever means necessary) separated; and the more remote horizon of an eternity where a final peace awaits us all, beyond everything that ever had the power to divide souls from each other. (109)

Saved further describes these two eschatological horizons as “the end of history in a final judgment and...the end of judgment in a final reconciliation” (109).

This contrived speculation appeals merely to the good side of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; furthermore, the phrase *forever and ever* in Revelation 20:10 does not support the possibility of two distinct eschatological horizons pertaining to God’s judgment. *Saved* supports its position that judgment is not eternal by appealing to 1 Corinthians 3:15, where Paul speaks of being “saved, yet so as through fire.” Hart states that the church fathers’

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view of universal salvation corresponds to what Paul speaks of in this verse. If Hart is accurate in saying that the fathers apply this verse to unbelievers and if Hart is in agreement with this application, then his argument for two distinct eschatological horizons quickly falls apart, because Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3 are not directed at nor do they apply to all of humanity but only to redeemed humanity in the church, whose works, when judged by fire, will either remain or be consumed.

Having aligned himself with some of the church fathers and having suggested that the resolution to the conflict between universal salvation and eternal judgment is the existence of two distinct phases of judgment, Hart then begins to excoriate both the thought of an eternal judgment and the persons who hold such a view, stating that such a view is "plainly bereft of the least element of mercy" (23).

If Christianity is in any way true, Christians dare not *doubt* the salvation of all, and that any understanding of what God accomplished in Christ that does not include the assurance of a final *apokatastasis* [restoration] in which all things created are redeemed and joined to God is ultimately entirely incoherent and unworthy of rational faith. (66)

Hart regards the acceptance of the doctrine of eternal judgment as

an unpremeditated corporate labor of communal self-deception, requiring us all to do our parts to sustain one another in our collective derangement. I regard the entire process as the unintentional effect of a long tradition of error, one in which a series of bad interpretations of scripture produced various corruptions of theological reasoning, which were themselves then preserved as immemorial revealed truths and, at the last, rendered impregnable to all critique by the indurated mental habits of generations—all despite the logical and conceptual incongruities that this required believers to ignore within their beliefs. (19)

He gives little ground to the thought that conviction and respect for the righteous acts of God come into play when Christians reflect upon eternal punishment based on God's righteousness. This righteousness is demonstrated to and realized by sinners who were called to repentance and is further realized when they experience the assurance of salvation, which rests upon God's irrevocable acceptance of them in response to their hearing of faith. Hart, in contrast, states,

I am convinced that practically no one who holds firmly to the majority tradition regarding the doctrine of hell ultimately does so for any reason other than an obstinate, if largely unconscious, resolve to do so, prompted by the unshakable conviction that faith absolutely requires it. (28)

He belittles those who argue for the existence of eternal judgment, stating, "The only reason for their inability to make the argument clear is that the argument itself happens to be intrinsically nonsensical" (46-47). He further states,

I honestly, perhaps guilelessly believe that the doctrine of eternal hell is *prima facie* nonsensical, for the simple reason that it cannot even be stated in Christian theological terms without a descent into equivocity so precipitous and total that nothing but edifying gibberish remains. (202)

Hart offers this partial explanation for the foolishness of Christians who believe the gibberish of the "doctrine of eternal hell"—they are unwittingly bowing to what is essentially terror indoctrination by the institutional instruments of the church to ensure submission and docility; he says,

I cannot help but believe that the infernalist [Hart's characterization of the doctrine of hell] view was fated to prevail simply as an institutional imperative (or, at any rate, an institutional convenience). The more the church took shape as an administrative hierarchy, and especially as it became an organ of and support for imperial unity and power, the more naturally it tended to command submission from the faithful by whatever permissible methods of persuasion lay near at hand. (206)

In this institutional argument there is explicit contempt for the "institutionalization" of the teaching of an eternal divine punishment, but there is also subtle contempt for Christians who have allowed themselves to be so accepting of the teachings, as elsewhere he states, "Maybe there are a great many among us who can be convinced to be good only through the threat of endless torture at the hands of an indefatigably vindictive God" (201). Actually, in his four philosophical meditations (Part II of *Saved*), Hart is in greater tension against God Himself than the supposedly duped followers of a belief in eternal judgment because in his consideration, the existence of an eternal judgment by God could come only from an "indefatigably vindictive God."

Hart's View of a God Who Exacts Eternal Judgment

Because Hart believes in universal, eternal salvation, he is forced to reflect on the characteristics of a God who would exact eternal punishment, acknowledging that "the more basic and comprehensive issue remains that of the essential character of the God Christians think they believe in" (52). No doubt, Hart believes in God, but he believes primarily in a God of love and mercy, a love and mercy that will eventually override God's temporary righteous judgments and not consign those who rejected the knowledge of God that was set before them in creation and in Christ to an eternal judgment. To Hart, a God without such love and universal mercy could possess only a malicious heart.

How viciously vindictive the creator of such a hell would have had to be to have devised so exquisitely malicious a form of torture and then to have made it eternal, and how unjust in condemning men and women to unending torment for the “sin” of not knowing him even though he had never revealed himself to them. (11)

Hart considers God’s judgment to be unjust when it is based on the “‘sin’ of not knowing him even though he had never revealed himself to them.” This thought echoes the argument that is often proffered by atheists who cannot accept the existence of a God who would condemn those who have never had the opportunity to believe in Christ, having never heard the gospel of salvation. Hart states, “Only a monstrous justice would refuse to assign guilt according to the capacities and knowledge of the transgressor; and a glory revealed by cruelty or vengeance is no glory at all” (132). This argument falls on the simple fact that God’s judgment is always commiserate with the level of knowledge that a person possesses and who then either accepts or rejects this innate and/or revealed knowledge. In the age of grace, the knowledge of God is conveyed through the message of Christ as the gospel. Those who hear the word of the truth and who subsequently reject it have no excuse. In the ages prior to the coming of Christ, the knowledge of God was conveyed through the things made in creation, as Paul notes in Romans 1:18-21:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold down the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known of God is manifest within them, for God manifested it to them. For the invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made, so that they would be without excuse; because though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or thank Him, but rather became vain in their reasonings, and their heart, lacking understanding, was darkened.

Paul’s reference to the knowledge of God, including His eternal power and divine characteristics, being perceived by the things made, is applicable not just to the ages prior to the coming of Christ; rather, God’s eternal power and divine characteristics have been “clearly seen since the creation of the world,” and this knowledge has been and still is “manifest within them [created humanity].” Indeed, many Christians initially turned to God through some realization regarding and appreciation of God’s creation; only later did they realize that what they were apprehending was the Creator, whose

name and person is Christ the Son (John 1:3). Every human being has a level of exposure to a knowledge of God in his or her environment, which environment is prescribed by God, who then makes a righteous appraisal of this one’s response to such knowledge; everyone is therefore “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). In many respects, it may be easier in this age for those who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel to be reconciled to God; this is because the “foolishness of the preaching” (1 Cor. 1:21) is often perceived, under the blinding thoughts of God’s enemy, as being “foolishness” and thus is rejected. In contrast, it is not difficult to accept the thought that a higher source is responsible for all the created wonders of the world.

When countering some “attempted justifications for the idea of an eternal hell” (47), Hart states,

If there really is an eternal hell for finite spirits, then it has to be the case that God condemns the damned to endless misery not on account of any sane proportion

between what they are capable of meriting and how he chooses to requite them for their sins, but solely as a demonstration of his power to do as he wishes. (47)

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This characterization of God as being subject to the whims of His power fails to see that God’s exercise of His power is subject to the limitations of His divine characteristics. God is righteous, and the exercise of His power must conform to the standard of His righteousness. For example, while He is righteous in His condemnation of sinners, He must also be righteous to justify repentant sinners. He cannot arbitrarily deny divine reconciliation to a sinner who has genuinely believed into Christ simply to demonstrate His power; He happily stays His wrath because He cannot deny His righteous attribute. Hart claims that “in judging his creatures God would reveal himself not as the good God of faithfulness and love, but as an inconstant god who can shatter his own covenants at will” (73). Actually, God has righteously bound Himself to His covenants. With God, there is “no variation or shadow cast by turning” in regard to the exercise of His divine attributes (James 1:17).

Hart’s Philosophical Arguments

Hart’s conclusions about the characteristics of a God who would judge and assign an eternal punishment to even those who do not approve of holding God in their full knowledge (Rom. 1:28) are conclusions drawn primarily from deeply rooted philosophical arguments. He covers such issues as

God's mercy, God's creation, and the human exercise of free will in his philosophical meditations, presenting arguments against eternal judgment but rarely providing supporting scriptural corroboration for his conclusions; he merely asserts the logic of his conclusions. Hart's philosophical meditations follow the tradition of men and are according to the elements of the world (Col. 2:8) and should therefore not be regarded as genuine wisdom, despite the erudition on display in his argumentation. In the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom and philosophies cannot know God (1 Cor. 1:21). Furthermore, the excellence of Hart's speech, the persuasive words of his wisdom, cannot stand against a faith that is rooted in the wisdom of God (2:1, 4-5). It is foolish to attempt to argue with Hart within the sphere of his philosophical conjectures, because his mastery of these "elements of the world" is indeed impressive, and such efforts would never convincingly lead him to conclude that he is not right in his own eyes. Indeed, he states, "I cannot alter my views (since they are almost certainly correct)" (108). In a telling accusation against those who hold an "infernalist" view of eternal judgment, he states that such a position

poses its own premises not as logically established or analytic truths, but simply as necessary correlates of its own foregone conclusions. The argument is nothing but a naked assertion, one that can recommend itself favorably only to a mind that has already been indoctrinated in obedience to a much larger and more pernicious set of assumptions. (20-21)

In many respects this assessment applies to the conclusions that Hart draws from his own philosophical meditations. He begins with the foregone conclusion that an eternal judgment is a cruel and unjust form of torture, lacking in love and mercy, and then he brings in his philosophical arguments to garner support for his views, which are nothing more than naked assertions that emanate from a self-indoctrinated mind filled with a pernicious set of assumptions. This is not surprising in that the one who judges practices the same things (Rom. 2:1). As Hart judges, so he practices.

Hart's Scriptural Support

Rather than exhaustively attempting to gain support for his views based on philosophical appeals, Hart would garner greater support if the starting point for his defense of the "truth" of a universal salvation came from the Scriptures. He takes a position that many of the "standard soteriological models of Christian tradition" are "products of profound misreadings of the language of Christian scripture" (24). In his treatment of the doctrine of hell, he also speaks of a "deeply misguided scriptural exegesis" (49). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that "a certain presumptive authority has to be granted to whatever kind of language the Bible uses most preponderantly" (93). In what he clearly regards as such preponderance of evidence, Hart lists twenty-three passages on pages 95 through 102, citing them in both Greek

and English; out of a book of more than two hundred pages, *Saved* sets apart only eight pages to present the scriptural support for a universalist salvation. For each passage in his list, Hart gives no explanation as to how the passage supports his view, asking his reader to take for granted that it simply must be interpreted as a reference for universal salvation. Rather than an exposition of each passage in the list, Hart gives a blanket statement prior to his list: "There are a remarkable number of passages in the New Testament, several of them from Paul's writings, that appear...to promise a final salvation of all persons and all things, and in the most unqualified terms" (94).

Although Hart's list includes 1 Timothy 2:4, he addresses this verse separately, presumably because it is the most salient verse in presenting the "truth" of universal salvation; he says,

The eternal perdition—the eternal suffering—of any soul would be an abominable tragedy, and therefore a profound natural evil; this much is stated quite clearly by scripture, in asserting that God "intends all human beings to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4). (81-82)

Hart's special attention to this verse possibly comes from his conviction that *intends* suggests an irrevocably willful act on the part of God to save all humanity. The translation "intends" is Hart's own, and while it is supported by the Greek, his is apparently the only translation that translates the Greek word as "intends." The New International Version translates it as "wants." The American Standard Version translates it as "would have," and, in a corollary to "would have," the King James Version translates it as "will have." Clearly, these translations point to a semantic notion of desire. In recognition of this, the New American Standard, Revised Standard Version, English Standard Version, New King James Version, Darby's New Translation, and the Recovery Version translate the Greek word as "desires." This word, *desires*, points primarily to God's enlarged heart for all humanity and to His willingness to save all, within the confines of a deference to the totality of His divine attributes, especially His righteousness.

While emphasizing 1 Timothy 2:4, Hart rather cagily dismisses the verses in the book of Revelation that pertain to an eternal judgment; he does this by casting doubt on the book itself, saying, "There are perhaps a couple of verses from Revelation [20:10, 15] (though, as ever when dealing with that particular book, *caveat lector*)" (93). By *caveat lector*, Hart suggests to his readers that any interpretation of Revelation and those verses in particular should be handled with skepticism. He further states, "Admittedly, it is so arcane a text that any absolute pronouncements on its nature or meaning are almost certainly misguided" (106). This dissimulation allows Hart to dismiss the text as not

having any credible basis for validation and acceptance. And finally, “The book does contain a few especially piquant pictures of final perdition, if that is what one chooses to cling to as something apparently solid and buoyant amid the whelming floods of all that hallucinatory imagery” (107). Even if the references are “hallucinatory,” they still speak of a “final perdition,” and thus, they cannot be cavalierly set aside simply because they offend modern views, which scoff at mystical signs in general and in the book of Revelation specifically (1:1).

Following his initial warning of *caveat lector* in regard to the verses in Revelation (93), Hart proceeds to list twenty-three passages as, presumably, evidence of the preponderance of scriptural proof for the teaching of universal salvation in the Bible. I will briefly address each one. The translations are from Hart.

Romans 5:18-19: So, then, just as through one transgression came condemnation for all human beings, so also through one act of righteousness came a rectification of life for all human beings; for, just as by the heedlessness of the one man the many were rendered sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be rendered righteous. (95)

Condemnation came to all men through the transgression of one man, Adam. Christ came to open the possibility for a rectification in life to all men through His one act of righteousness. This rectification of life is readily available to all men who were rendered sinners, and even the rendering of righteousness is available to all men. This is possible because the one righteous act of Christ will be applied to everyone who believes and thus receives the righteous Christ through faith. The first *all* refers to all humanity; the second *all* refers to the subset of believers, who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness through faith (v. 17).

1 Corinthians 15:22: For just as in Adam all die, so also in the Anointed [Christ] all will be given life. (95)

The first *all* refers to all humanity; the second *all* refers to the subset of believers, who are in the Anointed.

2 Corinthians 5:14: For the love of the Anointed constrains us, having reached this judgment: that one died on behalf of all; all then have died... (96)

Christ died on behalf of and for all, and in His death all corrupted humanity also died, but the application of the

efficacy of His death is limited to those who have been constrained by the Anointed’s love.

Romans 11:32: For God shut up everyone in obstinacy so that he might show mercy to everyone. (96)

Might speaks only of God’s capacity to show mercy to all; it does not suggest that He has to do so. Rather, He will show mercy to those to whom He will show mercy (9:15).

1 Timothy 2:3-6: ...our savior God, who intends all human beings to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of truth. For there is one God, and also one mediator of God and human beings: a human being, the Anointed One Jesus, who gave himself as a liberation free for all. (96)

See my earlier comments in regard to the word *intends*. *Liberation free for all* speaks only to the broad reach of Christ’s mediatorial action for all humanity; the verse does not imply that all will avail themselves to His available mediation and, hence, escape judgment.

Titus 2:11: For the grace of God has appeared, giving salvation to all human beings... (96)

There is an availability of salvation for all human beings, but this does not constitute a guarantee that God’s salvation

will be accepted and received by all human beings.

2 Corinthians 5:19: Thus God was in the Anointed reconciling the cosmos to himself, not accounting their trespasses to them, and placing in us the word of reconciliation. (97)

The cosmos, humanity, has been reconciled to God through Christ’s death on the cross, but the word of this reconciliation still needs to be accepted and received in order for a reconciliation to occur.

Ephesians 1:9-10: Making known to us the mystery of his will, which was his purpose in him, for a husbandry of the seasons’ fullness, to recapitulate all things in the Anointed, the things in the heavens and the things on earth... (97)

The recapitulation, or the heading up, of all things in Christ is related more to judgment than to salvation.

Colossians 1:27-28: By whom God wished to make known what the wealth of this mystery’s glory is among the gentiles, which is the Anointed within you, the hope of glory, whom we proclaim, warning every human being and teaching every human being in all wisdom, so that we may

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present every human being as perfected in the Anointed. (97-98)

The perfecting of human beings in Christ requires human beings to be in the Anointed. Every human being in the Anointed can be perfected, but not every human being is in the Anointed.

John 12:32: And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will drag everyone to me. (98)

Dragging, or drawing, everyone to Christ is the power of the cross, but someone who is drawn can still reject Christ's sacrifice. If receiving salvation were a result of being dragged, then such a salvation would be predicated on God's coercion rather than on a repentant sinner's response.

Hebrews 2:9: But we see Jesus, who was made just a little less than angels, having been crowned with glory and honor on account of suffering death, so that by God's grace he might taste of death on behalf of everyone. (98)

Christ tasted death on behalf of everyone to make salvation available to all. The availability of salvation to all, however, does not ensure the acceptance of salvation by all.

John 17:2: Just as you gave him power over all flesh, so that you have given everything to him, that he might give them life in the Age. (98-99)

Christ's authority to give life to all humanity is unlimited, but any thought that this authority will be automatically and universally applied to all human beings ignores the fact that the giving of life is based on faith, which is exercised by some and rejected by others.

John 4:42: And they said to the woman: "We no longer have faith on account of your talk; for we ourselves have listened and we know that this man is truly the savior of the cosmos." (99)

Savior of the cosmos refers to the all-inclusive applicability of Christ's redemptive death on the cross, but it is not an assertion that all will avail themselves to the salvific effects of Christ's redemptive accomplishment.

John 12:47: ...for I came not that I might judge the cosmos, but that I might save the cosmos. (99)

Christ's coming was not first and foremost for judgment, but this does not mean that judgment is eliminated should a person reject the Savior who came first and foremost to save. The possibility of judgment is indicated in the very next verse, which says, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that will judge him in the last day" (v. 48).

1 John 4:14: And we have seen and attest that the Father has sent the Son as savior of the cosmos. (99)

Christ's being the Savior of the cosmos is only an affirmation of His person and work; it is not a confirmation that the salvation available through His person and work will be universally applied.

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not delaying what is promised, as some reckon delay, but is magnanimous toward you, intending for no one to perish, but rather for all to advance to a change of heart. (100)

In His love, the Lord has no desire for anyone to perish. His desire that all would advance to repentance is a reflection of His love, but the existence of such a desire does not mean that all will advance to repentance, apart from the satisfaction of God's righteousness through their belief.

Matthew 18:14: So it is not a desire that occurs to your Father in the heavens that one of these little ones should perish. (100)

According to the context of verse 14, *little ones* refers to the little ones who believe into Christ (v. 6), not to all humanity in general.

Philippians 2:9-11: For which reason God also exalted him on high and graced him with the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend—of beings heavenly and earthly and subterranean—and every tongue gladly confess that Jesus the Anointed is Lord, for the glory of God the Father. (100)

Every knee and every tongue are the knees and tongues of angels in heaven, the knees and tongues of living believers on earth, and the knees and tongues of dead believers under the earth.

Colossians 1:19-20: For in him all the Fullness was pleased to take up a dwelling, and through him to reconcile all things to him, making peace by the blood of his cross [through him], whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens. (101)

The reconciliation of all things to Himself is an eternal accomplishment, but this reconciliation still must be received and applied through faith.

1 John 2:2: And he is atonement for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the whole cosmos. (101)

Atonement for the sins of the whole cosmos speaks of Christ's atonement, which is freely available to all, but this atonement still must be received through faith in order to be effectual for the salvation of a sinner.

John 3:17: For God sent the Son into the cosmos not that he might condemn the cosmos, but that the cosmos might be saved through him. (101)

This verse speaks of the expression of God's love in the incarnation, but it does not obviate the need for the satisfaction of God's righteousness, which satisfaction was the primary motivation for God's sending of His Son (Rom. 8:3-4).

Luke 16:16: Until John, there were the Law and the prophets; since then the good tidings of God's Kingdom are being proclaimed, and everyone is being forced into it. (102)

If everyone is being forced into the kingdom, there is no need for human cooperation, such as repentance; salvation thus becomes a coercive experience. The Recovery Version translates the final clause "everyone forces his way into it." This properly places the initial responsibility for entrance into the kingdom through the application of Christ's salvation upon those who hear the gospel.

1 Timothy 4:10: ...we have hoped in a living God who is the savior of all human beings, especially those who have faith. (102)

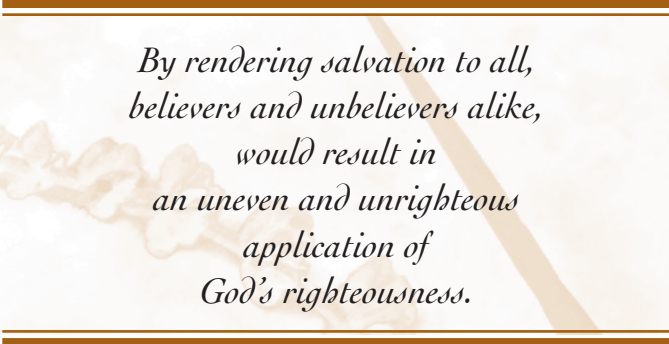
Christ being the Savior of all human beings, but especially of those who have faith, speaks of a limited, rather than universal, receiving of salvation. Christ's salvation is available to all, but it is applied uniquely to those of faith.

When commenting on those who would challenge his view—those who believe that the above pericopes are anything but universalist in intent—Hart brushes aside any possibility that the meaning of these passages are not as clear as he understands them to be. In this list of pericopes, however, a lack of Hart's certainty is on display, at least in regard to Colossians 1:27-28, which he introduces with the words *And presumably* (97); Hebrews 2:9, which he introduces with the words *And perhaps* (98); and Matthew 18:14, which he introduces with the words *Maybe even* (100). Given that he is not unquestioningly certain that these verses are indicative of universal salvation, more consideration on his part should be given to interpretations that counter his understanding. Instead, he disregards the possibility of alternative, non-universalist interpretations, saying,

That long inventory of seemingly universalist scriptural pericopes that I supplied in my Second Meditation has been explained away, in its every discreet item, again and again down the centuries of Christian history. Often the effect has been absurd. (162-163)

Hart's declaring non-universalist interpretations of these pericopes to be attempts, down the centuries, at explaining away universalist interpretations subtly suggests that such attempts have failed and that thus, a non-universalist interpretation can be dismissed. It is easier to dismiss, however, interpretations of verses taken in isolation from the context of the individual verse. Relying solely on the content of Romans 5:18, for example, which Hart translates, "So, then, just as through one transgression came condemnation for all human beings, so also through one act of righteousness came a rectification of life for all human beings" (95), he writes,

It has been obligatory for devout infernalists to insist that in the space of a single verse (Romans 5:18)—of a single sentence, in fact—the word "all" changes from a reference to every human being throughout the whole of time into a reference solely to the limited number of those elected for salvation, and does so without the least notice being given. (163)



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Both instances of *all*, in fact, refer to all humanity. However, while the first *all* points to the certainty of condemnation to all humanity, the second *all* points only to the possibility of a rectification of life for all human beings, not a determinative outcome for all human beings. Without the

possibility of a rectification of life for all, God's salvation would be unevenly and, hence, unrighteously applied. By rendering salvation to all, believers and unbelievers alike, again would result in an uneven and unrighteous application of God's righteousness. The "all" who are rendered righteous in experience are those who have received the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness through faith (v. 17).

The Righteousness of God in Judgment

The case for universal salvation is framed more substantially as a necessary issue of God's love overcoming the dictates of judgment that issue from God's righteousness. The satisfaction of God's righteousness, however, is an imperative for salvation, universal or otherwise; without such a satisfaction, the love of God is insufficient to justify and reconcile. Before a human being is reconciled to God, his status is that of an enemy of God, because God's righteousness, offended as it is, must be ameliorated (v. 10). No amount of love on God's part, even a love that is universally large toward all, can cause God to suspend His demand for righteous accountability. God's demand for the satisfaction of His righteousness was answered by the sending of His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin in order to

condemn sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (8:3-4). Such a sending of His Son also demonstrated His love for the world (John 3:16). God loved and loves the world, but since there was no one righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10), He sent His Son, who subsequently lived a righteous life and became an acceptable sacrifice to stay the wrath of God on repentant sinners, those who have believed into His Son.

Both righteousness and love are attributes of God; that is, God is righteousness itself, and He is also love itself. There is no hierarchy of these attributes in the immanent being of the Triune God. Love does not supersede righteousness, and neither does righteousness ignore love. To deny either attribute in the expressive acts of forgiveness, justification, and judgment that issue from His divine being would be to deny Himself, which He cannot do (2 Tim. 2:13). God's attributes bind Him in His actions toward all humanity, but even more, they bind Him to what He is in Himself. Despite His desire to save humanity based on His love for humanity, He cannot ignore His righteousness; however, even though His wrath related to sin is righteous, He also cannot cast aside His love by capriciously sanctioning sinners for the wages of their sins without offering any possibility of salvation. The satisfaction of God's righteousness through the death of Christ and the subsequent application of His death to those who believe into Him issue in the believers' salvation. Consequently, this salvation is secure, because God cannot righteously continue to demand satisfaction from us when He has obtained it from Christ, who paid the price on our behalf. A line from a hymn written by Augustus Montague Toplady and adapted by Watchman Nee states this fact well: "God would not have His claim on two— / First on His Son, my Surety true, / And then upon me laid" (*Hymns*, #1003).

A mutual operation of divine love and righteousness is surely present in any consideration of eternal punishment. Love cannot abrogate the application of God's righteous judgments, and judgment must be imbued with love. With judgment comes discipline, and discipline, in principle, is not void of love (Heb. 12:6). How precisely such love is manifested in relation to eternal judgment is a consideration best left with God. As a man, it is best not to answer back to God for His withholding of a full explanation (Rom. 9:20). As much as universalists believe that God's love will win out over God's righteousness, this is only a human sentiment that refuses to acknowledge that the ways of the Lord are righteous and true (Rev. 15:3).

Judgment Involving Separation

Hart's visceral reaction to the notion of an eternal judgment of fire is based ultimately on a consideration that a materialistic form of judgment in an eternally burning lake of fire would be a cruel form of torture and debasement, both of

which would be beneath a God of goodness. Hart is not to be faulted for regarding the lake of fire in Revelation as a physical realm of torture and torment, as this has been the widespread view ever since the publication of Jonathan Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. In his sermons Edwards urged his listeners to escape the torments of hell by turning to Christ; it follows naturally that those who were saved as a result of Edwards's speaking would accept the certainty of such a punishment for unrepentant sinners. Hart also accepts without question this view of the lake of fire as a place of torment, not realizing that the lake of fire is not a physical instantiation of eternal judgment but a sign of judgment. The book of Revelation is a book of signs (1:1) that speak to overarching spiritual realities. For example, the Lion-Lamb in 5:5-6 is not a real lion or lamb but the Lord Jesus, who is fierce toward His enemies and gentle toward His believers. The seven Spirits burning before the throne are not seven separate Spirits (4:5; 5:6) but the one Spirit intensified sevenfold in His economical actions to consummate the age. And the beast out of the sea is not a literal beast but Antichrist (13:1-4). In this pattern of symbolic interpretation, the lake of fire should also be interpreted as a spiritual symbol.

In biblical interpretation it is always good to go back to the first mention of an item in order to establish a principle for interpreting subsequent references to the same item. The first reference to fire occurs in Genesis 3:24, with God's use of a flaming sword to guard the way back to the tree of life, a symbol of the life of God available in and through Christ. The flaming sword shows forth God's righteousness in response to the presence of sin. With the fire of God's righteousness in place, humanity could not partake of the tree of life without satisfying God's righteous requirement. Without such a satisfaction, there is a need for separation between righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14); the lake of fire perfectly matches this principle of separation. There is no hint of torture being enacted upon the first humans—only the actuality of separation through banishment.

In many respects the garden of Eden is a precursor to the New Jerusalem. There are features in Genesis 1 and 2 that are developed and writ large in Revelation 21 and 22. There are the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2), a flowing river (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1), and precious stones (Gen. 2:11-12; Rev. 21:18-21). There is separation due to the offense to God's righteousness in Genesis 3:24, and there will be separation according to God's righteousness in Revelation 22:15, as indicated by the word *outside*, applying to various categories of people who love and make a lie. When the first humans in their fallen state were cast out of the garden, they were effectively sent into a world of pain, submission, toil, and sweat, one that was separated from God. In the lake of fire in eternity future, those who are outside will be separated from God because of their unreconciled, unrighteous

status. Separation, not torture, is the principal significance of the lake of fire, the sign of eternal judgment.

Hart's Tone

On a final note, when seeking to build a case for a controversial position, a modicum of humility is helpful to at least gain some willingness on the part of a reader to honestly engage with the arguments. Hart, however, eschews this approach and, instead, adopts a highly condescending tone toward his critics and, by extension, toward all readers who would deign to question his logic and conclusions. He speaks of a "slight shiver of distaste at the naïve religious mind at its most morally obtuse" (12), suggesting that his moral values are superior to those of the "naïve." He boasts of having "mastered all of the more common arguments for the moral intelligibility of the idea of a hell of eternal torment" (12), suggesting that there is no response to his arguments that he cannot demolish (so spare your efforts and simply accept his conclusions). He claims that the explanations of the infernalists reflect only "moral idiocy" presented in a way of "spiritual subtlety" (19), suggesting that those who hold to the teaching of an eternal form of judgment are simply gullible and duped.

He chides those who accept the plain word of the Scriptures regarding eternal judgment, considering them "too morally indolent to care about anyone other than themselves and perhaps their immediate families" (31), suggesting a lack of love in their hearts. Such caustic remarks seem to be intentionally aimed at driving his readers away from seriously engaging his views. It may be that Hart senses that he is speaking into the wind and that his views cannot possibly prevail, given the climate of religious indoctrination and that thus, there is no loss in further driving away those who disagree. In fact, the more he drives them away, the more his moral status is elevated in his own eyes. This is regrettable because, just as there is no scriptural basis for accepting *Saved's* errant view of universal salvation, there is equally no basis for despising and not receiving all those who have a genuinely held belief in an eternal accounting according to the righteousness of God (Rom. 14:1, 3, 10). No matter what position one takes in regard to the issues raised in *Saved*, we all should walk according to love in regard to one another.

by John Pester

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Hymns. Living Stream Ministry, 1980.

An Incomplete Presentation of Regeneration

New Life in Christ: What Really Happens When You're Born Again and Why It Matters, by Steven J. Lawson.
Baker Books, 2020.

In *New Life in Christ: What Really Happens When You're Born Again and Why It Matters* (hereafter *New Life*), Steven J. Lawson, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, elucidates upon the transformative effect and fundamental changes brought about by regeneration in believers. Drawing from John 3:1-21 as his primary text, Lawson expounds the details of the Lord Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, particularly His charge that the Pharisee and teacher of Israel be born anew of water and of the Spirit so that he might have a new life in Christ in the kingdom of God. Although there are many points that we can affirm in *New Life's* presentation of a believer's new birth in the divine life, there are also significant errors in its presentation of regeneration, including a failure to see regeneration as

a necessary element in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, the conflation of the human spirit and soul, the lack of a distinction between God's redemption and His subsequent salvation through the operation of the divine life, and the neglect of the corporate aspect of regeneration in God's eternal purpose. *New*

Life's oversights regarding the truth concerning regeneration limit its claim to unveiling what really happens when we are born again and, more importantly, fail to show why it matters.

Affirmation: Regeneration Being Our Spiritual Birth

At the outset, *New Life* establishes that the miracle of the new birth is the "radical and complete transformation of a person's life that is performed by God" (16). Based on the first mention of our being "born of God" in John 1:12-13, *New Life* accurately shows that by believing in the name of Jesus Christ, that is, by willingly surrendering our life and humbly submitting to His "supreme authority," we receive Christ and become children of God (19). In regeneration God's life is conceived within our new heart of flesh that replaces our old heart of stone, and the Holy Spirit resides in our "innermost being" (20-21). This miracle of the new birth is not the result of our family heritage, personal efforts, or personal choice but "exclusively a divine work of God in the human heart" to remake each person into the "likeness of Jesus Christ" (21-24).

The conversation in John 3:1-21 offers the most poignant

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example to showcase the need of regeneration. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest and most fundamental sect with regard to the law, and a ruler of the Jews, that is, a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body in Israel. In short, he was a model of virtue, a paragon of wisdom and knowledge, and a revered leader. Yet the Lord Jesus charged such a one, who commanded the respect and honor of others, to be born anew (v. 3). Although Nicodemus had reached the pinnacle of human success, within him the unique need of all fallen mankind was not met—a spiritual birth with the life of God. *New Life* correctly points out that “Nicodemus—and every member of the human race—entered this world with a radically corrupt sin nature,” which is irrecoverably averse to everything of God (68-69). *New Life* says that “from [Nicodemus’s] conception, the deadly poison of sin had already permeated his every faculty, marring his mind, affections, and will” (70). We can agree with *New Life*, affirming this condition to be true of all humans by birth. Like all unbelieving sinners, Nicodemus was spiritually bankrupt, and all areas of his life were wrought with an “all-pervasive depravity of sin” (113). His self-righteousness was worthless, and all his religious activities amounted to nothing (72). None of his self-effort or self-improvement could rectify his condition or avail him of salvation. Hence, all humankind, who are corrupted to the core, need a new life granted by a second birth of a heavenly and divine origin. *New Life* rightly says, “Being born again does not mean a good person becomes better or a sick person becomes well...It is, more accurately, a dead person coming to life” (94).

New Life interprets our new and spiritual birth revealed in John 3:3 and 5 as the receiving of a new heart. The scriptural base of its interpretation is Ezekiel 36:25-27. Of particular emphasis, verse 26 says, “I will also give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” For our regeneration God performed a heart “transplant” by removing our old, decadent heart and replacing it with a new heart that has new affections, a new priority, and passion for God. According to *New Life*, our new God-given heart reorients our entire being toward God in five aspects. First, our heart that was hardened, incapable of responding to the things of God, resistant and even opposed to God, and pursuing sinful desires and worldly things has been replaced with a new heart that loves God, desires the kingdom of God, seeks the truth, loves what God loves, and rejects what God hates. Second, our new heart with the faculty of the mind enables us to know God, to understand His word, to have the mind of Christ, to have His eternal mindset, and to “have an accurate evaluation of ourselves and a right estimate of our relationship with God” (81). Third, our new heart gives us the ability to believe, accept, discern, and grasp what God is saying in the Scriptures. Fourth, our old heart that was “self-centered” and “self-deceiving” has been transplanted with a heart that

exalts and is full of praise for God (82). Fifth, our new heart leads us to obey God and to keep His commandments, to depart from the broad way of the world system that leads to destruction, to journey on the narrow path of obedience to God that leads to life, and to no longer walk in darkness but in the light.

A believer’s heart is new because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In its interpretation of John 3:6, *New Life* observes that there is “a fundamental principle of nature that like produces like” (109). Based on this principle, *New Life* then correctly states, “The flesh can only produce that which pertains to the flesh. Human nature can only beget human nature. Similarly, the Spirit will always produce a spiritual birth and can only produce that which belongs to the realm of the spirit” (110). *New Life* indicates that regeneration is an operation of the life-giving Spirit, who comes to indwell the believers at the moment of their spiritual birth. Furthermore, *New Life* rightly equates the indwelling Spirit with the abiding of God Himself within the believers, who become the “holy temple where the living Spirit abides” (118). *New Life* accurately points out that every believer, who has been indwelt with the life-giving Spirit, immediately begins a journey with Christ: “As soon as this new life is imparted to us, a new walk with the Lord begins in pursuit of holiness” (119). We may accept this view insofar as regeneration represents the initiation of the Christian walk and that the “pursuit of holiness” implies and involves the continuing work of the indwelling Spirit to bring believers to full maturity. However, *New Life*’s notion of regeneration reaches beyond the scope presented in the Scriptures.

Critique

New Life’s presentation of a believer’s spiritual birth contains significant errors that overstate the meaning of regeneration by not recognizing the part of man that is regenerated, omitting the role of God’s judicial redemption, neglecting the other processes in God’s salvation in life, and missing the corporate aspect of becoming children of God. These missteps are serious enough to question *New Life*’s understanding of what really happens when we are born again; they are substantial enough to render its presentation a failure in explaining why regeneration matters.

Failing to See the Positive and Most Important Aspect of Regeneration

New Life is adept at explaining man’s need for regeneration: even when our need for forgiveness of sins and justification before God is met, we, as fallen human beings, would still have no hope without the divine life being added into us. However, *New Life*’s anthropocentric view belies a great deficiency found throughout the book, that is, the revelation of God’s need for man’s regeneration in order to fulfill His eternal purpose. Contrary to the general implication of

the book, humanity's need for regeneration predates the fall. God has an eternal purpose, and to fulfill His purpose, He created man as a vessel for His expression (Gen. 1:26). In order to express God, humanity needs the divine life in addition to the created, human life. Hence, even after creation, humanity was incomplete without the uncreated, eternal life of God. This need is illustrated by God's placement of humanity before the tree of life that humanity may receive and be regenerated with God's life (2:8-9). To receive God's life and nature for His expression in order to fulfill God's eternal purpose in creating humanity is the most significant aspect of being born again.

Conflating the Soul and Heart with the Spirit

The root of *New Life's* lack of full understanding related to regeneration is its conflation of the human spirit with the soul. In statements such as "When the Holy Spirit regenerates the human heart, He reproduces a holy life in the soul" (109) and "Being born of God is divine life within the soul" (17), *New Life* considers humanity as having two parts—the soul (spirit) and the body. The divine revelation, however, clearly shows that humanity is tripartite, that is, having a "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thes. 5:23). The double *ands* in verse 23 intentionally differentiate the three constituent parts of man, leaving no ambiguity as to a distinction. Hebrews 4:12 speaks directly about the dividing of soul and spirit. In Philippians 1:27 Paul distinguishes the spirit and the soul in function: "Only, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, that whether coming and seeing you or being absent, I may hear of the things concerning you, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together along with the faith of the gospel." If the apostle understood *spirit* and *soul* to be synonymous, he would be unnecessarily repeating himself in this verse, as indicated by its grammatical construction. Actually, he is purposely indicating to the Philippian believers that their standing firm in one spirit does not guarantee that they are also united in their soul; hence, he charges the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit and to strive together with one soul.

It is crucial to understand the distinctions of the parts of humanity, especially the spirit and the soul, in God's complete salvation in general and in regeneration in particular. The body, with its five senses, was created to interact with the physical world, with all its material things, and allows us to have a practical existence. The human soul, which consists of the faculties of the mind (Psa. 13:2; 139:14; Lam. 3:20), the emotion (1 Sam. 18:1; 30:6; S. S. 1:7; 2 Sam. 5:8; Isa.

61:10; Psa. 86:4; Judg. 10:16), and the will (Job 7:15; 6:7; 1 Chron. 22:19), not only corresponds to the psychological world but is the seat of our personality. The human spirit, with its functions of conscience (Rom. 9:1; cf. 8:16), fellowship (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9), and intuition (1 Cor. 2:11), is the inward organ that contacts, receives, and contains God.

The New Testament indicates that the heart is neither another part of nor synonymous with the soul but that it includes all the faculties of the soul—mind (Matt. 9:4; Gen. 6:5; Heb. 4:12), emotion (John 16:22, 6), and will (Acts 11:23; Heb. 4:12)—as well as the function of the conscience in the spirit (10:22; 1 John 3:20). The heart is related to both the soul and the spirit. According to their main purpose in creation, the heart is the loving organ in man, the soul is intended to express and reflect the Lord, and the spirit is meant to contact, receive, and contain God as the Spirit.

Regeneration occurs in the deepest part of humanity—the human spirit. In John 3:6 the Lord Jesus said plainly, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

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The first Spirit mentioned here is the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, and the second spirit is the human spirit, the regenerated spirit of man. Regeneration is accomplished in the human spirit by the Holy Spirit of God with

God's life, the uncreated eternal life. Thus, to be regenerated is to have the divine, eternal life (in addition to the human, natural life) as the new source and new element of a new person. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 6, note 2)

New Life rightly understands *Spirit* as referring to the Holy Spirit, who produces the "spirit nature" (111), yet it fails to see that the recipient organ of the spiritual life and nature is the human spirit, especially when it quotes 4:24, which says, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness." Here, again, the word *spirit* refers to our human spirit, not to merely our spiritual nature; the inner organ within us that corresponds to and that can worship God, who is Spirit, is our human spirit. *New Life* fails to see that the place of regeneration is the human spirit, not the soul or the heart. Conflating the soul and the heart with the spirit hinders the Christian experience of God's complete salvation.

Not Distinguishing God's Judicial Redemption from His Subsequent Salvation through the Operation of the Divine Life

In the chapter entitled "Soul Cleansing," *New Life* suggests

that being “born of water” in John 3:5 symbolizes the “inner cleansing of the soul in the new birth” (98). *New Life* explains that many scholars agree that this verse may be translated, “Unless one is born of water, *even* the Spirit, one cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,” thereby indicating that *water* and *the Spirit* could be used interchangeably, as water “simply illustrates the inward working of the Spirit” (101). While *New Life* is correct to reject the interpretation that outward, water baptism is a means of salvation, it wrongly interprets being “born of water” as merely “a synonym for the inner purifying work of the Holy Spirit” in regeneration (99). In verse 5 the Lord Jesus spoke plainly to Nicodemus by using an easily identifiable reference—John the Baptist—who had previously spoken to the Pharisees, saying, “I baptize you in water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is stronger than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11; cf. John 1:33; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). In John 3:5 being “born of water” alludes to John the Baptist’s ministry of repentance by water baptism; in the same principle, being “born of Spirit” corresponds with Jesus’ ministry of baptism by the Holy Spirit. Witness Lee says,

“Water” was the central concept of the ministry of John the Baptist, that is, to terminate people of the old creation. “Spirit” is the central concept of the ministry of Jesus, that is, to germinate people in the new creation. These two main concepts together constitute the concept of regeneration. Regeneration is the termination of people of the old creation with all their deeds, and the germination of people in the new creation with the divine life. (*Recovery Version*, v. 5, note 2)

Being immersed in water is a symbol of the termination and burial of our evil, corrupt, and dead self through our repentance. All sinners must recognize their defiled and incurable condition, one that is worthy only of termination, and their repentance and believing in Christ result in their receiving the Spirit as the germination of the divine life. Believers are regenerated by being born of water, that is, through the termination of the old man by repentance, and of the Spirit, that is, through the germination of the divine life in the Spirit.

In the same chapter *New Life*’s presentation of regeneration extends incorrectly into the redemptive aspect of God’s complete salvation, which includes forgiveness of sins, washing away of sins, justification by God, reconciliation to God, and positional sanctification. The Old Testament portions concerning being washed in water referenced by *New Life* refer to the efficacy of the blood rather than to the cleansing of the Spirit as water. When speaking of washing away our uncleanness, *New Life* expounds Zechariah 13:1, which says, “In that day there will be an opened fountain for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.” *New Life* argues that this verse speaks of God’s cleaning our stain of sin by David’s

descendant, Christ, through regeneration, that is, through the “inner washing of the soul by the Spirit” (101). The confusion between soul and spirit notwithstanding, the core of *New Life*’s misinterpretation is that it mixes aspects of God’s redemption with His salvation in life. The fountain in Zechariah 13:1 is a type of the outpouring of blood from Christ’s pierced side for the accomplishing of redemption (John 19:34). The water flowing from Christ’s side is a type of the outpouring of the divine life. The pouring out of blood and water occurred simultaneously, but there is a clear distinction between blood and water. The blood is for our redemption—to deal with sins—and the water is for imparting life—to deal with death.

Regeneration Being the Initial Step of God’s Salvation in Life

New Life recognizes that the pollution and depravity of sin in humanity require a work of God to “alter the interior of our souls” (97), but its dichotomist view of humanity hampers its ability to see the Spirit’s work beyond regeneration. Because the human spirit is not properly distinguished from the soul, regeneration is regarded as the definitive conclusion to the experience of salvation. Instead of viewing regeneration as the initial step of God’s continual salvation in, by, and with the divine life spreading from the human spirit into the soul, *New Life* sees regeneration as a conclusive end in the transformation of believers in their inner life:

Regeneration is a comprehensive alteration of our whole person. The new birth produces an alteration at every level of our nature. Sin ruined every part of us, but the Spirit renews every part of our inner being. In the new birth, God reestablishes His reign in every region of our souls. The new birth is as wide-ranging in renewing our inner life as sin was in defacing it. Grace remodels the entire human soul.

Regeneration produces the change necessary to enter the kingdom of God. This inclusive transformation is all-encompassing. It is a holistic renovation of our souls by the Holy Spirit. The new birth alters our whole person with far-reaching change. This is the greatest change that could ever take place within our souls. This renovation comes from the new birth. (114)

This overreaching definition of regeneration does not adhere to the biblical revelation that a spiritual birth is only the first step in a lifetime of gradual transformation through the operation of the divine life. Regeneration makes this possible by setting us on the path toward full salvation.

In the New Testament, especially in Paul’s Epistles, the “greatest change that could ever take place within our souls” (114) begins with regeneration and continues throughout our Christian walk. We can testify of this fact from personal experience, for despite the marvelous change engendered

by being born anew, we can sense that we are not drastically more Christ-like the moment after believing than how we were before we professed our faith in Him. The biblical record is clear that in addition to the application of God's redemption, through which sinners are judicially forgiven, justified, reconciled, and sanctified before God, they are regenerated to become children of God (John 1:12-13). Just as children at birth possess the human life and nature of their parents, the spiritual birth bestows the divine life and nature to God's regenerated children. And just as children need to grow and develop in their human life toward adulthood, we as new believers must grow unto maturity in the divine life, even unto the reigning in life over sin, death, the world, and Satan (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 5:17). Thus, following regeneration, we need the Lord, who is the great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), to shepherd us with His continual impartation of the divine life into us through the guileless milk of the word for our divine growth (2:2). We are dispositionally sanctified by the saturation of the divine and holy nature of the Spirit in our inner being, which is accomplished by the washing of the water in the word (Rom. 6:19, 22; Eph. 5:25-27; John 17:17). Concurrently, we are being renewed by the purging away of the old nature of our old man and by the imparting of the divine essence of the new man into us for the uplifting and renewing of our mind, emotion, and will (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:2). *Transformation* describes the metabolic process in which the divine element spreads into our entire being and in which the old, natural element is discharged (v. 2; 2 Cor. 3:18). As we are being renewed and transformed, we are increasingly being conformed, shaped, in life to be the reproduction of Christ, the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29). Finally, we will be glorified as the mature sons of God (v. 30), fully saturated with the God of glory in our entire tripartite being. This is the hope and destiny of glory that regeneration affords all believers (Col. 1:27). (For a more thorough presentation of God's salvation in life, see Ed Marks, "The Believers' Union with the Triune God in His Organic Salvation," *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1996, pp. 3-12.)

The Corporate Aspect of Regeneration

Regeneration also has a corporate aspect, a matter not mentioned in *New Life*. John 3:3 and 5 speak of the kingdom of God, which is the divine realm where God reigns and into which we enter by being born anew. This realm is a realm of life in the same sense that all animals are part of the animal kingdom. Through regeneration the Spirit enters into

us to enliven our spirit and to indwell us. Simultaneously, by our believing into Christ, we enter into Him to become a new creation (v.16; 2 Cor. 5:17). In Adam we are the old creation, but we became the new creation by being in Christ. The old creation does not have the divine life, but the new creation possesses the life of God. By being in Christ and by having His life, we have a union in life with Him. This union with Christ constitutes us to be the many members of Christ, to be His Body (Rom. 12:4-5). The Body of Christ is a corporate entity, even an organism, composed of many members, who are one in life with Christ the Head and with all the other members. Therefore, regeneration saves sinners not merely for them to be individual believers but mainly for them to become a corporate entity for His expression according to His eternal purpose.

Conclusion

Regeneration is a fundamental step in our Christian life because it is the initiation of all spiritual experiences. *New*

Life's presentation adequately covers some basic truths concerning our new birth, but it errs in omitting the role of regeneration in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, in conflating the spirit and the soul, and in overextending the concept of regeneration to include the transformation of the soul. Ultimately, re-

generation matters because the divine life enables believers to fulfill God's eternal purpose in His economy, which is to have a corporate expression through His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people.

by Kin Leong Seong

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An Eschatology of Allegiance and Obedience

Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study, by Constantine R. Campbell. Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Constantine R. Campbell's *Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (hereafter *Hope*)

is the second volume of a series of thematic examinations of Pauline thought, the first being the well-received *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (hereafter *Union*). Comparing his recent investigations, Campbell states that while union with Christ is the “webbing that connects all of Paul’s key theological commitments,” eschatology is the “frame of the web” (453). Comprehensive in scope and attentive to the Scriptures, there is much to affirm about *Hope*. It is the first focused examination of Paul’s eschatological outlook within the modern guild since Geerhardus Vos’s 1930 magnum opus *The Pauline Eschatology*. This is noteworthy as Paul’s life and writings were indelibly shaped by the race set before him and the prize that awaits faithful believers (Heb. 12:1; 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Additionally, as with *Union*, Campbell surveys the Pauline corpus to apprehend Paul’s eschatological schema, a decision that goes against the grain of the modern academy’s wrong-headed distinction between “accepted” and “disputed” Pauline Epistles (7).¹ Lastly, Campbell situates *Hope* within an existing line of inquiry that recognizes Paul’s “inaugurated eschatology”—the notion that the age to come has “broken into the present through the resurrection of Christ” causing “the old age and the new age [to] now coexist in an overlapping fashion” (5). This realization causes the historical events of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection to be experienceable by Christians today and, ultimately, saves *Hope* from being a compendium of doctrinal speculation about “last things” (5). Notwithstanding, specific elements of *Hope* warrant critique—notably, its lack of appreciation for the organic aspects of the kingdom of God and a misapprehension of the importance of its manifestation in the millennium.

An Overview

Hope is comprised of three parts. Part 1 discusses methodological issues (ch. 1) and traces the past century of scholarship examining Pauline eschatology (ch. 2). Part 2 is exegetically oriented and examines the granular data of the Pauline corpus in relation to eschatological themes (chs. 3–13). These eleven chapters are more expansive than simple word studies, as Campbell aims to include all scriptural passages undergirding each theme. For example, when discussing judgment, he includes references to “wrath, anger, blamelessness, the judgment seat of Christ, destruction, salvation, and other concepts that are clearly related to the event of final assessment” (133). As a result, key verses are covered in several chapters when relevant to multiple themes (e.g., Romans 8:18 is discussed in chapters examining resurrection (170), inheritance (217), the new creation (235), and glory (257-258)). Part 3 is a theological study that synthesizes Campbell’s exegetical insights (chs. 14–17) and delineates his conclusions about Pauline eschatology (ch. 18). As space disallows fully rehearsing this four-hundred-sixty-three-page book, what

follows is illustrative, not exhaustive, of claims made by Campbell about Paul’s eschatology.

Chapter 3 outlines the foundation of Paul’s eschatology—a two-age/two-realm framework, where *age* is defined as “an era or epoch,” and *realm* refers to “a sphere of rule or influence” (65). The present age (realm) is visible, ruled by sin and death, and characterized by evil and darkness; the age to come is invisible, ruled by grace and righteousness, characterized by goodness and light, and relates to judgment and salvation (65-67). Though the age to come properly belongs to the future, it has already broken into the present via Christ’s death and resurrection, and thus, these two realms “exist side by side, coexisting and competing for space” (101) in a state of continuous warfare (101-102). For Campbell, the composition of each realm is determined by allegiance to its ruler (69, 89, 91). The positive realm is the kingdom of Christ, “the sphere of Christ’s rule, under which his people exist and live” (99, cf. 102). Members of this kingdom “are to remain loyal to him in every respect” and “resist any temptation to follow sin again as though they are still subject to it” (69). Instead, they must “live according to the values of his realm—according to righteousness, grace, and godliness” (102).

In chapters 4–6 Campbell discusses the parousia, the last day, and judgment. Importantly, he notes that for Paul, the parousia is not just a historical event. Rather, “the expectation of the *parousia* has a transformative effect on the present lifestyle of believers” (109).² Additionally, he argues that the parousia inaugurates the end of this age, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment of God, whereby God’s enemies are punished while Christ shares His glory with those who belong to Him (122). Lastly, Campbell notes that while Paul does not advocate salvation by works, he does incorporate the notion of reward within his soteriology (148). Thus, judgment does not merely impact the future of believers. Rather, “the notion of reward at judgment is also held out as motivation,” encouraging believers to live “in faithful allegiance to Christ, knowing that he will reward their devotion, come what may in their current situation” (165-166).

In chapter 7 Campbell contends that “there can be no more central theme for Paul’s eschatology than the resurrection of the dead” (202). However, this is not merely a future hope. Rather, “the spiritual reality of participation in Christ’s death and resurrection has implications for life here and now”—namely, that believers are made dead to sin and alive to God and, thus, must live and act accordingly (169). Additionally, Paul links Christ’s resurrection to the believers, both in terms of quality (i.e., Christ’s immortal and incorruptible resurrected body means that the believers’ resurrected bodies will be the same) and

certainty (believers will rise because Christ has risen; this is “as certain as the harvest that follows the firstfruits”) (174).

Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the related themes of eternal life and inheritance. Notably, Campbell states that for Paul, “eternal life is viewed not simply as a state into which believers will enter but rather is a domain in which they will live” (205). Entrance into this future domain is “determined by one’s orientation now—either in allegiance to the flesh or in allegiance to the Spirit” (208). Thus, eternal life is not merely life without end. Rather, “it is a *kind* of life...a morally informed and shaped life” that is “characterized by righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness” (210-211). Regarding the believers’ inheritance, Campbell contends that the Spirit is *not* the promised inheritance of Abraham but only a “down payment” (221). He admits that “it is not entirely clear what the promised inheritance actually *is*,” suspecting it could be the world or the kingdom of God. Ultimately, this ambiguity leads him to suggest that “the world will one day *be* the kingdom of God” (233).

In chapter 10 Campbell’s discussion concerning the new creation yields two conclusions. First, Paul’s use of “new creation” language for individuals describes a person in Christ under the realm of Christ. Being under this realm “changes who they are, their allegiances, and their purpose for living” (236). Second, Campbell argues that Paul’s “new creation” language in relation to creation (Eph. 1:9-12; Col. 1:15-20) indicates that there are not “two created orders—an ‘old’ creation waiting to be replaced by a superior, new creation” (241). Rather, though the new creation is a better version of the old, continuity exists between the two, and there is “no sense in which one is scrapped and replaced with the other” (241). In chapter 11 Campbell concludes that while it is unclear if Paul expects widespread Israelite repentance, he does believe that a remnant representing believing Israel—of which he considers himself a part—will be saved (252-253).

In chapter 12 Campbell argues that for Paul the glory of God is “the highest purpose of humanity and of creation in general...the greatest motivation for serving Christ...the highest hope to which believers aspire,” and “the ultimate end of all things” (254). Hence, glory affects the believers’ present experience—they must “wait and avoid the trappings of this current age” in anticipation of God’s glory (285). Campbell admits that it is difficult to

articulate what glory *is* “apart from its eternal and incomparable nature,” though it is clear “that it pertains to God’s nature as well as to his deeds” (285-286). In chapter 13 Campbell defines Christian hope as not merely wishful thinking but “the certain expectation of what God will do based on his promises and his past faithfulness” (287); moreover, it is grounded “in the person of Christ... and all that he has done, is doing, and will do” (311). Ultimately, Campbell contends that “genuine Christian living is nothing without hope for the future,” inclusive of the believers’ hope of bodily resurrection, the redemption of creation, and eternal life, all of which make “following Christ overwhelmingly positive even in the face of the overwhelming negativity and evil of this present age” (321).

Chapters 14 and 15 detail two theological characterizations of Pauline eschatology. First, Paul’s eschatology is “irreducibly Christocentric,” as its formative shaping occurs through his “reflection on the meaning and significance of Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension” (325). Specifically, it is Christ’s death that condemns sin and defeats death; His resurrection, as the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead, that makes justification possible; His ascension, that bestows Him with lordship over all powers and

authorities; and the participatory realm created by these events, that allows believers to experience salvific benefits both presently and eschatologically (355). Second, Paul’s eschatology contains several features that are “apocalyptic”: (1) the notion that past mysteries have been revealed (365-367, 374-376); (2) descriptions of the coming of the Son of Man (367-371); (3) exhortations concerning believers’ watchfulness (371-373); and (4) a “soteriology of victory,” where salvation is not merely an individual reward but a cosmic triumph over the evil powers that presently reign (376-377).

Chapter 16 discusses the age to come. Campbell strongly insists that Paul envisions a future age of restoration—not a discontinuous new heavens and new earth—and proffers a re-reading of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 19–22 to forward this thesis (405-420). Additionally, he states that while Paul’s writings are not sufficient to support either a theology of hell or annihilationism (399-401), Paul is likely not a universalist due to his definitive affirmations of divine judgment—specifically, a judgment according to works (401-405). Regarding the tension between this judgment and justification by faith, Campbell proposes two resolutions. The first emphasizes relationality and

Specific elements of Hope warrant critique — notably, its lack of appreciation for the organic aspects of the kingdom of God and a misapprehension of the importance of its manifestation in the millennium.

suggests that believers who are not concerned about pleasing their Father may not be genuine believers; the second recognizes the serious weight that Paul places upon transformation and proposes that true faith will be accompanied by good works (394-395). In chapter 17 Campbell discusses the present age, which, as mentioned, involves participation in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and is characterized by believers' continued allegiance to the age to come in lieu of the darkness presently surrounding them (423, 450).

The Kingdom Today: Objective Allegiance or Organic Constitution?

The related themes of allegiance and obedience are paramount in Campbell's portrayal of Pauline theology. For Campbell, the transfer of human beings from the authority of darkness to the kingdom of God is a "transferral of allegiance" (91), and thus, "those who have allegiance to Christ constitute his kingdom" (89). Membership in the kingdom of God entails "fidelity to its values and principles" (101) and requires believers to "remember who they are as members of the realm ruled by God," to "remain loyal to him in every respect," and to "resist any temptation to follow sin again as though they are still subject to it" (69). This emphasis is also present in Campbell's previous monograph *Union*, where he defines identification with Christ as the "believers' location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship" (413).

In its broadest sense, *the kingdom of God* refers to God's general rule over the entire universe from eternity past to eternity future, with the Scriptures testifying that God is particularly interested in establishing this realm on the earth, even to the point that the world "will one day *be* the kingdom of God" (*Hope* 233). However, there is a controversy in the created order, originating with the rebellion of Satan, involving the cooperation of fallen humankind, and resulting in the establishment of a competing kingdom. For this reason, the Triune God was incarnated as the man Jesus Christ, who Himself is the kingdom of God (Luke 17:20-21). As the unique God-man, Christ defeated Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom (v. 17), inflicted damage upon Satan's kingdom during His earthly ministry (12:26-28), and passed through death and resurrection to become a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), thus enabling human beings to enter, live within, and enjoy the divine and mystical realm. Today Christ as the seed of the divine life is being sown into human beings to develop *within them* into a kingdom, a realm of the divine life where God rules and reigns (Mark 4:26-29).³ Though there is nothing wrong in suggesting that believers should display loyalty and fidelity toward Christ, an inordinate focus on these extrinsic relational orientations grossly misapprehends the organic nature of the kingdom

of God.⁴ Indeed, the establishment and expansion of the kingdom are not primarily carried out by accruing loyal citizens; rather, something far more glorious is taking place.

Just as organisms must possess the plant life to be part of the plant kingdom, humans must possess God's life to be part of God's kingdom. In other words, the transfer of humans from the authority of darkness to the kingdom of God is not merely a "transferral of allegiance." The unique entrance into God's kingdom is regeneration—being born of God to have the life and nature of God (Eph. 4:18; John 1:12-13; 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Moreover, just as plants do not retain membership within the plant kingdom by adhering to outward regulations but, instead, are governed by the spontaneous growth and maturity of their organic capacities, believers are not outwardly regulated by rules and principles. Rather, all regenerated persons possess an organic capacity to spontaneously fulfill the kingdom requirements as they grow and mature in the divine life. In sum, God's reigning in the realm of the divine life "is not outward but inward, not objective but subjective, and not by the exercise of power but by the sense of life" (Kangas 4).

The kingdom of God today, the realm of life where God has the authority to rule and reign within His believers, is the genuine church life (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 4:11). Though Campbell notes the eschatological character of the church (462), he regrettably excludes Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 4:20, and Colossians 4:11 from exegetical analysis and, for that matter, any discussion in *Hope*. This oversight disallows a necessary investigation of the intimate relationship between the kingdom of God and the genuine church, an issue present elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:1-18; Rev. 1:5-6). This results in Campbell's offering a shallow account of the church as merely mirroring the experiences of individual believers on a corporate level. In actuality, the church "occupies a central and crucial place in the divine administration, for it is the one place on earth that is the kingdom of God and that also brings in the kingdom of God" (Kangas 6). Ultimately, the church will crush Satan under her feet (Rom. 16:20), dealing with the ultimate controversy in the universe. It is the church, as the matured bride, that will end this age by ushering in the wedding day, the millennium, the manifestation of the kingdom (Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7; 20:1-6); and it is the church that will be consummated as the New Jerusalem, whose center is the throne of God and of the Lamb with God's authority and power, which rules God's eternal kingdom, that is, the new heaven and new earth (21:1; 22:1-3).

The Kingdom to Come—the Millennium

In his final chapter Campbell argues that Paul's position

regarding the millennium is irrelevant for the purposes of his book, as his concern is to “think through eschatology from what Paul actually says, rather than to answer preconceived questions that may come from other quarters” (452). However noble this rationale ostensibly appears, it results in a distorted account of Pauline soteriology. Though Campbell rightly recognizes an antinomy related to Paul’s statements regarding justification by faith and a future judgment related to works, he incorrectly resolves it by doubting the faith of those who do not presently care for their relationship with God and/or will not have good works to show on the day of judgment (393-395). To uphold the pure revelation of the Bible, we must unequivocally affirm both the eternal salvation of believers—irrespective of their present condition—and the judgment of believers according to their righteousness through works. Paul lucidly states that defeated believers “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15), a solemn warning for believers who are judicially redeemed and experience the first stage of salvation (regeneration) yet do not fully mature in the divine life during their lifetime. In *Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, Witness Lee states,

When Paul says, “he shall suffer loss,” he means loss of reward, not loss of salvation. To suffer loss here absolutely does not mean to perish. The salvation which we have received in Christ is not by our works (Titus 3:5) and is eternal, unchangeable in nature (Heb. 5:9; John 10:28-29). Hence, those believers whose Christian works will not be approved by the judging Lord and who will suffer the loss of reward will still be saved. God’s salvation to all believers as a free gift is for eternity, whereas the Lord’s reward to those whose Christian works are approved by Him is for the Kingdom age. The reward is an incentive for their Christian work, and it is not given to all believers. (246)

Though Campbell acknowledges that the “reward” at judgment is held out as a motivation to believers (165-166), he is unable to account for what its loss entails as well as for the content of the reward. While its loss entails the believers’ discipline in lieu of enjoying the wedding day, the reward is multifaceted, including the reception of a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), an outstanding portion of the resurrection beyond the believers’ general resurrection (referred to as the “best resurrection” in Revelation 20:5 and the “out-resurrection” in Philippians 3:11),⁵ and ultimately, the full enjoyment of the manifestation of the kingdom during the millennium.

Conclusion

Campbell’s insistence that Paul’s eschatology formatively shapes the believers’ present lives via their entrance into a participatory realm inaugurated by Christ is commendable. Moreover, his recognition of other aspects of Paul’s Christocentric eschatology, such as Paul’s grounding of Christian hope in the person and work of Christ and his identifying Christ as the firstfruits of the believers’ future bodily resurrection—thus ensuring both the quality and certainty of their hope—is similarly laudable. However, Campbell’s inordinate focus on the outward aspects of the kingdom misapprehends the intrinsically organic nature of the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life. Moreover, his dismissal of the millennium as “irrelevant” to Pauline eschatology distorts his account of Pauline salvation, which unequivocally includes both eternal security and dispensational reward or punishment. Notwithstanding, these critiques do not minimize *Hope’s* positive contributions to Pauline studies.

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by Michael Reardon

Notes

¹To be clear, this decision is not based on Campbell’s explicit or implicit affirmation of Pauline authorship of these Letters. Rather, Campbell em-

employs Brevard S. Childs’s canonical approach, which focuses upon the ecclesial reception of the Pauline corpus as opposed to determining the authorship of each Epistle. In fact, Childs rejects direct authorship of several Pauline Epistles (Childs 79) but nevertheless argues that the entire corpus is worthy of study to “instruct, admonish, and sustain the apostolic faith of the church” (112).

²Here, Campbell quotes Pieter G. R. de Villiers, “In the Presence of God: The Eschatology of 1 Thessalonians,” in Jan G. van der Watt, *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, 316.

³For further reading on Christ as the kingdom of God and the seed of the divine life, see Witness Lee, *The Kingdom*, pp. 20-28. Additionally, the Spring 2009 and Spring 2012 issues of *Affirmation & Critique* are devoted to the themes of the kingdom of God and the kingdom, respectively.

⁴While Campbell does link eternal life to a divine realm, he argues that it is a *future* realm (not a present reality), stating that “believers *anticipate* living under the reign of righteousness” (213, emphasis mine). Per Campbell, the believers’ entrance into this future realm of life is “determined by one’s orientation now—either in allegiance to the flesh or in allegiance to the Spirit” (208).

⁵Hope posits no link between the reward for believers' living in the present age (2 Cor. 5:10) and the out-resurrection. When commenting on Paul's uncertainty in Philippians 3:11 (εἴ πως; "if perhaps"), Campbell suggests that Paul's uncertainty of reaching the ἐξανάστασιν relates to the "how" of the *general* resurrection—i.e., the physical and biological processes surrounding it (193).

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The Gospel of the Kingdom Seed

In Mark 4:26-29 the Lord Jesus said that the kingdom is like a man who sows seed into the earth. The seed grows, the blade appears, the ear appears, and finally it is harvested. The kingdom is a seed that is sown into the earth and that grows until it reaches maturity, at which time it is harvested. The seed is the Lord Jesus as the shining One. We all are the soil into which the Lord Jesus as the seed has been sown. The seed grows and eventually will produce the harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the seed of life who has been sown into us and who grows in us until He reaches maturity at the time of harvest. When the crop is ripe, there will be the harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom. The growth of the seed within us is the process of the kingdom. On the one hand, we are in the kingdom, but on the other hand, we are in the process of the kingdom. For example, in a wheat field seeds are sown into the soil. The seed then grows until the tender young sprouts appear. The growth continues until the sprouts bring forth ears, fruit, and eventually are fully ripened. Then there is the harvest of the field. This is a picture of the process and manifestation of the kingdom. Now we are in the process of the kingdom. Today we have the seed of the kingdom growing within us. This growth of the kingdom will bring us to the harvest, and that harvest will be the full manifestation of the kingdom.

Let us compare Luke 18:29 and Mark 10:29. Luke 18:29 says that we leave certain things for the sake of the kingdom. Mark 10:29 says that we leave the same things for the sake of the gospel. This proves that the kingdom is the gospel. *The kingdom* and *the gospel* are synonymous terms and are used interchangeably. We must declare that the kingdom is the gospel. If we do not realize that the gospel is the kingdom, we are deficient in our understanding of the gospel. The gospel is not only a matter of the forgiveness of sins, redemption, justification, sanctification, or salvation. The gospel is also a matter of the kingdom. What is the kingdom? The kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the seed of life who has come into us. When this seed of life came into us, we were regenerated. By regeneration, we were born into the kingdom (John 3:3, 5). Regeneration was our transfer. By regeneration, we were transferred out of the authority of darkness into the kingdom of God. Hallelujah! This is the genuine gospel!

The entrance into the kingdom is not an outward entrance but is by an inward rebirth. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (v. 5). In other words, when the Lord Jesus comes into us, He brings the kingdom into us. This is why He said that the kingdom is in the midst of you (Luke 17:21). This is the Lord Jesus, the seed of life, sown into us and growing in us all the time. We are in the process of the kingdom.

Second Peter 1:3, 4, and 11 tell us that God's divine power has granted to us all things relating to life and godliness. By these we become partakers of the divine nature. Since we share the divine nature and all things which relate to life and godliness, we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom. When the Lord Jesus comes into us, He brings with Him all things relating to life and godliness, including the very nature of God. By this we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom. This is the process of the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is not merely a dispensation.

How do we enter into the kingdom? It is not by learning or by studying or by keeping any outward regulations. It is by regeneration. We enter into the kingdom by the Lord Jesus coming into us and giving us all things relating to life and godliness. All things relating to life and godliness are now inside of us. Do not despise the little seed. That little seed is all-inclusive: the roots, the stalk, the branches, the leaves, the blossom, the fruit—all these things come out of that little seed. All things relating to life and godliness have been given to us, so we are partakers of the divine nature (v. 4). By this we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom—not just an entrance but a rich entrance.

From *The Kingdom* by Witness Lee, pp. 25-27