Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Reflecting Upon God's Grace



When we think about God's grace, we must approach it with the splendor and complexity inherent in how God manifests and expresses Himself. God's grace is theologically defined as God's unmerited favor. I like to define grace in these terms: "Getting something good when I don't deserve it." But is there more to grace than this?

Since the time of the Reformation, theologians have defined grace in at least two categories: common grace and saving grace. The first category, God's common grace, refers to God's goodness that is enjoyed in everyday life by both the saved and the unsaved. Jesus hinted at this when He said "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 4:45 ESV). God is gracious even to the unsaved by providing order in the universe that allows one to carry out life without any need for saving faith. The crops of the righteous do not necessarily yield more than the unrighteous. God's common grace is experienced in common life by common human beings.

If you are a good Bible scholar, you may recognize that Jesus was using this illustration as concluding evidence for a primary point he was making in the Sermon on the Mount. His point was not to unpack the merits of common grace (this was assumed knowledge). His point was to bring out the amazing kindness of God which is to be seen in those who follow Him. The preceding verses read: "43You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Jesus was ushering in an outrageous value system that would characterize those in the Kingdom of God, those who willingly bow their knee to the true King, Jesus

the Messiah. [Note: This value system is expounded on in Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy (San Francisco: Harper/Collins 1998).]

The gift of saving grace was the prerequisite for being able to show common grace, which in my opinion is anything but common. Loving one's enemy, praying for those who persecute you is unnatural and untenable without the love of God Himself infusing one to die to self and live for another cause. This was not a warm and cozy fireside chat; it was a battle cry for all who would take up their cross, deny self and come follow Jesus. The only way a human being could live out this outrageous new code of honor was due to the radical relationship God offered through His Son. God's saving grace is so transformational for us who believe because we would finally experience an unconditional love that the world system cannot give. God Himself loves His enemy—namely us! (Col 1:21). In acknowledging saving grace, we get something good (love from God) which we don't deserve. That is the basis of grace, which is the basis of God's character.

So what does all of this have to do with us who believe? We're saved. Period. But that's not the end of the story. God uses us to be evidence of His transformational love to those who have yet to bow the knee to King Jesus. God uses us to be His walking billboards of who He is. We are supposed to make the watching world jealous of us (in a good way), so that they will see the source of all delight is really God Himself. The saving grace God gives us allows us to move toward others with an unnatural and untenable love. Without some supernatural explanation, our lives should not make any sense to unbelievers.

The question is: do we live in such a way that really causes the watching world to scratch their head and ponder what in the world motivates us to be such gracious people? Is that the reputation that God's people have among those who are in the world? Unfortunately, this does not tend to be the perception. So that means that we will have to be even more strategic about embracing opportunities God gives us to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" in all its many forms. That means we will need to depend on God's grace to flow through us when our flesh is crying out to be satisfied by being judgmental, vindictive or angry.

One counterintuitive way to grow in becoming more gracious is to ask God to help us become more aware of our ungracious ways. We can be broken over our internal lack of grace to someone who invades our space at the grocery store or to a friend who talks solely about her problems without overt concern over our own issues. When we treat people like annoyances, threats and problems to fix the clear message of God's grace gets muffled. This should grieve our hearts and lead us to a place that confesses: "I can't (fill in the blank with your own struggle: love, treat people like You do, forgive . . .), but You can." Our dependence on God to love through us becomes a lifeline of His grace to us. And maybe as we participate in showing His common grace, He will use that to lead hearts to trust in His saving grace.

Dr. Christy Hill

Questions for Reflection:

· What does God's grace reveal about His character and why should grace define our new identity in Christ?

· Why is common grace an implied assumption about Kingdom life?

· What difference does it make if I know about common grace and saving grace as theological constructs?

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John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection



John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection

By James M. Hill

The Problem: Can Justified Christians Achieve Perfection Through a Sudden Working of the HOly Spirit in Their Lifetimes and Subsequently Live in Sinless Perfection?

Because God is perfectly holy, he cannot have fellowship with unrighteous, fallen people who descended from the seed of Adam after the Fall (Gen 3:6). Humans, as image bearers of God, lost fellowship with God, but God provided for their salvation by condescending in the form of the God-Man to atone for their sin. God gave new spiritual life to all that repent of their sin and trust in the finished work of the Son of God on the cross at Calvary. Through this spiritual rebirth, God imputed the righteousness of Christ and declared them justified before Him.[1] This treatise examines whether or not God, who declared believers positionally righteous (justified), also provided the means of grace to be instantaneously holy or sanctified. This is what came to be known as John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection. Is God's grace a discrete, stair step affair, with justification as the first measure of grace in the lives of believers, Christian perfection the second, and sanctification everything upwards after the first step? Or is sanctification a lifelong process unable to be totally completed in a believer's lifetime? Does the Holy Spirit impart a second, sudden working of grace such that believers are entirely sanctified, thus eliminating their sinful natures in their natural lifetimes? Are there three levels of people, the lost, the justified, and the entirely sanctified, or just the first two? Can accurate theology be developed or even validated upon the basis of personal experience, or is it a purely scholarly affair?

INTERPETATIONS THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH

Most Reformers and Evangelicals on Sanctification

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) states, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die until sin, and live unto righteousness."[2] This view of gradually increasing holiness is typical of the Reformers and evangelicals, except for the traditions that arose out of the Wesleyan movement, including the Methodist, Holiness, and Nazarene traditions. Unlike the Roman Catholic doctrine that posits sanctification as the increase of justification, the tradition of the Reformers and

evangelicals abides by a solid distinction between the two concepts, "while affirming that the two are inextricably related." [3] Lewis and Demarest summarize this theological position by stating:

In terms of differences, justification is a legal declaration of right standing before God (imputed righteousness), whereas sanctification makes the believer existentially holy (inherent righteousness). Moreover, justification is an instantaneous event, whereas sanctification is a lifelong process. Finally, justification allows for no degrees, whereas sanctification admits of degrees.[4]

One of the keystones of this position is the dual nature of the Christian. On one hand, believers are purified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Corin 6:11). They are accounted positionally righteous before God through faith in Jesus and his sacrificial death (Eph 2:8-9, Heb 10:10). On the other hand they still possess a sinful nature inherited from Adam as a result of the Fall, and don't always do the things that God calls them to.[5] Paul said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."[6] "Christians realize entire sanctification or moral perfection not in this life but in the life to come when they behold Christ (1 John 3:2)."[7] Calvin believed in a lifelong process of sanctification. Demarest and Lewis quoted Calvin as stating, "We teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness."[8] Luther held a similar view and made the following statement in *Table-Talk* No. CCLVI:

Original sin, after regeneration, is like a wound that begins to heal; though it be a wound, yet it is in course of healing, though it still runs and is sore. So original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us.

Both Calvin and Luther denied "any perfection other than imputed perfection." Later Reformers, including the Anabaptists, reacted against an "under-emphasis on holy living." [9] This was likely one of the factors that led to John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, along with his dislike of Calvin's position on eternal security.

John Wesley on Christian Perfection

John Wesley was the seventeenth century founder of Methodism who formulated the doctrine of entire sanctification from 1739 to 1760. "In public address he used the terms "Christian Perfection," "Perfect Love," and "Holiness," as synonymous, though there are differences between them when examined critically."[10] The basis of his theory was that after a Christian become a believer by being spiritually reborn and indwelled by the power of the Holy Spirit, at some point after a period of growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ there was an instantaneous act of sanctification. Therefore, even though there was gradual growth in sanctification after the believer was justified by God, after a "final, all-surrendering act of faith in Christ, it reaches an instantaneous completion through the act of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier."[11] According to Greathouse, the teaching of John Wesley was that this initial work of gradual sanctification may be "cut short in a

moment, by faith, when the heart is cleansed from the inward root of sin – pride, self-will, atheism, or idolatry – and perfected in the love of God. As a consequence of this deeper cleansing of the heart the Christian is enabled to grow more normally toward perfected Christ-likeness."[12]

Greathouse's definition of Christian perfection is:

. . . the glorious teaching that through the provisions of the sacrifice of Christ and the personal agency of the Holy Spirit, and on the condition of simple faith, those who savingly trust in Christ may be cleansed from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God and unselfish love for their fellowman.[13]

One would likely never find such a concise definition of Christian perfection among John Wesley's writings. Rather, John Wesley's normally accepted view as rendered by Greathouse developed gradually over the life of his ministry. Wesley said that he developed his unique view on sanctification because he "thought it was scriptural." In the same quote, John Wesley went on to say, "But I still think that perfection is only another term for holiness, or the image of God in man."[14] Wesley's doctrine seems to have very much been driven by his concept of holiness as Christians living out their lives in God's perfect image through his Son Jesus Christ.

John Wesley left some small amounts of room for interpretation of what he meant by perfection. In his sermon and subsequent tract *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he defined Christian perfection by stating, "By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions." Wesley went on to excuse slight misdeeds by "perfected" Christians by saying, "there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul." With the leeway given, Wesley went on to say, "I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.[15] In the same tract, Wesley spoke about what he called the "Circumcision of the Heart."

It is the habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writing, is termed holiness, and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and, by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus the being so renewed in the image of our mind as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. . . . In what sense are they perfect? Observe, we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians. ***But even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin*** (emphasis added).[16]

How then did Wesley define sin? In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley stated, "But does not the Scripture say, 'A just man sinneth seven times a day?' It does not. Indeed it says, 'A just man falleth seven times.' But this is quite another thing' for, first the words, a day, are not in the text. Secondly, here is no mention of falling into sin at all. What is here mentioned is, falling into *temporal affliction* (emphasis added)." Wesley admits that the apostles sinned, but because they sinned does not mean that all Christians have to sin. [17] Wesley's definition of active or overt sin was so telling of

his whole theology that it was quoted completely from Carter as follows.

Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a ***voluntary transgression of a known law of God***. Therefore, every voluntary breach of the law of live is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly. To strain the matter farther is only to make way for Calvinism. There may be ten thousand wandering thoughts and forgetful intervals without any breach of love, though not without transgressing the Adamic law. But Calvinists would fain confound these together. Let love fill your heart, and it is enough (emphasis added).[18] This is not far from what 1 John 3:4 says, minus the attacks on Calvin, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."

Did Wesley agree that believers can be tempted, yet without sin? John Wesley made it clear that he believed so. In the questions and answers section in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he stated a variety of answers to various hypothetical questions. Question 14 was, "But can one that is saved from sin be tempted?" His answer was, "Yes; for Christ was tempted." In response to question 15 regarding the difference between temptation and corruption of the heart, he said, ""A woman solicits me. Here is a temptation to lust. But in the instant I shrink back. And I feel no desire or lust at all; of which I can be as sure, as that my hand is cold or hot."[19]

Wesley found scriptural support for his position on sanctification in various New Testament passages. He interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. [20] Orr, et. al., regarding Wesley's position stated, "Thus sanctification is gradual, but entire sanctification is instantaneous . . ."[21] Wesley also looked to 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Other Epistles were quoted by Wesley, such as Ephesians 4:13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Even though Wesley posited that the context of Romans 7 was that of an unregenerate man, he quoted just a few verses earlier in the previous chapter for support, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom 6:6)." One wonders if Wesley understood that the translators added the paragraph breaks that were not in the original text. He also looked to Galatians 2:20(a), "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live," and sought support in 1 Thess. 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly . . . ." In this passage "the word *sanctify* is a Greek aorist tense, signifying an act and not a process, as also in John 17:19, 'that they . . . may be sanctified in truth,' or truly."[22] The reasoning is that if Paul didn't think that God was able to accomplish these things during the natural lives of Christians, he wouldn't have written it. In the same light, Wesley also appealed to verses such as Matt. 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," with Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," along with 1 John 4:18, "perfect love casting out (all) fear. Finally, Wesley made frequent appeals to 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."[23]

In the same treatise, Wesley defended his position in light of the writings of St. John in 1 John 1:8-10, the latter which states, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (v. 10)." Again, his reasoning regarding this text was particularly telling of his whole theology. His entire response to the critics was as follows.[24]

(1.) The tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: "If we say we have no sin," in the former, being explained by, "If we say we have not sinned," in the latter verse. (2.) The point under consideration is not, whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin or commit sin now. (3.) The ninth verse explains both the eighth and the tenth: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As if he had said, "I have before affirmed, the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. And no man can say, 'I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from.' If we say we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, not only to forgive us our sins, but also to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, that we may go and sin no more. In conformity therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: *A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin* (emphasis added).[25]

Wesley found proof of the attainment of the second working of grace in 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." Wesley said that additional proof came from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, per 1 Corinthians 2:12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."[26] In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley clarified the spiritual evidence for the achievement of Christian perfection. In question he was asked, hypothetically, "But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption?" In response, Wesley stated:

We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, First, by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness with our spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness, that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first; (as neither is that of justification;) neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter. Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn. Yet, in general, the latter testimony of the Spirit is both as clear and as steady as the former.[27]

The Early Church on Sanctification

Augustine believed that even though the Christian was accounted positionally righteous before God through justification, their sanctification gradually conformed them to the image of Christ.[28] Greathouse, who seemed to stress the extent to which he thought (wrongly) that Augustine espoused the view, stated:

While Augustine can be cited as an advocate of this truth (Christian perfection), his pessimistic

doctrine of Original Sin with its notion of ineradicable concupiscence has been the single greatest foe of the doctrine, especially in Protestantism. Developed in his controversy with Pelagius, this latter idea upstaged Augustine's earlier confidence in the possibilities of grace and became the standard view of most Reformed and Lutheran theologies. ***The permanent residue of Augustine's doctrine in the view that human nature is irretrievable sinful this side of the resurrection*** (emphasis added)**.**"[29]

Augustine seemed to dismiss the possibility of Christian perfection during the natural life. Demarest and Lewis quoted Augustine as saying, "There is not a man living in the present life who is not absolutely free from sin."[30]

Several church fathers held a view similar to John Wesley. Friesen quoted Ignatius as writing, "No man truly making a profession of faith sinneth; nor does he that possesses love hate anyone." "Irenaeus and the Shepherd of Hermas also believed that perfection was possible while Tertullian did not expect perfection until after death." [31]

BIBLICAL TEACHING AND THEOLOGICAL INTERACTION

Old Testament

In the OT the call of the prophets was a "demand for personal righteousness and social justice." This was evident in such passages as Psalm 18:30 stating God is perfect, but with Psalm 18:32, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." God instructed Abraham to be perfect, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect (Gen 17:1)." Greathouse tied God's requirement "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deut 6:5)" with a call to personal holiness. [32] The word translated "perfect" from the Hebrew is *tamiym*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, even though the root *tamam* indicates "a move towards that which is ethically sound," the fundamental idea is that of completeness. The *Wordbook* goes on to tie NT Pharisaism to the root word, something that the followers of Wesley should take careful note. "Those who make them (claims of perfection) do not profess to be absolutely sinless, but they do disclaim all fellowship with the wicked." It goes on to say, "other than (the) passages referring to God himself, the OT resists claims to ultimate perfection."[33]

The OT contains an important theological construct in the Pentateuch, that of unintentional sin, closely related to the sin of omission. In Leviticus 4 the Lord gave to Moses the process for the sin offering. Verse two states, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins *unintentionally* and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands' (NIV, emphasis added)."[34] The concept of unintentional sin is prevalent throughout the Pentateuch. In

Leviticus applies the requirement for a sin offering to individual people (4:27, 5:15), leaders (4:22), the whole community (4:13), and the Gentiles alike (15:29). The concept of the sin of omission is also clearly found in the NT (James 2:15-16).

Gospels

In the Gospels and the rest of the NT, the key concept of perfection revolves around variations of the Greek word *teleioi*. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The word in the original is the Greek is *teleioi*, and as in to OT, means "complete." Friesen said, "In almost every case where the word 'perfect' is used in reference to people in the New Testament it is a translation of this word *teleios*." He went on to analyze the verse and concluded that in order to be perfect, the universal call to believers is that they must come follow Jesus.[35] In several of Wesley's sermons he argued how God could command perfection if man were unable to achieve it. In light of a more accurate translation of the Greek, perhaps Wesley should have looked to the concept of completion of God's promises to humanity in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Or, Phil 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Other New Testament Literature

Paul provided on interesting insight into his own sinfulness in the seventh chapter of Romans. Paul said, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (7:14)." As stated earlier, Wesley interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. An exegetical study of Romans shows that this was not Paul's intention. In 7:22 Paul stated, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law (NIV)." This hardly sounds like Paul reflecting on his sinful past prior to his conversion on the Damascus road.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6, the KJV uses the word "perfect" whereas the NIV renders *teleios* as "mature." This is similar to the NIV rendering of *teleios* in Luke 6:40 as "fully trained." The NIV is a much more accurate translation of the word, since in the longer context of the passage from 2:6 – 3:3 Paul describes the characteristics of mature people, the *teleioi*. "The *teleioi* are involved in a growing process. They are different from natural men and also from immature Christians and these differences are demonstrated by their behavior." In 1 Corinthians 14:20 Paul instructed the people to be adults (*teleios*) in their understanding (from the NIV). Friesen comments, "The *teleioi* are gifted and use their gifts to build up others in the Church. . . . Their concern is for the growth of those within the community and for those who have not yet experienced new life."[36] It is evident from the passages that the idea of perfection from the KJV translation is much more accurately reflected in the concept of spiritual obedience and maturity than sinless perfection.

The prison epistles speak to the concept of *teleioi* in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In

Ephesians 4:13 Paul states, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (*teleios*) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The NIV substitutes the word "mature." "The verses preceding 4:13 describe a process whereby maturity or perfection may be reached. God has given apostles . . . to the Church so that these person may equip all the saints for the building up of the Church."[37] The KJV rendering of "perfect" in Phil 3:12 illustrates the point even more: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect (*teleioo*) . . ." Here Paul states that he has not yet been made perfect, but is in the process of being perfected, pressing on towards "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14)." In Colossians 1:28 Paul says, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect (*teleios*) in Christ Jesus." "Paul believes that he has done a part in bringing others to perfection. He does this by admonishing and teaching."[38] Clearly, Paul's goal is to utilize his spiritual gifts to so "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corin 11:2c)."

Perhaps the most prominent verse in the Epistles that speaks regarding Wesley's view of Christian perfection is 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Commenting on the verse, Adam Clarke (1760-1832), a prominent Wesleyan minister, theologian, and scholar born in Londonderry, Ireland said the following.

This is tantamount to 1Jo 1:10: If we say that we have not sinned. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and therefore every man needs a Savior (sic), such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin, or needed any Savoir (sic). In deed, the Gnostics even denied that Christ suffered: the AEon, or Divine Being that dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, according to them, left him when he was taken by the Jews; and he, being but a common man, his sufferings and death had neither merit nor efficacy.[39]

Clarke's straw man argument that the passage was written to confront the Gnostic heretics is not justified in light of the historical context of this section of the text. Clark stated the overall purpose of 1 John by, "I therefore consider that which is commonly called the First Epistle of St. John as a book or treatise, in which the apostle declared to the whole world his disapprobation of the doctrines maintained by Cerinthus and the Gnostics."[40] Such a statement is true, except even a cursory examination of the first chapter reveals that the content of this section is more regarding "the fundamental tests of genuine fellowship," and the pericope containing verse nine is concerning "a biblical view of sin."[41] To say that verse nine speaks specifically to the Gnostic heresy is faulty logic from a straw man argument. Albert Barnes, holding to the opposite view, said, "he meant to say that if a man should claim to be perfect, or to be wholly sanctified, it would demonstrate that he deceived himself; and the two statements go to prove that neither in reference to the past nor the present can any one lay claim to perfection."[42] Spurgeon, commenting on the passage in 1 John 5 said, "We understand by this not that believers are perfectly free from sinning, but that they do not sin habitually, willfully, and openly as the unregenerate do."[43]

Wesley often quoted 1 John 3:9 regarding the ability for perfected believers to sin, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is

born of God.." The word sin in this text is the Greek verb *hamartanein* in the present active infinitive tense. This indicates a continuing action of sin rather than discrete events. The passage literally means, "Born again Christians don't persistently sin in an ongoing manner." Barnes agrees, "If it can be used as referring to the doctrine of absolute perfection at all, it proves, not that Christians may be perfect, or that a portion of them are, but that all are. But who can maintain this? Who can believe that John meant to affirm this? Nothing can be clearer than that the passage has not this meaning." Rather, Barnes says, "This passage must (mean that) they who are born of God, that is, who are true Christians, do not sin habitually and characteristically." [44]

Wesley had a tendency of selectively applying verses to prove his doctrine of perfection. The Book of Hebrews declares in chapter 12, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (v. 14). Wesley declined to apply this verse to Christians in general, those justified and entirely sanctified. According to the ISBE speaking about Wesley, "The declaration 'without sanctification no man shall see the Lord' (Heb 12:14), does not apply to the saints, 'the holy ones.'"[45] Again we saw Wesley picking and choosing which verses, or portions of verses apply in order to create his doctrine of entire sanctification.

Friesen did an analysis of the concept of *teleioi* in all of the NT uses, including Hebrews. He made an excellent summary in Hebrews regarding his derivation of the meaning of perfection as meaning spiritual maturity and obedience. As we leave the scriptural study section, he note the following summation in his section on Hebrews:

In this letter we see that the *teleioi* are people who are able to move beyond the discussion of elementary doctrines and accept and even teach solid food from God's Word. They are holy people, but they are also in the process of being made holy. This progress is not merely passive growth – the *teleioi* are actively involved in the process of growth. (They) are able to discern good and evil because they constantly practice obedience.

The author couldn't state it any better than that. The concept of perfection in the Bible is that of believers constantly growing and being obedient to the commandments and image of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest difficulties of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is found in James regarding the sin of omission. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (2:15-16)." Even if the Christian was perfect in outward behavior and somehow avoid sins of commission, they are often guilty of sins of omission as was shown by God's need to include deliverance for this sin in Leviticus.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual Perfection: A Theology of Experience

We concur with Lindstrom that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is a "theology of experience."[46] What role does experience play in the development of any theological doctrine? Bett looked at in an interesting way and found that Wesley "founded religion and theology in the fact of experience."[47] Wesley objected to such criticisms, saying "if man is not to go astray it (theology) must be checked by the Bible.[48] It seems logical that theology could be evaluated on the basis of personal experience, but what role does bringing a "pre-understanding" to the biblical text have in developing doctrine in the first place? It is evident that every theologian brings along a certain level of pre-understanding, and Wesley was not different in that regard. Also, unless the theologian remains teachable, an overactive experiential pre-understanding brought to bear upon the text will produce alternative views from an otherwise plain exegesis. Perhaps a red flag for this type of theological development is their mandating of sudden contextual shifts within discrete areas of the biblical text. Such contextual deviations are evident in Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. It is evident that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is indeed a doctrine of experience. More careful exegesis of the relevant verses would have revealed to Mr. Wesley that the central concepts of Christian perfection were that of spiritual growth and obedience, not sinless perfection. Friesen, in his concluding remarks stated, "The *teleioi* are not portrayed as those who have attained absolute perfection. They always strive toward perfection and are not content to settle for less."[49] Perhaps this is the greatest risk of following Wesley's doctrine, that one may cease growing in knowledge and maturity to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Relevance to Life and Ministry

It is very important in ministry to have a clear understanding of the nature and process of sanctification, as well as how the various Christian churches understand the doctrine. First, it is crucial to be able to explain the various sects and denominations of the Christian faith to new believers such that they are not put off by the appearance of divisions in the body of Christ. Even if groups of believers believe in the doctrine of Christian perfection, for the purposes of unity in the body of Christ a certain measure of tolerance must be expressed. It is extremely important to recognize John Wesley's huge contributions to the Christian church in America. This is not to say that we should tolerate false teachings, which Scripture warns about extensively, but Christians must come as a united force against the powers of darkness. In the case of Christian perfection, the belief of this doctrine is nicely balanced by the same denomination's belief in Arminianism. This keeps them continually resisting temptations and striving towards their salvation anyway. Albeit that this comes at the risk of becoming prideful – something which many Christians struggle with regardless of their denomination. Second, as the Wesleyan churches well know, eternal security is a closely related concept. This related doctrine should be preached to proclaim the truth of 1 John 5:13, but along with the warning verses. This will help believers maintain a healthy humility and respect for the power, sovereignty, and grace of God. Believers need to be given an assurance of their salvation in a world filled without almost no certainty in many other areas of their lives. They should be shown that God expects them to persevere under His power, not their own. Believers need assurance that God has gifted them with every resource that they need to accomplish His purposes

in their lives. This striving includes a continuous growth towards perfection, but this is not something that will be accomplished until after they die.

END NOTES

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[1] Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Vol. III, 173.

[2] Ibid., 177.

[3] Ibid., 175, 184.

[4] Ibid., 184.

[5] Ibid.

[6] All verse quotations are KJV unless otherwise indicated. This is necessary to facilitate comparisons to John Wesley's writings.

[7] Demarest, 185.

[8] Ibid., 186.

[9] Robert Friesen, "Christian Perfection," *Direction* 13 (July 1984): 25-32.

[10] James Orr and others, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), s.v. "Sanctification."

[11] Ibid.

[12] William M. Greathouse, *From the Apostles to Wesley: Christian Perfection in Historical Perspective* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 15.

[13] Ibid., 12-13.

[14] Charles W. Carter, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 521.

[15] John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, London: [1777], n.p.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Carter, 270-271.

[19] Ibid.

[20] John C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, orig. 1879), xxii.

[21] Orr.

[22] Orr.

[23] Wesley.

[24] N.B. A Prize will be awarded for any student that can follow this quotation!

[25] Wesley.

[26] Orr.

[27] Wesley.

[28] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[29] Greathouse, 9.

[30] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[31] Friesen, 25.

[32] Greathouse, 23.

[33] *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), #8552.

[34] Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of International Bible Society. "NIV" and "NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark office by International Bible Society.

[35] Friesen, 26.

[36] Ibid., 27.

[37] Ibid., 28.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, abridged [CD-ROM], 1 John 1:8.

[40] Ibid., 1 John 1:1.

[41] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1962.

[42] Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* [CD-ROM].

[43] *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*, on 1 John 3:1-6.

[44] Barnes, 1 John 3:9.

[45] Orr.

[46] Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification.* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Publishing, 1981), 2.

[47] Ibid., 3.

[48] Ibid., 5.

[49] Friesen, 30.

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Apes, Dates, and Escapes

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5





Apes, Dates, and Escapes

A Poem By Jim Hill

One day my teacher told me that my daddy really just came from an ape.

"Mam, is that why ***your*** daddy bears an uncanny resemblance to one from *Planet of the Apes*?"

Hanging by the nape, I had little chance of escape.

Thinking, "Isn't this how mommy affected her brave cubs escape?"

"While daddy was out in the jungle, collecting savory dates?"

"Principal, why am I suddenly the subject of your extreme scorn, rage, and hate?"

"Scientific facts are the reason she went into such a state."

"Would have been worse, except her highly-evolved, motherly senses are innate."

"Not for that, she'd have had you on the rack, and been justified in her attack!"

Rubbing my neck, "Sir, could it be that your birth was the result of a rape?"

"While your daddy was hunting, out looking for a date?"

I have often said that evolution is a religion which requires more faith than Christianity. Christianity is historic and evidential, whereas evolution requires giant leaps of faith that would have to clear the largest mountain in a single stride. It seems that evolution is no longer taught as a theory, but pure fact. It is the foundation upon which much of modern biological theory rests. Evolution requires that literally quadrillions of simultaneous events happened at the very same time. Animals had to evolve from something and their food sources at the same time. The dirt on which they stand had to "evolve" from a great cosmic explosion. Yet all of it is based upon the idea that a genetic mutation prospered the evolutionary line. When is the last time we saw mutations improving things? Does a two headed frog hunt better than one with a single head? They should be able to catch twice as many bugs, but then why didn't this mutation become dominant? Breast cancer is a mutation, and

does that improve the human race? The idea that genetic mutations improve anything is ridiculous, as is the idea that man evolved from an ape.

According to evolutionary teaching, humans are the most highly evolved creatures in the world. Okay, their instincts and intelligence shoud be written in their genes, and therefore their genetic makeup should be the most complex among any plant or animal. If you believe this you would be wrong. Wheat has one of the most complex genetic structures of any plant or animal. In fact some varieties has as many as six sets of chromosomes. So tell me Mr. Wheat, what should I wear to the prom this Saturday night? I'm thinking about renting a tux, but would I be overdressed in comparison to Sally my date whose mom made her dress out of an expensive table cloth? I could use some help in other areas too, perhaps I should ask Bran your sister for some help? Can you send her over tomorrow at 2?

Jim Hill

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An Examination of the Escatolical View of Scripture Emerging from Hanegraaf and Brouwer's First Book in the Last Disciple Series



AN EXAMINATION OF THE ESCATOLOGICAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

EMERGING FROM HANEGRAAFF AND BROUWER'S FIRST BOOK

IN THE *LAST DISCIPLE* SERIES

BY JIM HILL

The Last Disciple (hereafter *LD*) is a fictional novel set in the Roman Empire during the reign of Nero. The main character is Vitas, a trusted advisor of Nero that attempts to curb this beast's maniacal excesses and save Christians from torture and execution. The plot is complex and follows Vitas as he journeys to Jerusalem to report on the governor Florus who has been persecuting Jews and Christians alike. During the adventure, Vitas becomes engaged to a former slave girl named Sophia who is a Christian. Eventually they meet up with John the Revelator who is being held in prison. The book is exciting but requires attention to details since this first book in the series spends an extensive amount of time building the characters for future books.

The thesis of this paper is the degree to which we can affirm the partial preterist position that

emerges from Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer's first book in their eschatologically themed series. Specifically, what are the main eschatological themes in the book? Second, did John mean for us to refer to the first-century Roman ruler Nero in the book of Revelation when he spoke of the beast? Finally, can we interpret many of the events in the Olivet Discourse as having already found their fulfillment during Nero's persecution of Christians during the middle part of the first century? Hanegraaff stated in the afterward of his book that the theology in the series was predicated by a term that he invented called "exegetical eschatology."[1] The thesis therefore is the extent to which this eschatological perspective is theologically palatable as it develops within the *Last Disciple* and from other statements made by Hanegraaff.

The word *preterism* came from the Latin words *praeter* meaning "beyond," and *ire* which means "go." This eschatological view has interpreted certain OT and NT biblical prophesies as having already been fulfilled. Toussaint quoted Ice as indicating three forms of this theology, including mild, moderate, and extreme. Followers of the extreme form teach have taught that all biblical prophesy has been fulfilled and the Lord Jesus has already returned. Teachers of the moderate form have held that most Bible prophesies have been fulfilled except for the second coming of Jesus. Adherents of the mild form of preterism have held that the Tribulation spoken of in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation was fulfilled through the judgment of the Jews in 70 C.E. or Rome in 313 C.E.[2] It was this mild form of what we call partial preterism that was the subject of this treatise.

Tyndale released *The Last Disciple* in late 2004 in response to Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' highly successful *Left Behind* series. *Time* magazine interviewed Hank Hanegraaff when this first book was being released who said, "There is a lot of hysteria because of the *Left Behind* books." He continued, "The *Left Behind* books are part of a trend toward sensationalism and 'script torture' of the Bible."[3] Several recent events ignited this battling of end-times authors. First was the 1996 release of the *Left Behind* book and subsequent series by LaHaye and Jenkins. Second was the callous acceptance by many evangelicals to Jenkins' series. Many of the callers to Hanegraaff's *Bible Answer Man* program did not seem to be willing to rethink any of their eschatological view. A third factor in the debate was pregnant pause that ensued as Christian radio listeners waited for the

release of Hanegraaff's own position on eschatology. Hank made many critical comments about Jenkins' book on his radio program. Whenever callers would ask for Hank's position, his response was to tell them to wait for his book. His main complaint was that many callers blindly followed the futurist, pre-millennial view like a pied piper. Listeners to the program weren't surprised when Hank released his book series with a different theological bent coauthored with novelist Sigmund Brouwer. After Tyndale released this first book in the fictional series in 2004, the second one entitled *The Last Sacrifice* followed in 2005.

Primary Theological Issues in *The Last Disciple*

Eschatology is a vast and complex subject. If we were to examine all of the theological issues that emerged from the *LD* we would be doing so right up until "the Lord himself (comes) down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess 4:16). [4] Because of this complexity, we have narrowed the scope of this paper to the events in the Olivet Discourse with a brief reference to events mentioned in Revelation. Yet the interrelatedness of the material requires that we examine at least some of the main theological themes in the book. These are seemingly without number, but the main ones are as follows.

First, the *LD* is an outright rejection of the futurist view of eschatology. It espouses a partial preterist view regardless of what Hanegraaff says otherwise. This doesn't mean that we accuse Hanegraaff of an unorthodox Christian view. Adams provided an excellent treatise on the different between what he called an "orthodox preterists" and an "unorthodox preterists." Although theology is usually done in shades of gray, this debate on orthodoxy revolves around the heart of the Gospel, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unorthodox preterist denies the second coming of Christ, saying that Jesus came spiritually in 70 C.E. They also deny the resurrection of the dead and relegate this to a spiritual sense.[5] Hanegraaff follows the orthodox view and doesn't in any way deny either the second coming of Christ or the resurrection of the dead. Even though Hank has rejected the prevailing eschatological view, his position isn't unorthodox in any fashion. We should discuss his beliefs with gentleness and respect as he likes to say on his program.

Second, the premise of *LD* almost entirely hinges upon an early dating of Revelation, before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The thesis of the book is based upon this early dating of both Revelation and the entire NT. In his second book, Hank questions how John could have written Revelation and not mentioned that the temple had been destroyed. He said, "The point of all this is that if Revelation was written before AD 70, then it is reasonable to assume that the vision given to John was meant to reveal the apocalyptic events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem—events that were still in John's future but that are in our past." Hank went on to say, "First, it is instructive to note that the late dating for Revelation is largely dependent on a single—markedly ambiguous—sentence in the writings of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons." He gave one single reason for rejecting the late dating (95 C.E.) of Revelation. [6] Geisler stated regarding the eschatology in the *LD* book, "There is strong evidence that Revelation was written in the 90s well after Nero was dead during Domitian's reign. If so, this would make the LD false." Geisler gave no less than ten reasons for the late dating of Revelation.[7] It is evident from history that Nero was a monster. However, the text of Revelation seems to indicate that the beast mentioned there is connected to a later Roman figure or the nation as a whole. The first time that the beast appears is in Rev 11:7. The context of this passage is during the close of ministry of the two witnesses who are then overcome by the beast that came up from the abyss and killed them. Neither history or Scripture record the ministry of these two individuals during the timeframe of Nero. The beast could be prefigured by Nero, but certainly wasn't fulfilled by him.

Geisler continued to refocus the likely setting of Revelation in the future. He quoted Hanegraaff's book as saying that since John uses words like "the time is near" and "soon" in Revelation, this reveals that John could not have been looking towards the modern era. Geisler said, "If so, then on this premise the whole book of Revelation (including the Second Coming and Resurrection – Chapters 19-20) must refer to the first century since the word "soon" applies to the whole book of Revelation (1:1; 22:10). In this case full preterism follows which is heretical." Geisler found that the word translated "quickly" in various places in Revelation is *tachu* (tacu) meaning "quick, swift, or speedy." He said, "Hence this term need not, as LD argues, refer to a first-century event but to the

imminent coming of Christ whenever it occurs."[8]

Third, *LD* incorporates metaphorical language of scriptural in a very literal fashion from the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. This is something that Hank, while on his radio program, has accused LaHaye of doing. Hanegraaff said, "The pretribulational rapture model featured in the Left Behind series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion."[9] Yet Hank did the very same thing in his book with a variety of scriptural texts. On the very first page of the book, Hanegraaff introduced Nero as a man dressed in a costume consisting of leopard's skin, eagle's wings, a bear's legs, and the head of a lion alluding directly to Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.[10] Before the end of the first chapter, Hanegraaff had openly identified Nero as the "beast" spoken of by John in Revelation.[11] Additional examples abound. One of the characters said, "Earthquakes seem to occur daily across the world."[12] Hanegraaff didn't do anything different than LaHaye in literalizing the details of Scripture, but he shouldn't accuse LaHaye of violating hermeneutical principles since *LD* was filled with similar examples. On the positive side, Hanegraaff and Brouwer did a good job in painting this historical situation that existed in Jerusalem during the reign of Nero by including many true historical features.

Finally, *LD* inaccurately states the futurist position regarding the activities of antichrist in Rev. 13. Hanegraaff stated, "The pretribulational rapture model in the *Left Behind* series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion. Thus the antichrist dies and resurrects himself physically in order to vindicate his claim to be god."[13] Hank contrasted his approach with LaHaye's:

> In sharp contrast, The Last Disciple series exegetes Revelation 13 in light of the whole Scripture. Thus Satan can *parody* the work of Christ through 'all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders' (2 Thessalonians 2:9), but he cannot literally do what Christ did—namely, raise himself from the dead. . . .What is at stake here is nothing less than the deity and resurrection of Christ.[14]

The problem with Hank's thesis is that the biblical text does not plainly say that the antichrist does this. Revelation 13:3 states, "I saw one of his heads *as if* it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast" (emphasis added). The

NIV reads, "seemed to have had a fatal wound."[15] The word rendered "seemed" in the NIV is the Greek word ώς (hoos) which means, "that is to say, so to speak," or as in 1Thess 5:2; "like," in the sense "like a thief in the night."[16] The text goes on, "And he (the false prophet) *deceives* those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the *wound* of the sword and has come to life" (Rev 13:14, emphasis added). These passages speak of how the false prophet *deceives* those on earth through the antichrist who was wounded *as if* dead. It is evident from these verses that the "death and resurrection" of the antichrist is a satanic deception. Scripture states, "And the whole earth was amazed" (13:3b). Therefore, LaHaye was justified in portraying an actual death and resurrection since the whole word was deceived by this satanic trick.

Norm Geisler reviewed the book and made the following statement regarding the preceding issues:

> Many events in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18 were not fulfilled in A.D. 70 – at least not literally. For example, the stars did not fall from heaven (Mt. 24:29), nor were one-third of humans killed (Rev. 9:18), and neither did all the creatures in the sea die (Rev. 16:3) in A.D. 70. . . . Although *LD* disavows the label of "partial preterism" as well as "post-millennialism" this conclusion is in agreement with preterism. And if LD is right, then the rest of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18) must be placed there too.[17]

Geisler hit on both the main eschatological theme and the problem with the partial preterist theology. The theme is that most of the events in Revelation were already fulfilled during the first-century except for the second coming of the Lord. The problem is that many of the events named by the partial preterists weren't completely fulfilled in that century. It's not so much that some of the events that occurred during the first century couldn't have fulfilled Scripture, but that they weren't fulfilled in the thorough manner that the futurists require. In any case, Jesus' birth certainly surprised many Jews who later believed in him. It was only after the fact that anyone could look into OT prophesy and locate the details of Jesus' coming. These are the reasons that our correspondence with those holding a partial preterist position must be seasoned with love and humility that is to be forthcoming of fellow believers (John 13:35).

The Olivet Discourse in *LD*

A well developed theology regarding the Olivet Discourse doesn't completely emerge in the *LD* since it is the first in the series. However, several themes do emerge regarding Jesus' prophetic speech heralded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. *LD* holds that the first portion of the scriptural text of the Olivet Discourse relates to the first century during the reign of Nero. In Matthew's version of the Discourse, Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed, then after a lengthy discourse he said in 24:34 that, "Truly I say to you, *this* generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Truly, what is meant by "this generation" is where the discussion on the Discourse must begin. Hanegraaff quoted these verses in the afterward of his second book to tie the generation mentioned in verse 34 to the destruction of the temple in verse 2.[18] After Jesus' lengthy discourse, the Lord went on to say when all these things would happen. In verse 34 he said, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Hank agrees that Jesus has not yet returned,[19] therefore he cannot say that "this generation" is being spoken of in the near sense since if this was the case the entirety of prophesy in the Olivet Discourse would have had to have been fulfilled when the temple was destroyed. Hank can't have it both ways as Geisler aptly noted. He can't say that Jesus was saying that *all* of the events would be fulfilled in the lifetime of the generation existing around 70 C.E., but on the other hand look forward to Jesus' return on the clouds (v. 30) in the future.

Hank tries to get around these apparent difficulties. He said, "This is not to say, however, that all of the prophecies in Revelation have already been fulfilled. . . . Revelation not only predicted fore-future events, such as the coming apocalypse in John's lifetime, but also chronicles events that will take place in the far and final future."[20] According to Hank, "(He is) deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than any particular model of eschatology."[21] This is a reasonable hermeneutic in light of the vagaries of theological systems gone awry such as hyper-Calvinism or Wesley's Christian perfection. His method deserves serious attention even though at first glance from a futurist perspective it is logically inconsistent. Hanegraaff would have to draw a dividing line between which events were literally fulfilled during Nero's reign and destruction of the

temple during the Jewish civil war and the ones that were not. Futurist often point to dual fulfillments of prophetic Scripture. This adds yet another layer of theology to that hermeneutic, making prophetic interpretation the vastly complicated science it is. Hanegraaff's partial preterist hermeneutic, even though he doesn't call it that, not only brings some simplicity but may also help to explain away some of the futurist's problematic verses such as Matthew 24:34 which according to Toussaint is a hard one for everyone.[22]

Perhaps what is needed in the eschatological debates on the Discourse is this entirely different perspective brought by the partial preterist scholars. Nixon began his book on the Olivet Discourse from this perspective with the following statement, "If anyone proposes a new interpretation of Scripture that contradicts the sober opinions of MOST known Bible scholars, he is probably wrong. However, this is one case, at least, where one must ignore all existing attempts to explain the Discourse." Next, he boldly stated that Matthew 24:3-22 was clearly fulfilled during the Jewish/Roman civil war of 66-70 C.E., and "the present writer knows of NO ONE who disagrees with this interpretation." [23] Nixon said, "The standards or pennants of the 10^{th} legion (the Roman army's gods) were regarded as the "abomination of desolation" by the Jews of the city."[24] This interpretation contradicts even the most fundamental understanding of the futurist interpretation of the Discourse. Most futurist commentators point to these verses as having at least a future fulfillment regardless of what happened in the first century. Many look to the typology of the second century B.C.E. events under Antiochus Epiphanes, with final fulfillment in the future.[25] The preterist authors do offer an entirely different perspective, but not one without serious reactionary preconceptions against the futurists. Their reactions against the futurists seem to drive their theology as much as the futurists are driven by their own.

Hanegraaff's book wasn't without many redeeming theological expressions. He offered an excellent insight regarding the biblical author's use of visual imagery in the Discourse. In his story, Helius was second in command under Nero, and had one of his scribes read from the Gospel of Matthew 24:29-30:

> But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

His scribe related the meaning of this Scripture to him:

> If you were a Jew, you would be familiar with the imagery. *Coming on the clouds* is a familiar Jewish expression used by our prophets to communicate the majesty and sovereign power of God. His coming on the clouds translates to judgment for those who resist Him and blessing for those who bow the knee. . . . Isaiah, for example, used this very expression to describe God's retribution on Egypt when he prophesied that God would come in wrath and fierce anger to make the land of Babylon desolate, he said that 'the rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.'"[26]

As futurists, we have quite likely missed the sense of the Scripture by over literalizing it. This is hypocritical since it is the same thing that we earlier accused the partial preterists of doing. In the NASB, the text regarding the darkening of the sky is in all capitals, indicating an OT quotation. In terms of Jesus' promise to come in the clouds, should we literalize this in keeping with the promise by the angels in Acts 1:11, or should we allow symbolism in keeping with first-century Jewish thought? This latter course appears more logical, especially in light of Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him." How can every eye see his coming at the same time if this is taken literally? In this text, the first portion concerning the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds is a direct quote from Daniel 7:13. In Exodus, the pillar of cloud was literally representative of the glory of God. Certainly, we have to allow for Jewish symbolism and visual imagery given to us by the Jewish scholars who created the NT.

Conclusion – No Logical Middle Ground

The value of Hank Hanegraaff's book was not its theological brilliance but rather the challenge that it offered his readers to develop their own eschatological position. The first book in the series didn't develop an extensive theology but rather laid the groundwork for subsequent books. Hank appears to have taken a partial preterist position not so much as a middle ground but as a reaction against the futurists. In doing so, he has attempted to force his own partial preterism system on them, rather than allowing for what he called an exegetical theology to interpret the text outside of existing theological systems. We cannot suggest a novel middle ground that would negate some of the difficulties with Hanegraaff's position while offsetting those of the futurist position. Instead, we must continue to wrestle with the whole of Scripture with special emphasis on proper contextualization of the eschatological events in the NT. We long for additional validation of the late dating of Revelation. This is not so much for the purposes of proving our futurist position, which we believe, is the correct one, but to glorify the Lord in more confidently proclaiming his coming

judgment and glory. Govett said back in 1985, "In conclusion—fully I am convinced that no ingenuity can extricate the Praeterist interpreter from the endless difficulties, absurdities, historic contradictions which beset his scheme."[27]

END NOTES

[1] Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), 393.

[1] Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse." *BSac* 161 (2004): 469-70.

[1] Kathy Boot Thomas, "Is it the End of the World as This Author Knows It?," *Time Magazine* 164 no. 21 (November 24, 2004): No pages. Citied 24 March 2006. Online: http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,995693,00.html.

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