Answering the Critics

Paper 11 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Most of the objections in this paper weren't gathered from books. They were spoken, written, and mailed to people who taught this message in one small fellowship, over the course of several years.

It began in 2006 in an evangelical, nondenominational Bible church. A handful of its members had begun studying the coming kingdom and the salvation of the soul in a weeknight home Bible study. The church's elders looked into the teaching, decided against it, and asked the study to stop. In time they issued a written statement that it "clearly adds to the Gospel message and leads to a very specific point of view that departs from traditional evangelical Christianity," and that its "Bible exposition techniques are not consistent with proven and accepted methods of study." The lay teachers stepped down from every leadership role they held and moved the study into their own home. In 2007 a member of that church published a pamphlet built on three charges: that the teaching is salvation by works, that its teachers have broken fellowship with the rest of the Body of Christ, and that its method of reading Scripture is unsound. Over the next several years he pressed those charges further in blog posts, forum threads, and letters. Pastors, elders, laymen, and strangers on the Internet added their own. Somewhere along the way the teaching was compared to a cult.

Those charges are answered here as they were actually made, in the critics' own words wherever possible. The 2007 critique said its purpose was "not to close the door on further discussion, but to open it." The pastor of that church wrote afterward that he still wanted "to talk with you of the Bible study methods we are using and which one is more sound." Both are fair invitations, and this paper takes them up.

The other doctrinal papers in this series each answer the objections raised against their own teachingTHat. This one does a different job. It takes the objections a Christian is likely to meet once he starts sharing this message, the ones aimed at the teaching as a whole, at its method, and at the people who hold it, and answers them in one place. Where another paper carries the full case for a point, this paper states the conclusion and points there.

A word about the teachers. Some of what the critics quoted came from men who taught this message a generation or two ago, in language this series doesn't use and on points it doesn't hold. That is what growth looks like among people who keep studying. Paul told the mature in Philippi, "if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you," and in the next breath told them to walk by what they had already attained (Phil. 3:15-16). Truth came to Israel "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:13), and it still comes that way. No one who studies the Bible stops learning, and this series doesn't present itself as the last word on anything. It answers the critics from Scripture as it reads Scripture now.

Objection One: Salvation by Works

The charge

The 2007 critique opens in Galatians. A "Christ-plus" gospel, it says, "begins with Christ's finished work on the cross," but "as it matures, the Christ-plus model reveals that while Christ's work is finished, ours is not." This teaching limits grace to the spirit and calls the salvation of the soul "works-based," so it's Christ plus soul salvation.

Three arguments back the charge. First, Scripture describes one comprehensive act, not a salvation completed in stages: "one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18, in the translation the critique uses). Second, God demands perfection, and "to fail God in even one instance is to fail him completely" (Jas. 2:10), so if anything at all depends on works, "we all stand rightly condemned." Third, saying the works are motivated by love and faith changes nothing: "unless this motivation is irresistible... these works come from man, not God," and Paul says nothing "coming from ourselves" saves us (Eph. 2:8-9). The critique closes the point in one line: "If salvation begins with Christ, it should end with Christ, not man."

The answer

Start with what isn't in dispute. A man's standing before God is settled once, by grace through faith, with nothing added to it:

> "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

This teaching adds nothing to that standing and puts none of it at risk. A Christian is eternally secure from the moment he believes, because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). But the critique's own passage doesn't stop at verse 9. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And Paul uses salvation language for that walk, writing to "saints" (Phil. 1:1) whose standing was already settled: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). The question that matters is the one this series keeps asking: saved *from what*, and *when*?

The "Christ plus" charge assumes that whatever is still ahead must be man's contribution. Paul says otherwise, in the chapter the critique quotes:

> "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Rom. 5:10)

Reconciled by His *death*; saved by His *life*. The men Paul describes are already reconciled, and their being saved is still future tense. Hebrews says the same about the life Jesus lives now: "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). What remains is not Christ plus man. It's Christ's death and then Christ's life, His present work as High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16). The critique's closing line is right. Salvation begins with Christ and ends with Christ, and it does so in this teaching.

The critique's reading of Romans 5:18 asks the verse to say more than it says. In the NKJV it reads, "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,

even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life." If one act completed salvation in every man it reached, "all men" would make every man saved, and the critique doesn't hold that. The verse names what Christ's act made available to all. It doesn't describe one moment that finishes everything in each. The same paragraph shows it: "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). Paul has justified men still waiting to be saved.

The perfection argument rests on a verse about the law: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). That's what the law demands of a man who stands on it, and it's why no one is justified by it (Gal. 3:10-11). The Judgment Seat doesn't grade sinlessness. The commendation Jesus gives is "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things" (Matt. 25:21). *Faithful*, and over a few things. Hebrews 11 names Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and Rahab (Heb. 11:31-32), none of them flawless, and says of the whole company that "all these" obtained "a good testimony through faith" (Heb. 11:39). Sin along the walk is real, and it costs (Rom. 8:13). Scripture answers it the way it always has: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That's the forgiveness of the walk, given to men already in a standing before God. To *confess* (*homologeo*) is to say the same thing God says about the sin, to agree with Him. The critique heads this off by saying John never mentions the soul's salvation. John names what's at stake in his own vocabulary: "abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

The motivation argument proves too much. Paul holds both halves together without strain: "I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). And Scripture rewards works everywhere: "He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:27; also 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:14). The critic himself wrote, in a later exchange, "we are to work, and we will be judged according to our works." If a reward attached to works makes a gospel of works, every tradition that teaches rewards stands condemned with this one. The real disagreement is narrower. It's about *what* the reward is. This teaching says Scripture calls it the salvation of the soul (1 Pet. 1:9; Heb. 10:39; Jas. 1:21), and Objection Two takes that up.

Mainstream evangelicalism has its own quarrel at exactly this point. The view called Lordship Salvation makes fruit the test of whether a man's standing was ever real, which loads the question of works onto standing itself. This teaching leaves standing alone and asks of fruit only what Scripture asks of it (Paper 8 works that out). The critique and this teaching agree that salvation begins and ends with Christ, and that His work on the cross is finished. He said so Himself: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Nothing can be added to it. What's still unfinished is in the man that work was done for. His standing before God is complete the moment he believes, but his soul's salvation is still being worked out (Phil. 2:12), and Christians are still "eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).

Objection Two: No Text Names the Salvation of the Soul

The charge

"There are no direct references to soul salvation," the 2007 critique says. A lay handout circulating at the time gave three verses for it (Matt. 7:21-23; Jas. 2:17; Col. 3:23-25), and "none of these references mentions the soul." Stringing texts together and insisting the soul is "implicitly meant is no substitute for the plain meaning of scripture," and "anyone who has read or studied the Bible knows that no such passage exists."

The charge reaches back to the three-part view of man the doctrine rests on. Paul says "spirit, soul, and body" only once (1 Thess. 5:23), and elsewhere says "body and spirit" (1 Cor. 7:34). Quoting a respected commentator, the critique says that verse no more makes man threefold than "heart, soul, mind, and strength" makes him fourfold (Mark 12:30). It adds that a threefold soul goes back to Socrates and Plato, and that Genesis 2:7, a body animated by breath, "is a dichotomist picture." In a later exchange the critic pressed two more points. Man's parts don't relate to each other the way the persons of the Trinity do, since "my body did not pray to my soul." And Jesus' spirit couldn't have gone to the Father at His death, because on resurrection morning He said, "I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17).

The answer

On the handout, the charge lands. Three bare references that never use the word *soul* invite exactly this reply, and a short list is no substitute for the texts themselves. On Scripture, the charge doesn't hold. The phrase is there, more than once, and in each place it sits among people already saved:

> "...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time... receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:5, 9)
>
> "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise... But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." (Heb. 10:35-36, 39)
>
> "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." (Jas. 1:21)

Peter's readers have been begotten again to a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3), and their soul's salvation is "ready to be revealed in the last time." Hebrews ties the saving of the soul to "great reward" and to doing the will of God, in a passage written in the first person plural. James writes to "my beloved brethren" whom God "brought... forth by the word of truth" (Jas. 1:18-19), and tells them the implanted word is able to save their souls. Four chapters later he says it again: "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death" (Jas. 5:19-20). A Bible teacher who answered the critique in 2008 ran the search in the Greek Old and New Testaments for *save* and *soul* together and found dozens of places.

Jesus said it before any of them, and in the same breath He attached it to works:

> "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." (Matt. 16:25-27)

"Life" and "soul" in those verses are one Greek word, *psuche*, four times over. English renders it two ways, and the reader loses the thread. Read it as one word, and Jesus is describing a soul saved or lost by what a man does with it now, settled when He comes and rewards each according to his works.

Notice the asymmetry. "Salvation of the spirit" isn't a scriptural phrase, and this teaching concedes it wherever it uses the term. The thing it names is in Scripture, in other words: made alive when dead in trespasses (Eph. 2:1, 5), joined to the Lord as "one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17). But Scripture names the soul's salvation expressly and repeatedly, and never the spirit's. That's what this teaching would predict. Scripture names what is still in play.

The three-part view of man doesn't stand on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and the commentator's argument is aimed at a foundation the doctrine doesn't use. The case begins with God's triune nature and man made in His image (Gen. 1:26). It continues with the way man was made: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being $$ *nephesh* $$" (Gen. 2:7). That verse names three things: the dust, the breath, and what the man became. Animals are living beings too (Gen. 1:24). What sets man apart is the act. God breathed into this one. Then the death of Jesus takes the three apart in three directions: His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46), His soul to Hades and not left there (Acts 2:27, 31), His body to Joseph's tomb (Luke 23:52-53). Only after all that does 1 Thessalonians 5:23 confirm what the rest has shown, alongside Hebrews 4:12's "division of soul and spirit." The case is cumulative, not a single proof, and Paper 1 carries it in full.

The other points are briefer. Mark 12:30 is a command about how to love God. First Thessalonians 5:23 is a prayer about what is to be "preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." One describes the energies of a man's devotion, and the other what he is made of and what is kept until Jesus comes. Plato's chariot divides the *soul* into three; it doesn't set spirit, soul, and body side by side, so it isn't this scheme at all. Nobody claims man's parts are three persons. The image of God in man is one being with distinguishable parts. Even so, Scripture does show a man speaking to his own soul: "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (Ps. 103:1); "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (Ps. 42:5).

John 20:17 doesn't collide with Luke 23:46 either. The risen Jesus is standing in front of Mary in His body when He says, "I have not yet ascended to My Father." The ascension He means is the one Luke records forty days later, when the whole risen man was taken up (Acts 1:9-11). A spirit committed to God at death was never called an ascension. Solomon said it of every man: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). Stephen prayed it as he died: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Neither man ascended.

Objection Three: The Teachers Have Broken Fellowship

The charge

The second charge in the 2007 critique is that this teaching's leaders "are not merely content to disagree, but actively condemn non-kingdom-believing Christians." Its main exhibit was a sermon preached by a pastor who teaches this message:

> "The scripture says we should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Can I tell you that's not talking about a non-Christian. It's talking about somebody who doesn't get this, who's not interested in this. They're the unbelievers. And we are not to be unequally yoked with them. We need people around us who can support us and encourage us in this."

From this the critique concludes that "to embrace $$ that $$ gospel is to declare anathema brothers and sisters who also confess Christ" but don't hold this teaching. It quotes another teacher warning that religious leaders who close the door on the kingdom message "will be condemned." It cites James: "who are you to judge another?" (Jas. 4:12). And it appeals to an old Lutheran saying, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in both, charity." Years later the same critic described the small fellowship at the center of this paper's history as having "closed themselves off to the fellowship of the Body of Christ," adding that "when genuine concern for theological matters is expressed, they perceive persecution and close the discussion."

The answer

Start with the word. This series holds that *unbeliever* (*apistos*) describes faith not exercised, and that Scripture can use it of saved people. Paul calls saved Israelites who would not believe Jesus was their Messiah "those who do not believe," with Moses' veil still over their reading (2 Cor. 3:14-15; 4:3-4). Hebrews warns "brethren" against "an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12). So the word can carry what the sermon said it carries. But the sermon made two mistakes with it. Faithlessness in Scripture is refusing what *God* has said. "Somebody who doesn't get this, who's not interested in this" makes a teacher's system the measure instead. And calling Christians "unbelievers" from a pulpit without explaining the word will be heard as a verdict on their standing. The teacher who says it that way owns the misunderstanding.

The verse itself is about a yoke: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). A yoke is a shared harness, two animals pulling one load. It pictures partnership in a work, not company at a table. Paul had already ruled out withdrawing from people as such, "since then you would need to go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:10). And where he does tell a church to withdraw from a disobedient brother, he adds, "Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:15). Even separation, done Paul's way, keeps the brother a brother.

Nothing in this teaching declares anyone anathema. Every Christian is eternally secure, whatever he thinks of the kingdom. Paul's anathema belongs to a false gospel of justification (Gal. 1:8-9), and Objection Fifteen comes back to it. Neither is anyone condemned when this teaching says the Bride will be taken out of the Body. That's how the first bride came to be: taken out of Adam (Gen. 2:21-23; Eph. 5:31-32), and Paper 2 works it out. The warning about leaders who close the door on the kingdom message is a hard one. Jesus said something very like it to the leaders of His own day

(Matt. 23:13), and James says teachers "shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas. 3:1). A warning like that is meant for every teacher, this teaching's own included.

The tone is a fair charge, and this paper won't defend all of it. A warning meant to sober a brother reads very differently from language that seems to enjoy the thought of his loss, and people on this side of the argument have sometimes written the second kind. "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren" (Jas. 4:11) was written to them too.

The history behind the charge also needs telling, because it ran in both directions. When the elders of that church asked the home study to stop, the two lay teachers who led it stepped down from every leadership role they held rather than teach against the elders. One of them later wrote that the decision "was theirs to make under the authority of God." They moved the study into their home and told the people who had attended, "All of you are welcome here." Meanwhile an elder wrote to the others that "everyone who is open to talking with us about it should be warned against it," promising to "stay coordinated" in that effort, and people who studied with the couple were phoned and urged to stop. What actually narrowed was a shared platform for teaching. The friendships that broke broke on both sides, and both sides said things they shouldn't have.

Separating over doctrine isn't unique to this teaching, either. It's the ordinary shape of church life. Baptist and Pentecostal congregations, Reformed and Arminian ones, organize apart over differences each judges serious. The church in this history did the same when it declared it would "challenge those doctrines that claim to add to this message," and it had every right to decide what its own classes would teach.

The Lutheran saying sounds like a settlement, but it leaves the real question open: who decides what's essential? A historian of the saying notes that in the twentieth-century millennial disputes, the essentials-and-non-essentials distinction "was forced upon the premillennialists by the amillennial mainstream in an attempt to relativize or discredit" their teaching. Paul gives a better frame in one passage. Christians are to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" now (Eph. 4:3), "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). The Spirit's unity is something given, to be kept. The faith's unity is something reached, over time. Disagreeing along the way doesn't break the first. And when the disciples forbade a man because "he does not follow us," Jesus answered, "Do not forbid him... For he who is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9:38-40). That word cuts in every direction this history ran.

Objection Four: A Faulty Method

The charge

This was the charge the church's leaders pressed hardest. The elders' statement said the teaching's "Bible exposition techniques are not consistent with proven and accepted methods of study," and the pastor wrote, "I see the method as the problem." The 2007 critique spelled the complaint out. The teaching "reduces scripture to a series of proof texts": "the idea comes first. Then, an idea is applied to a passage. Finally, that passage is used to interpret other portions of scripture." The result "is comprehensible only to those who know the system." Its teachers say Scripture is its own interpreter while leaning on word studies and lexicons, and they avoid the word *interpret* "as if to avoid the word affirms the claim." Its typology, a later post added, "effectively allegorizes vast

portions of scripture." And Scripture forbids it all: "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). On that reading, interpretation is a collective work of the church, and a lone teacher's reading is suspect by nature.

The critique gave two examples. A handout cited Ezekiel 28 for Satan's rule over the earth before Adam, but "Ezekiel 28 never mentions Satan"; the lament is addressed to the king of Tyre. And the claim that Jesus isn't reigning now is "plainly heretical," because Peter says God has exalted Him to His right hand and made Him "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33, 36).

The answer

The pastor asked the right question. Method decides everything else, and Paper 0 is given to it in full. What follows is the short form.

Proof-texting is a danger for every reader, and the cure is the same for all of them: read passages whole, in their setting, and let the plain ones govern the harder ones. A handout that lists bare references invites the charge, and Objection Two has already conceded as much. But the critique's description, idea first and text second, describes a habit any tradition can fall into. It doesn't describe a method this teaching recommends.

A lexicon isn't an authority standing over the text. It's a tool for recovering what a word meant where it was written, and anyone can pick one up and check it. A creed or a council that fixes a doctrine's meaning from outside the text is a different kind of thing altogether. "Scripture interprets Scripture" was never a claim that no one reads, thinks, or uses a dictionary. It's a claim about which court is final. Scripture shows the method itself: Jesus "expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27), Paul taught by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13), and the Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Interpretation happens, and this teaching doesn't pretend otherwise.

Typology isn't allegory. Allegory sets the history aside and reads a meaning into it from somewhere else. Typology keeps the history and sees a pattern Scripture itself repeats, and the New Testament names the practice. Adam "is a type of Him who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Israel's wilderness years "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). The law's feasts and sabbaths "are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). Paul calls Sarah and Hagar "symbolic" (Gal. 4:24), and he quotes Genesis 2:24 and says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32). The control is simple. A type illustrates what plain statements teach; it never carries a doctrine alone. The critique itself leaned on this kind of reading when it explained why James and Hebrews both pair Abraham's offering of Isaac with Rahab: "These were recognized as types of the resurrection."

Second Peter 1:20 is about where prophecy came from. The next verse says so: "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Peter is saying no prophet made up what he wrote. He isn't saying ordinary Christians may read only what the church has agreed on. And the church's agreement has been wrong before. For centuries the early church expected a literal reign of Christ on the earth, and a later consensus set it aside (Paper 9 traces how).

The two examples bear the method out. Ezekiel's lament is addressed to the king of Tyre, but it says things no king of Tyre ever was: "You were in Eden, the garden of God" and "You were the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek. 28:13-14). The prophet speaks to the power behind the throne through the man on it, the same way Jesus once spoke to Satan through Peter (Matt. 16:23). And Peter's sermon, read through, seats Jesus at God's right hand and then quotes the psalm with its *till*: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Acts 2:34-35; Ps. 110:1). Hebrews describes the same posture: He "sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). The critique's own illustration grants the rest. It compared Satan's rule to Herod's, a real ruler governing at Rome's pleasure, and called Satan "a ruler" (John 14:30). God's sovereignty over all things isn't in question. The question is when the Son takes the throne promised to Him, which Jesus Himself distinguished from the one He shares now: "as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). Paper 3 carries that case.

Every reading of Scripture has a frame, and every frame looks strange from outside. Covenant theology is hard to follow without its covenants, and dispensational theology without its dispensations. The fair test is whether the frame comes out of the text and gives the text back intact, and the papers in this series are offered for exactly that test.

Objection Five: Christians in the Lake of Fire

The charge

The 2007 critique summarized the teaching this way: "unfaithful Christians, will be cast into the lake of fire for one thousand years for purification. Thus, through fire, they too will receive soul salvation." Two years later the critic named it as his principal objection: that the salvation of the soul is conditional, "and the claim that Christians will suffer the hurt of the second death, i.e. the lake of fire." One of his blog posts on the subject was titled "Baptist purgatory." The church's elders, reading a teacher's book on the Judgment Seat, noted it down as "Nonovercoming christians will go into the lake of fire." Even the teacher who wrote a defense of it in 2008 drew the line here: "If they believe that the unfaithful or worldly believer will spend the 1,000 years of the earthly kingdom burning in the lake of fire, I would reject that."

The answer

Begin with the verse. Jesus said to a church, "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:11), and John names the second death himself: "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8; see 20:14). The promise is made to the one who overcomes. A Christian who doesn't overcome isn't covered by it. This teaching won't explain that away, and the critic heard correctly. The letters to the churches do warn Christians that the second death can hurt them.

What the critic pictured, though, was a place: Christians thrown into a burning lake and kept there a thousand years until the fire purged them fit. That isn't how this series reads the lake, and it isn't what Scripture says fire is. Fire belongs first to God Himself: "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29; Deut. 4:24). The image describes what He *is*, never a place men are sent to or a length of time they stay there. It's His holiness at work, and what that work accomplishes is decided by what

it touches. Isaiah asked who could live with it: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" His answer was a man's walk: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly" (Isa. 33:14-15). Three men in Babylon stood in a furnace that killed the soldiers who threw them in, and the king saw them "loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt" (Dan. 3:25). The only thing burned was what bound them.

Paul describes the same fire at the Judgment Seat:

> "...each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Cor. 3:13-15)

That is where the hurt of Revelation 2:11 begins: at the Judgment Seat, under His eyes, with every work tested by the fire He is. A man hears his own Lord's verdict on his life of service, and some will hear "You wicked and lazy servant" (Matt. 25:26). The hurt doesn't end at the verdict. It continues through the age that follows, because each man goes from that seat to the place it assigns him. Objection Six describes that place.

None of this is purgatory. Purgatory makes suffering the means of making a soul fit, and this teaching has no such means. Nothing is burned out of a man to qualify him for anything. What he loses at the Judgment Seat stays lost: his part in the reign, his share in the glory, his place near the King for that age. The loss belongs to its age and expires with it (Paper 2 works through the comparison with purgatory, and Paper 4 the lake itself). Paul's "he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" points the other way from the critic's summary. The man's standing is never in the fire. His works are, and he comes out with nothing in his hands.

Some earlier writers in this stream did describe the lake as a location, entered after the Judgment Seat and endured for the length of the kingdom. The critics who heard that were hearing something that had actually been taught. This series doesn't read the lake that way, and it holds the details of the lake with an open hand. What it won't do is blunt Revelation 2:11. The Lord who spoke it meant it for churches.

Objection Six: Where Does Scripture Say a Christian Is Excluded, and for How Long?

The charge

The critic put this one as a challenge, more than once: "Simply provide a scripture reference that says carnal Christians will be excluded during the millennial kingdom, and I'll cease to argue against it." Revelation 20, he wrote, is "the sole reference to the millennial kingdom in scripture," and it says nothing about Christians being judged or shut out: "Its absence in a key text is fatal." When the passages from Jesus' teaching were offered, he answered that there are "too many punishments." Is it being cut in two and given a portion with the hypocrites, being shut out like the foolish virgins, being cast into outer darkness, or being sent into the fire prepared for the devil? The teachers themselves disagree. Besides, "none of the punishments in the Olivet discourse is temporary," and in the parable of the minas the unfaithful servant's mina "is never restored." The inheritance

warnings in the letters, he added, concern the unsaved: in Ephesians 5:6, "the sons of disobedience" are "those outside the covenant of Christ." And he pressed a plainer question: "Where do the unfaithful... go? What is their fate?"

The answer

Revelation 20 is where the reign is described. It isn't where the churches are judged. Revelation judges the churches at its beginning. Seven letters open "I know your works," and each closes with what Jesus grants "him who overcomes" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). In the middle of them He says, "I will give to each one of you according to your works" (Rev. 2:23). What He grants the overcomer is a share in His rule: "power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26) and a seat on His throne (Rev. 3:21). By the time John reaches chapter 20, those verdicts have been given, and the reign is under way.

The passages the critic asked for exist, and they're spoken about people already inside the household. Jesus said this to His disciples (Matt. 5:1-2), near the close of the Sermon on the Mount:

> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:21-23)

These men prophesied and cast out demons in His name. The question on the table is entering the kingdom, and only the saved stand at that question. The unsaved aren't judged until the kingdom is over (Rev. 20:11-15). "I never knew you" is a fair translation, and *know* in Scripture often means to acknowledge and own: God said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2), and He wasn't unaware of the others. The parable of the talents is about "his own servants," to whom the master "delivered his goods" (Matt. 25:14), and it ends with one of them: "And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). The man without a wedding garment is a guest already in the hall when the king finds him (Matt. 22:11-13). Paul writes the same warning to churches, and he uses the word *inherit*: "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21; also 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5).

The Ephesians passage won't take the critic's reading. It's written to "dear children" (Eph. 5:1), about conduct unfitting "for saints" (Eph. 5:3), and it warns them, "Let no one deceive you with empty words... Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Eph. 5:6-7). Nobody needs to be told not to become partners in what he could never do. "Sons of disobedience" names men by the character they show. Scripture uses *disobedient* of saved people more than once (1 Pet. 2:8; 3:1), and it's the readers who are being warned not to join them.

"Too many punishments" mistakes pictures for inventory. Scripture pictures the Church as a body, a building, and a bride, and nobody concludes there are three churches. In the same way the parables picture one loss from several sides: a servant cut off and given his portion with the hypocrites (Matt. 24:51), a door shut while the wedding goes on inside (Matt. 25:10-12), a hall full of light with the darkness just outside (Matt. 22:13). A parable isn't a literal account of anything; the wheat and the tares don't teach farming. The fire of Matthew 25:41 belongs to a separate

judgment, of the nations, and it's one fire under several names, God's holiness meeting whatever resists Him (Objection Five). That teachers have described these pictures differently shows that teachers differ. It doesn't show that Scripture is silent.

The question "where does he go?" needs reshaping before it can be answered. These pictures aren't places on a map, and separation from God was never a matter of distance; Adam hid from God among the trees of a garden God was walking in (Gen. 3:8). Ask instead what *condition* the unfaithful Christian is in, and Scripture answers. He does not reign (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 2 Tim. 2:12). So he lives in the kingdom he could have governed, under the authority of those who did what he didn't do. He's put out of his master's joy, having heard "Enter into the joy of your lord" said to someone else (Matt. 25:21, 30). He's outside a lit hall, near enough to know what he's no longer part of (Matt. 22:13). He's "ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). The darkness outside the light is the absence of the glory and the nearness he could have had, and Scripture means it to hurt.

The critic is right that the mina is never given back. What's lost is lost. But the loss is measured by what's lost, and what's lost is a part in the reign. That reign has a stated length (Rev. 20:4-6), and Paul says it ends, when the Son "delivers the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24). The word behind "everlasting" in these warnings is *aionios*, belonging to an age (Paper 5). The seventh day doesn't come around again, and the man who loses his part in it doesn't get it back. What lies past that age for him Paper 4 takes up, and the answer it gives presumes he's made whole once death itself is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26).

Objection Seven: The Thousand Years Is Never Called the Kingdom

The charge

This objection came from the same critic, aimed at the inheritance warnings in Paul's letters. Revelation wasn't written until the last decade of the first century. Galatians, Corinthians, and Ephesians were written decades earlier, so "first-century Christians did not know about the millennial kingdom (literally or figuratively) until John wrote the Revelation." When Paul warned that some "will not inherit the kingdom of God," his readers couldn't have heard a thousand-year reign in it: "That the Galatians would have understood Paul to be speaking of the thousand-year rule of Christ — a period not even called the Kingdom of God in Revelation — is beyond belief." Revelation 20 never calls the thousand years "the kingdom of God," and the Old Testament passages offered for it don't mention a thousand years: "you interpose the millennial kingdom into it. That's arbitrary." Behind this sits an older complaint. The number appears in one chapter of one book, written in a genre full of symbols, and no doctrine of this weight should rest there.

The answer

Paul's readers didn't need the number to know the kingdom. They needed what Jesus and the prophets had already said, and they had it. God had promised David a Son whose throne He would establish (2 Sam. 7:12-16), and the angel told Mary that God would give Jesus "the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). Jesus told the Twelve, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father

bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30; Matt. 19:28). After His resurrection the apostles asked the question every Jew would ask: "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). A coming reign, with thrones in it and positions handed out, was common knowledge long before John wrote.

Paul taught it to the Galatian churches in person. Returning through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, cities of the Roman province of Galatia, he and Barnabas went about "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:21-22). That was said to disciples, about *entering*, with continuing in the faith attached. Many hold that these were the churches of the letter. Either way, the letter itself says the warning wasn't new: "of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21).

Paul also knew the reign had an end, decades before Revelation gave its length. To the Corinthians he wrote, "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-25). That's a reign that begins, does its work, and is handed over. And Paul attached worthiness to it from his earliest letters: "walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12); "that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer" (2 Thess. 1:5). Revelation didn't introduce a kingdom with conditions. It gave the length of one the church already knew about.

As for the name, the critic granted that the kingdom of God arrives in Revelation 12:10: "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come." A chapter earlier the heavenly voices announce, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Chapter 20 then describes that kingdom in operation. "They lived and *reigned* with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4), and *reigned* is the verb of the noun *kingdom*. A reign is a kingdom being exercised. It needs no second label.

There's a further question underneath this objection. If "the kingdom of God" in Paul's letters isn't the coming reign, it has to mean something else, and the usual answer is a reign of Christ already present, spiritual instead of literal, exercised now in His people. Paul's own wording won't carry that. The kingdom in his warnings is something a Christian *will* inherit or fail to inherit: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21). It's something disciples "must through many tribulations enter" (Acts 14:22). No one is warned that he may never inherit what he already possesses. Paul even corrected Christians who thought the reign had begun: "You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" (1 Cor. 4:8). He wishes they were reigning, because then he would be reigning with them, and he isn't. Revelation 20 won't let the reign turn spiritual either. Of the first group John says, "they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years," and of the second, "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:4-5). It's the same verb both times. A spiritual reading has to make that one verb mean two different things within two verses. Paper 3 answers the spiritual reading in full.

The number appears only in Revelation 20, six times in six verses (Rev. 20:2-7). The pattern behind it is as old as Genesis. God worked six days and rested the seventh, and He "blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:2-3). Peter gave the measure, and he gave it in answer to scoffers asking, "Where is the promise of His coming?": "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:4, 8). Hebrews says the seventh day's rest still lies ahead: "There remains therefore a rest $$ *sabbatismos*, a Sabbath rest $$ for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). The early church read it that way well before any later consensus set it aside. Justin Martyr, in the second century, tied Isaiah's promise, "as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people" (Isa. 65:22), to "The day of the Lord is as a thousand years," and only then cited John's Revelation. The thousand years rests on the structure of Scripture itself, and the charge that Revelation's symbols make the number unreliable doesn't reach it. Paper 3 carries the full case.

Objection Eight: The Wilderness Generation Was Lost

The charge

At a leadership meeting in December 2006, the church's leaders would not agree that the generation who crossed the Red Sea were saved. The 2007 critique made a related point. The handout had said that before the cross, salvation "was based on faith in the passover lambs," and the critique called that "an interposition of a foreign idea": the Old Testament saints were saved by faith, as Hebrews 11 shows, and "there are not different modes of salvation." Put the two together and the charge runs like this. The generation that died in the wilderness died in unbelief, "an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12), and "they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19). So they were lost, and the warnings built on them in Hebrews 3-4 and 1 Corinthians 10 are warnings about the unsaved, not Christians.

The answer

A great deal turns on this one. If that generation was lost, Hebrews and 1 Corinthians are warning the unsaved. If they were redeemed, both letters are warning the redeemed that they can come short of an inheritance, and that is what this teaching says.

The critique is right that there aren't different modes of salvation. There has only ever been one way: faith in the death God provides in a man's place. Hebrews puts faith and the Passover blood in a single sentence: "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Heb. 11:28). God had said, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13), and the lambs carried that weight because of the Lamb "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19-20). That's faith in the blood of a substitute, the same faith a man exercises today.

The generation that left Egypt exercised it. "Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did" (Exod. 12:28). At the sea, "the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses" (Exod. 14:31). Hebrews credits that same generation with faith: "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land" (Heb. 11:29). And Paul lays out what they shared:

> "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." (1 Cor. 10:1-5)

All of them, five times, and the Rock they drank from was Christ. Then: "Now these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). The example works only if they were what Paul's readers were: redeemed people who could still fail.

Their unbelief came later, at Kadesh, and it had a specific object. God asked, "How long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?" (Num. 14:11). They didn't believe He could bring them into the land. English hides how closely Scripture ties the two scenes. The verb in "believed the LORD" at the sea and in "will they not believe Me" at Kadesh is the same Hebrew word, *aman* (Exod. 14:31; Num. 14:11). Hebrews does the same in Greek: "by faith" (*pistis*) they crossed the sea (Heb. 11:29), and they could not enter "because of unbelief" (*apistia*), the same word with a negative in front of it (Heb. 3:19). The people who believed God at the sea refused to believe Him at the border.

Moses interceded, and the answer came in one breath: "I have pardoned, according to your word," followed by "they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers" (Num. 14:20-23). Pardoned and shut out of the land, both at once. That's the unbelief Hebrews 3:19 describes, and the verse names what it cost them: they "could not *enter*." The subject is entering the rest, not being redeemed from Egypt.

Moses settles it. He and Aaron were shut out of the land too: "Because you did not believe Me... you shall not bring this assembly into the land" (Num. 20:12). Nobody counts Moses lost. Hebrews lists him among the faithful (Heb. 11:23-29), and he stood on the mountain talking with Jesus (Matt. 17:3). Losing an inheritance and losing one's standing before God are two different things, and Scripture shows them apart in the life of its greatest prophet.

Hebrews then turns the whole account on its readers, "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1): "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). A writer doesn't say *let us* about a danger only the lost can face.

Objection Nine: A Novel Doctrine

The charge

"If what the apologists say regarding this teaching seems new or different from what you heard in your home church," the 2007 critique told its readers, "it is because it is a new teaching." Its author later added, "I have studied scripture sincerely for 20 years and never noticed kingdom exclusion." When a defender of the teaching produced second-century writers who expected a literal thousand-year reign, another participant in the exchange asked the sharper question, and the critic seconded it: does Justin Martyr, or any second-century writer, teach that unfaithful Christians are shut out of that reign? "None of the sources you so diligently quote endorse the idea." A narrower form of the charge grants that pieces of the teaching are old and presses on the whole. Three

tenses of salvation mapped onto three parts of man, joined to an account of the kingdom offered again to Israel during the Acts period, is a combination no ancient writer held, assembled from one inference stacked on another.

The answer

New to a hearer isn't the same as new. In Josiah's day the high priest walked out of the temple and said, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 22:8). When it was read to the king, he tore his clothes (2 Kings 22:11). The book had been in the house the whole time. Twenty years of careful study inside one frame can still miss what that frame never looks for.

The literal reign is the older reading, and the record says so. Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, told a Jewish opponent, "I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged." He also said, in the same passage, that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise." The critic caught a defender of the teaching leaving that second sentence out, and he was right to. The fair statement is that the expectation was early and widespread, and that it wasn't unanimous. The turn away from it can be dated. Augustine, whose reading shaped the church for a thousand years after him, wrote of the literal reign, "for I myself, too, once held this opinion" (*City of God* 20.7). Paper 9 traces that history.

The sharper question deserves a direct reply. No second-century writer lays out this teaching the way this series does. What the writers who expected the reign do show is that they didn't expect every Christian to stand in the same place in it. Irenaeus passed on what the elders before him taught: "there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold" (*Against Heresies* 5.36.2). The *Shepherd of Hermas* pictures a tower whose stones are set according to how each one was found. And the letter that goes by the name of Barnabas, written within a generation or two of the apostles, warns its readers in words close to this teaching's own:

> "Take heed, lest resting at our ease, as those who are the called $$ of God $$, we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, acquiring power over us, should thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord.... Let us beware lest we be found $$ fulfilling that saying $$, as it is written, Many are called, but few are chosen." (*Epistle of Barnabas* 4)

That's said to "the called," about being thrust away from the kingdom. It isn't a worked-out doctrine, and this paper won't present it as one. The fullest statements of the teaching came much later, in Robert Govett and those who followed him in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The charge that the whole thing appeared from nowhere still doesn't survive the record.

The narrower charge is right about the combination. No early writer held these pieces together in this form. But no tradition's full system passes that test. Reformed theology's covenant of works and covenant of grace took their shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, out of older parts. The fair question about any system is whether its parts are faithful to the text and fit together without forcing it. As for inference, the account of the Acts period rests at both ends on events Scripture narrates outright: the Church's beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2) and Paul's last word to the Jewish leaders in Rome, "the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will

hear it!" (Acts 28:25-28). Between those two points, the placement of individual letters is held with less certainty, and this series says so where it matters.

Objection Ten: The Teaching Makes Itself the Test

The charge

The 2007 critique asked what the works are that the soul's salvation depends on, and found that the list ends with "commitment to the Word of the Kingdom teaching itself." Its conclusion: "What begins as a doctrine works — good deeds, morality, and faithfulness — ends as commitment to the teaching." The same sermon it quoted under Objection Three put it this way:

> "Can I tell you this morning that no work other than that which is done in Boaz's field is of any value whatsoever. Anything that is done outside of Boaz's field is wood, hay and straw, and it will be burnt up."

The church's elders found the same thing in a teacher's book, which called this message "the central message of the New Testament" and "a key to the Scriptures." Without it, the book said, "the Bible, for the most part, remains a closed book for the vast majority of Christians," and Christians in the churches are "slowly starving to death." It added that "a person, untrained in the theology schools of the land, but understanding the Word of the Kingdom, often has a better grasp of the whole of Scripture than many of those who are teaching in the theology schools." One elder sent the passage to the others and said it "explains their reactions to us." The shape of the charge is old: a group that claims the key to Scripture, sets itself above other Christians, and makes agreement with its teachers the work that counts.

The answer

If faithfulness meant agreeing with a teacher, the critique would be right, and that would be a gospel of a label. Nothing in Scripture measures a Christian's service by whose teaching he holds. The sermon's line, as spoken, claims more than its own picture allows. In the story, Ruth "happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz" (Ruth 2:3). The field is named for its owner. What the type points to is whose work it is, and Paul says where that work is done: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24). Work done for Him, in obedience to what He has said, is His, wherever it's done.

The servants in the parable are judged on what they did with what the master entrusted to them (Matt. 25:14-30). Knowledge matters because it brings responsibility, and Jesus says so directly:

> "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." (Luke 12:47-48)

A Christian who never heard any of this isn't judged as though he had. The one who has heard it is more accountable, not less. That cuts against any pride in knowing.

The claim that the kingdom is a key isn't an invention, though. It's Jesus' own. He told His disciples, "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11), and He

closed the same set of parables this way: "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). Understanding the kingdom does open the Scriptures. But a key isn't a password. The ancient sects that traded in secret knowledge kept it for initiates. Everything this teaching claims is set out in print, verse by verse, for anyone to check, and it asks to be checked the way the Bereans checked Paul (Acts 17:11).

The same chapter guards against the pride the critics saw. Its parables don't run one after another, each waiting for the last to finish. Each begins in the apostles' day and runs to the end of the age, so the enemy's sowing and the leaven are at work the whole time, everywhere the word is sown (Matt. 13:24-33). No assembly stands outside that field, this teaching's own included. Describing other Christians as starving, however sincerely meant, sets the hearer above them, and a teacher who does that has handed his critics the very sentence they quoted. Paul's question answers it: "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

The danger behind that word is real, though, and Scripture warns about it outright. Hebrews says it to its own readers:

> "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:12-14)

Paul told the Corinthians the same: "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able" (1 Cor. 3:2). Christians can stay infants, and staying there costs them. But the writer of Hebrews doesn't leave the warning hanging over his readers. He follows it at once with "let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1), and puts himself under the same call. The warning belongs on the lips of a man who includes himself in it.

Objection Eleven: Untrained and Unqualified to Teach

The charge

In 2009 the critic wrote that the small fellowship at the center of this history "does not have a paid pastor nor anyone qualified to preach," that it reads "notes adapted from the sermons of" another pastor, and that the congregation "simply parrots" him, "who largely parrots" an older teacher. Its reading of Scripture was "wildly allegorical and highly speculative. It is also not original." The church the fellowship had left made the same point another way, by replacing the home study with a published course on how to read the Bible. Behind both lies a broader charge: anyone who wants to press past the basics needs formal training, and this teaching's Greek word studies and cross-references are its own kind of gatekeeping, whatever it calls itself.

The answer

Jesus chose His first disciples from among fishermen and a tax collector (Matt. 4:18-22; 9:9). The leaders who examined two of them drew the conclusion the critic drew:

> "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

The same question had been asked of Jesus Himself: "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" (John 7:15). Paul made it a principle: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:26-27). One of the lay teachers answered the charge in a letter at the time: "originally, education from a theological institute was not a prerequisite for understanding, preaching, and teaching the gospel."

The book of Acts has a case that runs exactly opposite to the critic's assumption. Apollos was "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures," yet he knew "only the baptism of John." The ones who corrected him were a pair of tentmakers: "When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:3, 24-26). The trained man learned from the tradespeople, and the church was better for it.

None of this makes study optional. Teachers "shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas. 3:1), and every one of them is told, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Diligence asked of a reader is one thing. A title required before his reading counts is another. A lexicon or a concordance is a tool anyone can pick up and check. And where the full case takes time to assemble, Scripture already supplies the category, milk before solid food (1 Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14). That’s why the papers in this series are being given short versions: the substance in plain words for the reader starting out, and the full case, with its Greek and its sources, open to anyone who wants to test it.

The charge of "parroting" assumes originality is a qualification. Scripture asks for faithfulness instead: "it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Paul was content to say, "I delivered to you first of all that which I also received" (1 Cor. 15:3), and he told Timothy to do the same: "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Handing on what one has received, after checking it against Scripture, is how the faith has always been taught. The question is never whether a teacher learned from someone. It's whether what he learned is true.

Objection Twelve: The Teachers' Own Record

The charge

In December 2009 the critic opened a new line of attack. One of the best-known teachers of this message had edited, and kept available online, the collected writings of the pastor under whom he had first learned it. One chapter of those writings read Genesis 9 as a curse resting on a race of people and opposed the civil rights movement on that ground: "WHAT GOD HAS SEPARATED, LET NOT MAN INTEGRATE!" Asked about it, the editor replied that the curse of Genesis 9, "of necessity, remains in effect today." The critic wrote to him that the teaching "is rank heresy," and he wrote to the fellowship at the center of this history asking whether they disavowed it. Add the sermon calling other Christians "unbelievers" and the warnings of condemnation for leaders (Objection

Three), and the charge is this: look at what the teachers have said and done. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16).

The answer

First, the racial teaching. This series rejects it without qualification. Genesis 9:25 names its subject: "Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren." Scripture's own word on the peoples of the earth is that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), that He "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34), that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28), and that the Lamb redeemed men "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Nothing in the teaching of the kingdom depends on that chapter, and nothing in it is helped by it. The writings were taken down from the editor's website soon after the critic raised them, and the editor said he disagreed with a number of things in that chapter. A teacher's error is still an error.

Second, the principle. A doctrine stands or falls on Scripture, not on the conduct of the men who teach it: "let God be true but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). No tradition survives the other test. The critique honored Martin Luther as the man grace inspired, and in 1540 Luther counseled a prince to tell "a good, strong lie" to conceal a bigamous marriage. Nobody sets aside justification by faith on that account, and nobody should. The fruit Jesus told His hearers to inspect belongs to prophets, and it's measured by what they teach and how they live. A teaching is tested by opening the Bible.

Third, the teachers themselves. Scripture shows its own teachers being corrected and growing. Apollos learned "the way of God more accurately" from two tentmakers (Acts 18:26). Paul withstood Peter at Antioch "to his face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). Paul and Barnabas parted company over John Mark (Acts 15:37-39), and years later Paul wrote, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). "The path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

The same teacher whose sharpest words the critics quoted wrote a foreword for another man's book near the end of his life, in his early nineties. He told of sitting, at twenty-five, under the pastor who taught him "the basics of practically everything" he would teach, and he passed on a saying he'd learned there: "If you ever find two Christians who believe exactly the same thing about everything in the Bible, you can know one thing for certain: You can know that one of them is not studying." He wrote that he and the book's author disagreed on several points, and that it "would, instead, be strange if the author of the book and I did agree on everything in the book." He closed with a warning to the reader that "knowledge" and "a corresponding responsibility for that knowledge" go hand in hand. Those are not the words of a man who thought he had finished learning.

The teaching of the kingdom has a history, and it has changed as the men and women who hold it have studied further. This series parts company with earlier writers in this stream on a number of points, and it expects that readers after it will part company with it on some. That is not instability; it's what Paul described: "if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule" (Phil. 3:15-16).

Objection Thirteen: A Cult

The charge

The word came up in the church itself. According to a letter one of the lay teachers wrote to the pastor, more than one member said publicly that this message "adds to the gospel, and by adding to the gospel, it makes us a cult." The elders' own statement was more measured, but it called the teaching "sectarian," and the critic described its holders as "separatistic" and closed off from the rest of the Body. For most Christians *cult* is the strongest word available, and a teaching tagged with it rarely gets a hearing afterward.

The answer

The word carries two different meanings, and the charge needs to say which one it intends.

In its theological sense, a cult is a group that denies the center of the faith: who Jesus is, His death for sins and His resurrection, and a standing before God received by grace through faith. Paul states that center: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). John gives the test: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). This teaching affirms every part of it, the deity of Jesus and the Trinity included, and it holds that a man's standing before God is by grace through faith with nothing added (Eph. 2:8-9). By this measure the charge has nothing to stand on. Paper 12 shows where the groups usually called cults actually part company with the faith, and none of those departures is found here.

In its other sense, the one the cult-awareness field prefers, a cult is defined by conduct, not doctrine. One widely circulated definition describes a group "employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control," and lists them: "isolation from former friends and family," "powerful group pressures," "information management," "suspension of individuality or critical judgment," and "fear of leaving." The same literature is careful to add that "a group may be deviant and heretical without necessarily being a cult." A writer in that field, Michael Langone, makes the reverse point too: a church with sound theology can behave cultishly, because correct doctrine doesn't stop people from sinning.

By that measure the question is conduct, and conduct can be checked. The fellowship in this history kept its study open: "All of you are welcome here." It told the elders it would let a man who disagreed with it speak freely to its members, "even in the parking lot." Everything it teaches is in print, with the verses, for anyone to test. That isn't the profile the definition describes.

The same literature names one more mark: a group that claims "a special, exalted status" for itself. Objection Ten has already dealt with that danger, and it's the one this teaching has to watch. The guard is to keep every claim open to Scripture and every hearer free to check it.

The label itself proves less than it seems to. Paul's own faith was called a sect, and he answered it in court: "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the

God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14). The Jewish leaders in Rome told him, "concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere" (Acts 28:22). Being small and spoken against says nothing about whether a teaching is true. Scripture's instruction for that question is the same for every group: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Objection Fourteen: The Weight of Fear

The charge

This objection is pastoral. It can grant every distinction this teaching draws between a settled standing and a conditional reward, and still ask what it does to an ordinary Christian. The 2007 critique put the worry sharply: "If soul salvation is 'works-based,' we all stand rightly condemned, and none, except the sinless, will reign with Christ in the millennial Kingdom." Of the warning that unfruitful Christians face loss, it asked, "This is the Good News of the Word of the Kingdom?" A man who takes the warnings seriously, on this view, will live in the same anxiety as anyone under a gospel of works, whatever the doctrine says about his standing underneath. A teaching that produces chronic fear hasn't been rescued by a distinction its hearers can't feel.

The answer

Scripture commends a fear to Christians, and it doesn't apologize for it. "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:10-11). Peter tells people who call on the Father to "conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear" (1 Pet. 1:17). A teaching with no fear in it at all would be the one out of step with the New Testament.

What this teaching removes is the worst fear on offer. In the mainstream alternative, if fruit is the evidence that faith was real, a struggling Christian is left to ask whether he was ever saved at all, and no amount of present fruit can settle a question about the past. This teaching never asks him that. His standing is settled and can't be revoked (Rom. 11:29). The fear Scripture attaches to his walk concerns a reward, his part in the coming reign. It doesn't concern his standing before God.

John shows where that fear is meant to lead:

> "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:17-18)

Boldness in the day of judgment is possible, and John ties it to love being perfected, which is the same thing he elsewhere calls abiding: "abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). Fear and confidence aren't two fixed conditions a Christian is assigned to. They track the same present reality. The man who isn't abiding has reason to fear, and the man who is abiding has reason for boldness. Fear of

the right kind moves a man toward abiding, and abiding grows into the confidence that casts fear out.

And the provision for failure isn't a rule. It's a Person, present now. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). When correction comes, it comes from a Father: "For whom the LORD loves He chastens," and "afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:6, 11). That is the good news of the kingdom for a Christian who fails: a High Priest who is still interceding, and a throne of grace he is told to approach boldly.

Objection Fifteen: Another Gospel

The charge

The heaviest charge comes last, and the critic didn't make it lightly. "I do not cite Galatians 1:6-9 casually," he wrote, "but I believe they must be spoken." The passage reads:

> "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:6-8)

The 2007 critique anticipated the obvious reply. This teaching doesn't ask anyone to be circumcised or keep the law of Moses, and the critique granted that. But "they do commend believers to works of man (however construed as works motivated by grace). That, essentially, is salvation by works of the law, for it is something 'coming from ourselves.'" The critic also read Galatians 5:21 against this teaching. Paul's concern in the letter is "that they will return to their old state" (Gal. 4:9), and when he says "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God," he "reminds them, rhetorically, that no one in the flesh inherits the kingdom." Paul, in other words, is describing the unsaved there, not warning Christians.

The answer

The critic and this teaching agree on what Paul condemned. The "different gospel" in Galatia made circumcision and the law a condition of being justified: "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.... You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:2, 4). This teaching asks no Christian to keep the law to be justified, at any point. A man's standing before God is by grace through faith with nothing added, and that is what Paul was defending.

The critic's next step erases a line Paul draws in the same letter. To the critic, any work a man does is "something coming from ourselves," and so a work of the law. Paul sets the works of the law on one side and the fruit of the Spirit on the other: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). The works this

teaching speaks of are the second kind. Paul doesn't call them law. He calls them fruit, and he calls the walk that produces them sowing to the Spirit.

Then, two chapters after the anathema, Paul speaks of inheriting and reaping in conditional terms, and he says it to Christians. Read the passage through:

> "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.... of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal. 5:16-17, 21, 25)
>
> "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting $$ age-lasting $$ life." (Gal. 6:7-8)

The critic's reading of 5:21 can't stand in its own context. The section opens with "brethren" (Gal. 5:13). The war between flesh and Spirit is inside the reader, "so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:17), and unsaved men don't have the Spirit to be at war with. Paul says he is repeating a warning he gave these same people before. Verse 25 separates *living* in the Spirit, which they already do, from *walking* in the Spirit, which is the open question. The next chapter begins, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass" (Gal. 6:1), and "Do not be deceived" (Gal. 6:7) is a warning that only means something to someone who can be deceived. And Paul's verb is *inherit*. An inheritance is what an heir receives, not what makes him one.

So Paul put the anathema and the conditional inheritance in one letter, and he saw no contradiction between them, because they answer different questions. One question is how a man stands before God: by grace through faith, with nothing added, and anyone who adds the law to it is accursed. The other is what a man who already stands there will reap, and that depends on how he walks. The critic was right to treat Galatians 1:6-9 as the gravest test this teaching could face. Galatians itself is where the teaching finds its clearest support.

Conclusion

Almost every charge in this paper comes back to one question. Is *salvation* in Scripture one undivided thing, settled entirely at the moment a man believes, so that anything still at stake afterward must be a threat to that standing or a work added to it? Or does Scripture speak of a standing settled once by grace, and of an inheritance still ahead, for which a Christian is told to run, to sow, to endure, and to watch? The critics answered the first way, and from that starting point their objections follow: works must mean a different gospel, warnings must mean the unsaved, exclusion must mean condemnation. Scripture answers the second way, in its own words, from Jesus' "whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25) to Paul's "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

The critics were right about several things. A handout gave three verses that never mention the soul. A sermon called fellow Christians "unbelievers" without explaining the word, and some teachers described the lake of fire as a place Christians are sent. Some described other Christians as starving. One chapter its editor kept in print taught a curse on a race of people. Those are the teachers' errors, and none of them is the teaching of Scripture.

The pastor of the church at the center of this history wrote that he wanted to talk about "which $$ method $$ is more sound," and that he saw "the method as the problem and that our hearts are not purposely seeking to divide." That's the right place to meet. The papers in this series are offered on those terms, to anyone willing to do what the Bereans did, "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.