

THE TRUE 'PLAN OF SALVATION'

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It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
(1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV)

Who Carries Out the Plan of Salvation?

What is the true “plan of salvation”? Is this plan something God follows, or is it what He requires of us? Do we follow it as a joint project along with God? Is the plan of salvation the entire cosmic design which God laid out before time and then followed in order to Redeem Mankind? Or, is it the one, two or three steps of response we are required to make in order to “apply” salvation to our personal lives? Is the plan a progressive series of eras in human history in which one is saved by obeying all the truth they know? Do we “carry out” the plan of salvation or did Jesus Christ fulfill it alone? Is it a plan “of” salvation, or is it the plan “for” salvation? Does the plan of salvation come to the believer in installments: First, the simple Gospel and then a more “full Gospel”? These questions came to mind after reading Jim Yohe’s statement about the plan of salvation:

His death, burial, and resurrection typified the forthcoming plan of salvation preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost: “Repent (death), and be baptized (burial) everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (resurrection)” (Acts 2:38).¹

This United Pentecostal Church minister submits that the “plan of salvation” comes AFTER Jesus’ death burial and resurrection. He claims that when Jesus died, was buried and rose again, it “typified” the “*forthcoming* plan of salvation preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost.” “Forthcoming,” means that it had not come yet. In other words, Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection were not *the* “plan” of salvation. For Yohe, the “plan” is the three steps of Acts 2:38: Repent, be baptized, and receive the Spirit. Rev. Yohe holds this view because it is the standard teaching of the

¹Jim H. Yohe, “Sign of the Empty Tomb,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, May 2001, p. 14.

UPCI. For example, a prominent teacher in UPCI history, S. G. Norris, stated in reference to Acts 2:38: "Thus, the Book of Acts consistently presents the same keys – the same plan of salvation."² This plan of salvation is called the only plan and the "true gospel:"

This apostolic pattern – faith, repentance, water baptism, and infilling of the Holy Spirit – is still the pattern of salvation for us today. There is no other plan of salvation, no other true gospel.³

This historically and theologically unique interpretation of the "plan of salvation" lies at the heart of the UPCI's doctrinal identity. It is the issue which predominated and defined the 1945 merger which formed the UPCI:

These men had been ministers in their respective organizations for many years. They knew, therefore, that the main problem to be worked out concerned the fundamental doctrine of the proposed new organization. It was brought out in chapters seven and eight that both the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ and the Pentecostal Church, Incorporated believed in repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking with other tongues. To be a minister in either organization, one must have obeyed these gospel precepts, and must teach and preach them. But in general, the two groups differed in the spiritual significance attached to each of these "steps" in the plan of salvation. The vast majority of the ministers in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ believed that water baptism in Jesus' name remitted sins and was the birth of the water. They further believed that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was the birth of the Spirit. The belief of some in the Pentecostal Church, Incorporated was identical with this. Others, however, believed that the word "for" in Acts 2:38 meant "because of," and that one was baptized because his sins had been remitted, through the efficacy of Jesus' shed blood, at the time of repentance. The Pentecostal Church, Incorporated had accepted ministers who believed either way, seeking to keep the unity of the Spirit until they all came into the unity of the faith. So it is easy to see that before a merger could be

²"The Keys," by SGN, Tract # 6119 (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press), p. 3.

³"The Biblical Experience of Salvation," by JLH, Tract # 6150, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press), p. 3.

effected, there must be a fundamental doctrine relative to the plan of salvation that ministers in both groups could conscientiously accept.⁴

However, the major question here is not concerning the unique way that the UPCI interprets these three elements separately [we've addressed that elsewhere; [cp. "Hearts Purified By Faith"⁵; "How Did Paul 'Wash Away' His Sins?"⁶; "Remission of Sins in Acts 2:38"⁷; "How Many Stages?"⁸; "What Does it Mean to be 'Born Again'?"⁹]. It is that they see them as THE plan of salvation. Ostensibly for Yohe, Jesus' work is not even part of the plan (which I am sure he did not intend). According to his statement, the plan of salvation - Acts 2:38 - was not known until it was preached by Peter on Pentecost Day. Instead of a plan which Jesus followed and fulfilled, it was a plan to be followed by those who heard Peter preach. It pertains more to what *they* had to *do* to be saved, than to what *Christ did* to save them. The UPCI views the plan of salvation as what one must obey in order to be saved:

There are several things man must do in order to be saved. He must hear the gospel preached, he must repent, he must believe, he must obey God's Word, and he must be baptized in Jesus' name.¹⁰

It is this writer's conviction that the Bible teaches that the plan of salvation is *all about God and what He has done to save His people. It is not about the sinner's response.* The Scriptures present the plan with a stress on what God has done. Yes, the Bible speaks strongly that the sinner

⁴Arthur L. Clanton and Charles Clanton, *United We Stand*, Jubilee Edition, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1995; original ed. 1970, Pentecostal Publishing House), pp. 143f.

⁵<http://www.inchistalone.org/PurifiedByFaith1.htm>

⁶<http://www.inchistalone.org/HowDidPaul.htm>

⁷<http://www.inchistalone.org/RemissionOfSins.htm>

⁸<http://www.inchistalone.org/HowManyStages.htm>

⁹<http://www.inchistalone.org/WhatMeanBornAgain.htm>

¹⁰*Salvation – The Key to Eternal Life*, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1985), p. 119.

must respond with repentance and faith. Nevertheless, what we must do is not the chief Scriptural accent. The Bible's call to repentance and faith are consumed with the magnificence of God's sovereignty and grace in salvation. The focus is not on repentance, nor is it on faith. The Bible's emphasis is on the object of that faith. The focus is on Christ. Faith is the way the believer looks at Christ. Whereas, the UPCI places great stress on one's obedience to Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation, the Gospel places the stress on *Christ's obedience in fulfilling God's plan on the Cross and through the Resurrection*. There are a number of reasons why the UPCI position is wrongly focused. We will address some of those reasons in the next pages.

Outline of this Paper

There are some very important issues, pertinent to the plan of salvation, which we will cover in this paper. Firstly, I will address the fact that the essence of God's plan of salvation revolves around *His Purpose and His Decrees*, and not *our* responses. Secondly, I will suggest that the "full gospel" theology has shaped the UPCI "plan of salvation." Thirdly, I will try to explain that the Gospel is our *rehearsal*, in faith, of Christ's work and not a *reenactment*, through acts of obedience, of His death, burial and resurrection. Fourthly, I will attempt to convey that an *improper* "reading" of the Bible can cause one to miss the proper meaning of the "plan of salvation." Fifthly, I will try to show how: 1) the phrase "plan of salvation" is not applied *consistently* and means different things at different times, as illustrated in the writings of a leading UPCI writer; and; 2) that this confusion of several plans of salvation demonstrates that a *conflicted method of interpretation* is being used to define the "plan of salvation." Sixthly, we will address how *Dispensationalism* has contributed to a serious misinterpretation of the plan of salvation. Seventhly, we will answer whether the Gospel, or Christ himself, can ever be called a "type." Lastly, we will make a case that Christ, as the *eschatological fulfillment* of all things, can never be called the precursor of any plan of salvation. The overarching theme of this paper is this: *What God has done in and through Jesus Christ, is the true plan of salvation. It is Jesus who is God's plan.* Jesus fulfilled God's plan in His doing and dying. By this He obtained for us all God's benefits for our salvation. What remains for us is to place our faith in Jesus to receive these benefits by grace.

Confounding the Gospel

The “plan of salvation” is a phrase that is frequently used by certain Christian groups in referring to the “steps¹¹,” “keys¹²,” or “stages” “How Many Stages?”¹³ a person must follow in order to be saved. It is a confounding of what Jesus did with what we must do. Is it biblically and theologically correct to speak of the Christian’s response as a “plan” of salvation? I do not believe it is. It is not the

¹¹A few examples of writers who use the word “steps” in reference to Acts 2:38: “The first **step** we should take in the process of the new birth is repentance.” [J. T. Pugh, *How to Receive the Holy Ghost*, (Hazelwood, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1969), p. 17.]; “Romans 8:28-30 describes five **steps** in God’s eternal plan of salvation for fallen mankind.” [David K. Bernard, *The New Birth*, p. 333-334.]; “The biblical **steps** of repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit had long ago faded from the institutional church, . . .” [David K. Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine Vol. 1*, p. 274.]; “One of the distinctive positions of Oneness Pentecostals is that God’s standard of full salvation for the New Testament church is repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in tongues. The major Oneness groups hold that this experience is “the New Birth,” although there is some debate on this issue. While there are differences between groups and even within groups on the proper theological characterization of these three **steps** of faith, there is agreement that God commands everyone to obey them. There is also agreement that these steps do not constitute salvation by works. Rather, they are applications of the grace of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, and they are expressions of faith in God.” [David K. Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine Vol. 3*, p. 112-113.] Bold in quotes mine.

¹²On the front of one Oneness Pentecostal periodical I found this title: “The First Order Unto Salvation Is The New Birth of Water and Spirit, St. John 3:5 -- Acts 2:38” followed by three diagrams. The first was a person praying with “Conviction Brings Repentance” above it and “Key No. 1 ‘REPENT’” beneath it. The second diagram was a baptism with “Repentance Brings Obedience” above it and “Key No. 2 ‘BAPTISM’” below it. The third was of a person with raised hands descended on by a radiant dove. Above it was “Obedience Brings the Holy Ghost” and below it was “Key No. 3 ‘THE HOLY GHOST.’” This perfectly illustrates the distortion that occurs when Acts 2:38 is made to be the “plan of salvation.” The elements of Acts 2:38 are viewed as keys which unlock the door of salvation. Rather than faith in what Christ has done, the obedient follower of Acts 2:38 possesses the real means of “opening the door” to salvation. Nevertheless, Jesus said, “I am the door.” (John 10:9). A few verses later he states: “He that believes in me, though he may die, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25 NKJV).

¹³ <http://www.inchristalone.org/HowManyStages.htm>

way the biblical writers speak about salvation. Paul states emphatically that the Gospel is Jesus' own death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Rather than what God *requires* of us, the Gospel is what Jesus has already *done* for us. Since the Gospel is so clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, it is hard to see how anyone can redefine it¹⁴. Therefore, *the corruption of the Gospel must come by how the believer "applies" it*. This is exactly what happens with certain groups when they *add to the Gospel* by saying one must apply the Gospel by obedience to "something," rather than simply believing God for what He has done in Jesus Christ. This confounding happens too often among Evangelicals as well as other Christian groups:

The expression "God's eternal plan of salvation" is often used in gospel tracts to refer to three or four things God wants the sinner to do in order to be saved, such as: (1) "Acknowledge that you are a sinner and need to be saved," (2) "Believe that Jesus died on the cross for sinners," (3) "Ask God to forgive you of your sins," (4) "Put your trust in Jesus." While these are things which the sinner must surely do in order to be saved, they hardly constitute the content of God's "eternal plan of salvation." And it is only a debased level of theological awareness, but one quite current in our day, that would suggest that it is. What the expression more properly designates is "the order of decrees" in the mind of God (Eph. 3:11).¹⁵

In the case of the UPCI, faith in the biblical Gospel is confounded by their unique interpretation of Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation.

¹⁴Lee Strobel, in his book *The Case for Christ*, (pp. 229-230) states that such Evangelical scholars as Gary Habermas, William Lane Craig, and Craig Bloomberg "are convinced that this passage is a creed of the early church and not just the words" that originated with the Apostle Paul. Habermas informs, "The eminent scholar Joachim Jeremias refers to this creed as, 'the earliest tradition of all,' and Ulrich Wilckens says it 'indubitably goes back to the oldest phase of all in the history of primitive Christianity.'" (p. 230) Thanks to Shelby Smith for pointing out this reference to me. BLG.

¹⁵Dr. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), p. 461f.

The Purpose of God

Interestingly, the word “plan” is not found in the King James Version of the Bible. The word “purpose” is used instead. Often, when “plan” is used in other translations it refers to human “schemes” rather than those of God. The words that best parallel the idea of “plan” in the New Testament are found in these verses:

Acts 4:28 They did what your power and will had *decided beforehand* should happen. NIV

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. NIV

Romans 8:30 And those he *predestined*, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. NIV

1 Corinthians 2:7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God *destined* for our glory before time began. NIV

Ephesians 1:5 he *predestined* us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- NIV

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been *predestined* according to the *plan* of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, NIV

As we see, the word “plan” is found in the New International Version translation of Ephesians 1:11. The word used here for plan (*prothesis*) refers to “that which is planned or purposed in advance - 'plan, proposal, purpose,’”¹⁶ and is also found in the following verses, which speak about God’s eternal purpose or will:

¹⁶Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon - προ,θεσις, εως, η (1) *a placing before, a setting forth, presentation*; idiomatically, in ref. to the sacred bread set out weekly in the tabernacle or temple, οι ἄρτοι τη/φ προθε,σεως lit. *the bread of the placing before*, i.e. *consecrated bread, loaves placed before God* (MT 12.4); (2) *plan, purpose, design*; of men (AC 11.23); of God (RO 8.28).

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his *purpose*. NIV

Ephesians 3:11 according to his eternal *purpose* which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. NIV

2 Timothy 1:9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own *purpose* and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, NIV

The word “purpose” is translated from the Greek verb *prooridzo*, which means “to come to a decision beforehand - 'to decide beforehand, to determine ahead of time, to decide upon ahead of time.’”¹⁷ The truth that God is a personal God assumes the idea of purpose. An eternal God would have an eternal purpose:

That God acts upon a plan in all his activities, is already given in Theism. On the establishment of a personal God, this question is closed. For person means purpose: precisely what distinguishes a person from a thing is that its modes of action are purposive, that all it does is directed to an end and proceeds through the choice of means to that end.¹⁸

It would be an irresponsible if not an irrational God who would create the world and direct its course of events with no prior plan or purpose behind such activity – or who would not direct it at all.¹⁹

If God is a personal God, as we believe, he therefore has a purpose. And being God, He, by His very nature, has all power and wisdom to make sure His purpose or plan is completely carried out.

If we believe in a personal God, then, and much more if, being Theists, we believe in the immediate control by this personal God of the world he has made, we must believe

¹⁷Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon.

¹⁸Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, (Avinger Texas: Simpson Publishing Co., 1989), p. 6.

¹⁹Reymond, p. 462.

in a plan underlying all that God does, and therefore also in a plan of salvation. The only question that can arise concerns not the reality but the nature of this plan.²⁰

Many Christians (as evidenced by the “Openness of God” debate²¹) have a severe allergy to the idea of God’s exclusive, sovereign control of the world. They chafe against the notion of an eternal plan and of Divine decrees. They cringe at the thought that God has unilaterally ordained specific things for our lives according to His sovereign will. I have personally heard teachers who instructed their class not to read from certain passages, such as Romans chapter nine, because they said it would be too confusing for people to understand. This thinking has grave implications for one’s knowledge of Scripture, and ultimately of one’s faith in God. Does this imply that God’s Word is too confusing for His people? If so, I am compelled to make this strong response: God has placed in His Word all that is necessary for us to know His will and be comforted by His salvation. If, then, we claim there are statements of His foreknowledge, foreordination, and predestination which we should avoid or neglect, then we usurp God. We suppose that we know more than God. And by avoiding or neglecting these portions of Scripture, we impugn the very character of God, because we say He has put things in His Word which are confusing, unnecessary or detrimental to our understanding. Who are we to tell God that these inspired passages of His Holy Word are too confusing for the “average” Christian?

Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what is in any way profitable to suppress. . . Whoever, then, heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God, as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church.²²

One of the most tragic developments among a number of Christians is a hurtful and irrational prejudice against the biblical doctrine of predestination. Whatever one’s interpretation of predestination may be, all readers of Scripture must acknowledge that God has placed the idea of predestination in

²⁰Warfield, p. 7.

²¹Clark Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*; Pinnock, et. al., *The Openness of God*; Richard Rice, *Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*; and John Sanders *The God Who Risks*.

²²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. xxi. 3,4.

His Word (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11²³) and intended it to bring faith, hope, comfort and security to his children. Instead, being ignorantly misunderstood, it has fomented a near hostility and bitter denunciation among unwitting detractors. What is most tragic is that God intended it for the assurance of salvation for His people, but it is unskillfully obscured and dismissed by those who find it unsavory to their human sensibilities.

The Decrees of God

The general idea of a salvation plan in the Bible pertains more to the idea of the decrees of the one Holy God in eternity, than it does to a temporal order with which we must comply. The text of Scripture which expresses this most succinctly is Ephesians 1:9-12:

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (KJV)

This passage contains several words which communicate the idea of a plan of salvation. In Ephesians, Paul uses words from two Greek word-groups to express the majestic scope of God's plan. The first group (*thelema; boule*) speaks mostly of God's "will" or intention and decision. The second group (*proginosko; prothesis; prohoridzo*) deals with the notions of foreknowledge, predestination

²³A side note: Many say that God predestined the Church as a people (corporately and abstractly) but not the individuals in the Church. This is really an attempt to make a difference without a distinction. How can one have a set for which there is no sub-set? It is obviously illogical. You cannot have a people predestined without having the individuals that make up that *people* predestined also. Practically, these references were not first addressed to the corporate mystical body called the Church, but to individual members gathered to hear Paul's letters (as individuals) in the churches of Rome and Ephesus. They were also written by an individual who claimed to be individually predestined. The doctrine of predestination may be extremely difficult for one to accept, but if it is the teaching of Scripture one must put aside one's human opinions and accept God's Word.

and plan or purpose, as something set forth before time. The fact that Paul uses such a complex of words, compacted into a few verses in Ephesians, reveals the immensity and richness of the subject. Notice that: *the emphasis for Paul is on what God does and not what we must do.*

In Ephesians 3:9, the word “will” (θελημα²⁴) conveys the idea of intention. God has decided to do something. The force of the word is that God resolved to do something which He will not fail to do. Next, in the same verse, Paul speaks of God’s “good pleasure” (ευδοκια²⁵). This word connotes that which is good in its nature and what God is pleased to do. That mystery which pleases God is that He will gather together all things in Christ at the fullness of time. The next word “purposed” (προτιθνημι²⁶) - is that which God sets before Himself to accomplish. It is the goal of God’s work. He sets before himself a goal or “purpose” toward which He is working. That which God decides to do, which pleases Him and which He sets before Himself to accomplish, is called a “plan” (Προθεσις). This plan was formulated within God’s own counsel (Βουλη²⁷), known (προγινωσκο) by Him before time, and established - “predestined” (προοριζο) by God sovereignly before all created things. The result of all of this is to bring praise to God’s glorious grace as it is revealed in those who trust in Christ.

²⁴In Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon - θελημα, ατοφ, το, gener., as the result of what one has decided *will*; (1) objectively *will, design, purpose, what is willed*; (a) used predominantly of what God has willed; creation (RV 4.11); redemption (EP 1.5); callings (CO 1.9), etc.; (b) of what a pers. intends to bring about by his own action *purpose* (LU 22.42);

²⁵In Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon - ευδοκια, α, αφ, η - gener. *what pleases*; (1) of men; (a) as having good intent *good will* (PH 1.15); (b) as a feeling of strong emotion in favor of something, *desire, wish, good pleasure* (RO 10.1); (2) of God *good pleasure, favor, approval* (EP 1.5);

²⁶In Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon - προτιθνημι only mid. in the NT 2aor. προεθε,μην (1) *put forward publicly, present, offer* (RO 3.25); (2) strictly, *set before oneself*; hence, *intend, purpose, plan* (RO 1.13).

²⁷In Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon - βουλη, η/φ, η - (1) as an inward thought process leading toward a decision *deliberation, motive* (1C 4.5); (2) as the result of inner deliberation *resolve, decision, purpose, plan* (AC 5.38); (3) as the result of community deliberation *counsel* (AC 27.12); as the divine will *counsel, purpose* (AC 2.23).

If we are to stay close to the Bible's way of articulating God's salvation "plan," we should focus more on the *prothesis* - the preordination or predetermined plan of God, worked out in and through Christ Jesus. We should avoid applying it to anything that we do in response to what God has done. It is never presented in the Bible as a prescription of personal responses for obtaining personal salvation. It is not a plan "for" salvation, as is supposed by Yohe's treatment of Acts 2:38. One could say that our response to Jesus (such as Acts 2:38) was planned by God. It is true, that by placing faith in Jesus we do "participate" in God's plan. But we cannot say that our faith in Christ is the plan "for" salvation. It is Jesus who actively works to fulfill the plan, while we passively through faith receive it. We do not receive it by performing a series of steps. By trusting in Jesus we are, in effect, saying it is Christ who does the work. That is what saving faith truly means. The plan of God always refers to those eternal decrees fulfilled in history by God in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Certainly, all who use the phrase "plan of salvation" are not referring to a set of steps. It is not wrong to use the phrase "plan of salvation," because God does have a plan for saving the lost. The problem comes with how some define it. Unfortunately, not all who espouse a "plan of salvation" present it as God's plan revealed in the Gospel of Christ. There are several serious mistakes made when the Gospel (the culmination of the true plan of salvation) is turned into a subordinate pre-figuring type, while the commands of Acts 2:38, a plan of action that humans must follow, is made the fulfillment of God's salvation. It is God himself who carries out the plan of salvation which he purposed from all eternity. He carries out His plan in and through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The last two sections addressing the purpose and decrees of God establish that the emphasis or focus of God's plan is on God. This is the truth of *sola deo gloria* - all glory to God alone! The plan of God is cosmic in scope involving Heaven and Hell, angels and Satan, time and eternity, and the whole course of human history. It is about far more than one person's individual response. The focal point is the work of God to give us redemption and not on what we must do to receive it. It is about the steps God took in his incarnation – to live, die and live again as our Savior. It is not based on whether or not we have obeyed certain commands, kept the right procedures, or followed the correct steps. The cosmic, holy, eternal plan of God is more than a multi-step instruction sheet for do-it-yourself salvation. It is a mega-story of the purpose, decrees and consequent mighty acts of God carried out in the Person of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Error of “Full Gospel” Theology

The teaching of “full Gospel” salvation is greatly responsible for many of the errors in some current views of the plan of salvation (as coming in stages). It also has contributed to the idea of the plan of salvation as something the believer follows or does. The “full gospel” expression is based on two notions: 1) there are more benefits for the believer after conversion for which justification by faith is insufficient; and, 2) this “more,” or these additional benefits, are to be included in the essence of the Gospel.

The fundamental theme of full salvation was that there is more for the believer after conversion. Indeed, the Christian life cannot be lived fruitfully unless the “more” is appropriated.²⁸

I agree with the idea that there are more benefits obtained by Christ, for all believers, which we do not have in the present Christian state. Also, the Christian experience is one of growth, maturity and progress. Thus, the experience of the benefits of salvation which come by faith is in some sense progressive, based upon our growth and maturity. This should be an obvious fact to the studied reader of the New Testament. We are undeniably called to a life of maturity (Ephesians 4:13), obedience (Romans 6:19) and righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). The Christian is called to be, “filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18) It is our call “to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” It is significant that the Apostle asserts that this comes by the indwelling of Christ:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19 KJV)

Yes, we indeed are called to be “filled with God’s fulness.” Notice carefully, however, that this is to bring *glory to Christ*, and not an increased attention to the Christian’s spirituality or the Holy Spirit: “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

²⁸David. A. Reed, “The ‘New Issue’ of 1914: New Revelation or Historical Development?,” Society for Pentecostal Studies, Nov. 10-12, 1994, Wheaton, IL, p. 19.

This means that our faith is to be directed to Christ in seeking the fulness of God. He is the “Alpha and the Omega,” the “Beginning and the End,” the “First and the Last,” the “Almighty.”

Still, can we separate the work of justification from this progress in Christian living? A better question is, “How does justification function in the advance of the Christian life?” I would assert that all of the growth or filling out of the Spirit’s work in the Christian life is the direct result of faith in the one, biblical, simple Gospel - which is in essence, faith in Christ alone. Therefore, since the ongoing work of the Spirit is dependent upon faith in Christ, justification is central to all phases of the Christian life. The growth in our experience of the benefits of salvation is a direct result of our *ongoing* justification.

All of the blessings of Christ belong to the justified through faith alone. Problems emerge when justification is viewed as a one-time conversion rather than an ongoing, moment-by-moment, day-by-day, relationship with Christ. This is in fact what I believe occurs in the thinking of the exponents of the “full Gospel.” Under the influence of Revivalism, they relegate justification to merely an initiatory step of the Christian life. Then, because they do not understand the profound function of justification as an ongoing work in the Christian’s life, they look beyond it for the means to appropriate what is already rightfully theirs as a justified believer. At the same time, Perfectionism which was prevalent throughout American Christianity, urged Christians to concentrate their faith on post-conversion holiness, experiences and spirituality. In some cases justification disappeared from the vocabulary of various Christian denominations and movements. For most, justification became a muted and disfigured caricature of its biblical self. I will return to these issues later.

The Just Shall Live By Faith

The famous Reformation insight claimed by Martin Luther comes from the phrase in Romans 1:17: “the just shall live by faith.” This was not only the fundamental assumption of Luther’s reformation teaching, but it is the central motif or theme of Paul in Romans. The truth of this statement over-arches all the instruction and theology found in this book. The believer is not merely justified by faith as an initiation or conversion event, but *the believer lives by this justifying faith*. Every dimension of the Christian life is effected by justification. *Justification is a seamless reality in the believers existence*. It is an ongoing relationship with God, from the first moment of saving faith until the return of Christ. The “just” is not merely *converted* by faith, nor *initiated* by faith, but the just *lives* by faith, and **that faith is in Christ alone**. Every aspect of salvation has been obtain by Christ. Hence, every aspect of our

salvation must come by faith in Christ. We must be right with God through Christ - justified - in order to receive any of the benefits of our salvation. It is because of the fact that we are justified - right with God through Christ - that we can obey God's Word and live the life of faith.

Re-justification?

A gross misconception of justification is too often seen among "full Gospel" advocates. It is the mistaken idea that, after a Christian has a serious lapse of faith or behavior, that one would need to be re-justified in the form of a second conversion. At the heart of this whole issue is the question of the status of the lapsed Christian. It appeared to those of the Roman Catholic tradition that the answer is to view justification as synonymous with sanctification. This means the believer *cooperates* with Christ's grace *by obedience* to cause justification. Justification would not occur until one is completely transformed into the image of Christ. Of course, this would only occur (except for some saints) at the Consummation. Thus, no one (again, except for a few rare saints) is truly justified in this life. In their view, the lapsed Christian would need the sacraments of Confession, Penance, and the Mass in order to be restored, if they had not committed the unpardonable sin. Justification is viewed as the process of transformation, the "renewing of the Holy Ghost," by which a person is actually *made* righteous.

This teaching of "transformational justification" is the opposite of what the Reformers saw. They saw justification as the state of the believer by which he is right with God because of the merits of Christ. Rather than being *made* perfectly righteous, the believer is *counted* righteous on Christ's behalf. This enables the sinner to enter into favor and right standing with God, so that the work of the Spirit can proceed within the justified. This made it possible for the Holy Spirit to transform the believer. This transformation would advance, never perfect in this life, to a perfection received at the Coming of Christ. It is justification that makes sanctifying transformation possible and not the other way around.

Fault of Revivalism & Perfectionism

One of the faults of Revivalism²⁹ was to equate justification with a conversion experience. This mistaken notion has been handed down to many of children of Revivalism. The logic followed, that if one were brought into the Church by a dramatic, experiential conversion, then a lapsed Christian would need to come back the same way. Added to Revivalism was a form of Perfectionism popularized by Charles Finney³⁰ and his ilk. It popularized the idea that a person is fully capable, in his own strength, to choose to be converted. It denied the depravity of the sinner. With this, it dismissed the truth that sinners are dead in sin and need God's merciful "quickening" to come to Christ (Ephesians 2:5). And since one is self-sufficient to come to Christ in conversion, one is equally capable to do what is necessary to stay "right" with God. This led many perfectionistic, revivalist traditions to teach that the Christian remains "justified" by doing righteous things. Of course, this was exactly the position that Rome took against the Reformers and Protestantism.

The writers of Scripture did not teach that the lapsed Christian would need to be re-justified, i.e. re-converted, as in many revivalist circles. Neither did they teach that the Christian maintained his justification by doing right things. Instead, they taught that a lapsed Christian should be pointed to Christ alone, who is his Advocate:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1,2 NIV)

Subsequent Experience of the Spirit

The "full Gospel" understanding that one needs "more" of the Spirit to get *all of the Gospel* is one of the distinguishing marks of Pentecostalism. It treats justification as a conversion event or

²⁹It is very important to notice that I do not say "revival." I speak here only of Revivalism. The "ism" makes this a specific, historical philosophy. I mean something quite different when I say "revivalism" than when I speak of the biblical concept of revival. Cp. My paper "Vital Contributions of Revivalism to the Pentecostal Movement" (<http://www.inchristalone.org/RevivalismToPentecostalism.htm>).

³⁰<http://www.inchristalone.org/FinneyRejected.htm>

experience, while concentrating the post-conversion faith on an increased work of the Spirit in the Christian life. Essential to being Pentecostal is the belief that it is necessary to have an experience subsequent to justification in order to receive “all” or the “rest of” the Spirit. This is a result of the profound impact which Perfectionism had on Pentecostalism. A chief Pentecostal tenet is the conviction that there exists a difference between receiving the Spirit at conversion and FULLY receiving the Spirit after conversion: “The baptism in the Holy Spirit, then, is simply the full reception of the Holy Spirit.”³¹

Gordon Fee, a respected New Testament scholar raised in Pentecostalism, lists the two chief Pentecostal distinctives:

(1) the doctrine of subsequence, i. e., that there is for Christians a baptism in the Spirit distinct from and subsequent to the experience of salvation and (2) the doctrine of tongues as the initial physical evidence of baptism in the Spirit.³²

The reception of the Spirit as an event that is “distinct from and subsequent to” the New Birth, is fundamental to Pentecostal faith.³³ This identifies Pentecostalism as a “full gospel” movement. It assumes that one who is justified is not yet baptized in the Spirit:

Pentecostals believe that the Spirit has baptized every believer into Christ (conversion), but that Christ has not yet baptized every believer into the Spirit (Pentecost).³⁴

This addition to the Gospel of an experience subsequent to conversion opened the door for the potential of other things being included. Over time, even more was added to the full Gospel. As Donald Dayton explains in his study of Pentecostalism, there were four components which became generally received by Pentecostals as part of the full Gospel:

³¹Bruner p. 60.

³²Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1991), p. 84., first in: Gordon D. Fee, "Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent-a Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in Russell P. Spittler, ed., *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 120.

³³Bruner, p. 61.

³⁴Bruner p. 60.

During the Reformation God used Martin Luther and others to restore to the world the doctrine of justification by faith. Rom. 5:1. Later on the Lord used the Wesleys and others in the great holiness movement to restore the gospel of sanctification by faith. Acts 26:18. Later still he used various ones to restore the gospel of Divine healing by faith (Jas. 5:15, 15), and the gospel of Jesus's second coming. Acts 1:11. Now the Lord is using many witnesses in the great Pentecostal movement to restore the gospel of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5) with signs following. Mark 16:17, 18; Acts 2:4; 10:44 – 46; 19:6; 1:1 - 28:31. Thank God, we now have preachers of the whole gospel.³⁵

Thus, the foursquare elements of the Gospel are justification, sanctification, physical healing, and the coming of Christ. *The addition of these elements of the Christian faith to justification proper, led many to create a **more complex gospel**.*

More Righteousness / Holy Spirit

There is a very significant connection between the failure to understand justification by faith and the constant search for more of the Spirit. This connection is rarely understood among “second work” and Pentecostal people. Because justification is thought of as being *made* righteous (as in Catholicism), rather than being *counted* righteous on the basis of the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, there is a constant anxiety or insistence to “do more” in order to “be right.” *This lack of understanding about the true nature of justification leads to an unsatisfied quest for more personal righteousness.* This phenomenon turns the hearts of Christian, who are taught this faulty view, to constantly search for saving holiness (which they never seem to find). The focus of their lives can become an inordinate obsession to be more and more “holy.” (Usually they are more “holy” by following their movements “house rules” rather than following the requirements of the Law or the New Testament.) This obsession is the result of an ignorance about the righteousness of Christ that is *imputed* to us by faith.

But here is the connection for Pentecostals. Their misunderstanding of justification leads them to seek more of the Spirit, like the Holiness and “second work” proponents sought for more

³⁵Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), p. 20, quoting from H. S. Maltby, *The Reasonableness of Hell*, (Santa Cruz, CA:, n.p., 1913) pp. 82-83.

holiness/righteousness. Among Pentecostals there is often a lack of assurance as to whether they have enough of the Spirit. I believe this directly results in many of the bizarre and extreme excesses that have come through the years (soaking in the Spirit, filling of teeth, barking, unfulfilled prophecies, social purity, et. al.) They are driven to more and more of the Spirit because, just like the Holiness person tries to get more righteousness to please God, the Pentecostal seeks more of the Spirit to be sure they are spiritual enough to be accepted by God. I believe much of the impulse behind Pentecostalism is created by an inadequate teaching of the reality and dynamics of justification by faith, and its accompanying indwelling of the Spirit. This does not mean they are not sincere, dedicated, and honest people. That is not what is under question. One could not find more intensely religious and committed people than in Pentecostal or Holiness circles. The question is, how much greater would be their faith if they fully appreciated the meaning of Christ's righteousness for them.

UPCI Plan of Salvation & "Full Gospel" Theology

The plan of salvation as understood by the United Pentecostal Church follows closely the theology of the "full Gospel." A unique feature of the UPCI understanding is that they combine the problems of the Holiness tradition with those of the Pentecostal. Their misunderstanding of justification by faith creates a lack assurance concerning righteousness. Rather than trust in the righteousness of Christ imputed by faith, they seek and demand rigorous practices of behavioral holiness which they believe directly determines their salvation. At the same time, this lack of assurance for righteousness profoundly impacts their view of the Holy Spirit. Like other Pentecostals, they are driven to more and more experiences, fillings, manifestations, baptism, etc. of the Spirit, because they do not understand the indwelling Spirit of Christ that comes through justification. In fact, their position is more extreme, because they differ from most other Pentecostals by relating their reception and subsequent fillings of the Spirit directly to their salvation status. Rather than trust in Christ to supply the Spirit (John 7:38, 39; Philippians 1:19) and to be their righteousness, they have a compulsion for forms of personal righteousness and experiences of the Spirit, which are often not found in Scripture. I cannot help but recall the words of Paul in Romans 10:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (vv 1-4 KJV)

The UPCI believes the plan of salvation contains the steps a sinner needs to take to be saved. They also believe the plan of salvation includes the stages a believer goes through in his Christian life. This subject is taken up at great length in my paper "Can the Gospel Be Fractured?"³⁶

Do We Reenact Christ's Work or Do We Rehearse It?

We move to another important question we must ask concerning the plan of salvation. Is the biblical focus concerning the plan of salvation on God's glory and what great things He has done through Christ? Or is it on what we must do to deserve or receive salvation? This is the larger question in the issue of the plan of salvation and one's understanding of Biblical Theology (the over-arching theology of the Bible). We need to ask, "How does one's Biblical Theology shape one's view of Soteriology?" (the theology of salvation). I don't intend to "snow" the reader with high sounding terminology. My intent is to share concepts that will help us to grasp the deeper issues and problems. What I mean is: **How one perceives the meaning and flow of the doctrines of salvation throughout the whole of Scripture will directly determine how one defines New Testament salvation.** It will also regulate how one interprets *each particular (favorite) passage used in constructing one's definition of salvation.*

Reenactment is By Our Works

For example, if one understands that, from the Old to the New Testament, salvation consists of following certain qualifications to achieve acceptance with God, then New Testament texts, such as Acts 2:38, would be interpreted as "steps" of obedience in order to gain salvation. On the other hand, if one sees that the coming of Christ was a radical shift in God's approach to salvation (John 1:29). And if one sees that Humanity's attempt to achieve salvation through obedience to the Law was a failure (Romans 3) until God came and lived the Law perfectly in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). And if one sees that only Christ is qualified before God (Matthew 3:17; John 8:29) through obedience to the Law (Romans 10:3-11). Then, salvation will be understood as a work performed by Christ (Hebrews 9:2-28; 10:10) and offered to Humanity out of the grace of God (Ephesians 2:5-9), and it must be received

³⁶ <http://www.inchristalone.org/CanGospelBeFractured.htm>

by faith *alone* (Romans 4, 5). The focus will be on the greatness of the gift offered and not on the status, conditions or responses of the receiver of the gift. One will then interpret Acts 2:38 more as responses of gratitude than as "how to get saved." It is a *confession* or recital of what Jesus has accomplished, rather than a reenacting of some portion of Jesus' life that we accomplish through our obedience.

The idea that Acts 2:38 is our death, burial and resurrection, as suggested by Yohe, implies that the plan of salvation consists of our *reenacting* the work of Christ, rather than our trusting in the plan which Jesus followed. It is said that one "obeys the Gospel" by obeying Acts 2:38 because one repeats in one's own life the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through repentance, water baptism and Spirit baptism:

Obedience to the gospel is absolutely essential to salvation. It is impossible for a man to be saved unless he obeys the truth. . . . Just as disobedience ends with judgment and death, so obedience to the gospel results in eternal life. . . . It is impossible to be in Christ unless we are willing to be obedient to the gospel. There is only one gospel which will save a soul. There is only one way which was provided at Calvary. There is the clear choice of either accepting and obeying this one message of truth, or continuing on down the broad road to a lost eternity. There is no neutral ground. There is no way to have peace with God except by surrendering, and submitting our wills to His and obeying.³⁷

Certainly, I do not assert that the UPCI teaches that Jesus dies, is buried, and is resurrected every time Acts 2:38 is followed. That would be foolish. They would say that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection are finished and past events. However, the UPCI does not believe that it is sufficient to merely look in faith to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as for one's acceptance before God. They say that, although Jesus made salvation available, we must still appropriate or apply (these words are red flags) it through obedience to Acts 2:38. This makes following Acts 2:38 just as necessary for salvation as what Jesus did. It is a reenactment of Christ's work because the steps of Acts 2:38 are considered part of the saving work of Jesus. Is this biblically sound? Many, including this writer, would say not:

³⁷Ralph Vincent Reynolds, *Truth Shall Triumph: A Study of Pentecostal Doctrines*, (St. Louis, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1965), pp. 34f.

The church in every age is in danger of confusing the 'gospel' of reenactment with the gospel of rehearsal.³⁸

Reenactment Impossible

Reenactment is impossible because Jesus died once to sin. He rose only once. We do not repeat or reenact Jesus' death, burial or resurrection. We, on an individual level, simply confess and rehearse it. We rehearse it in water baptism. We rehearse it in the Lord's Supper. We rehearse it in the preaching of the Gospel every week. We rehearse it in worship by exalting the work of Christ rather than focusing on our own actions or experiences. We rehearse it in living lives dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ. In repentance we turn from what we could not do, to accept and claim what God has done for us. Water baptism is not an application of the death of Jesus but a recital which shows forth the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. It was done for us two thousand years ago. We cannot distort or pervert holy baptism by making it a way to qualify people for salvation. *Water baptism is the telling of the Gospel of Jesus in visual language, not the means of obtaining salvation. Our salvation was obtained by Jesus on the Cross long ago.*

The means of salvation is humble faith IN Christ, not obedience TO baptism. We do not baptize out of fear of falling short of salvation. We baptize, not to recreate or reenact Christ's work, but to symbolically show what He has done. Christians go wrong when they turn from *reciting the Gospel* to *reenacting the Gospel through baptism*. This is where "salvation is not said to be by God's act outside us in Christ, but by its reenactment in us."³⁹ We are commanded to baptize because, it shows that we fell far short by our sin, but *Jesus saves us to the uttermost* through his freely taking away our sins on the Cross. He ever lives to make intercession for us!

Receiving the Holy Spirit is not something that we do to get saved. It is a gift, given to those who trust in the finished work of Christ alone. Instead of laboring in prayer at an altar for days and weeks trying to "get the Holy Ghost" so that one can know they are saved, the Bible teaches that we

³⁸Robert D. Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History*, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1979), p. 93.

³⁹John Navone, "The Gospel Truth As Re-enactment," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29, no. 4 (1976): 333.

are given the Holy Spirit when we trust in Christ. We “get” the Spirit when we “get” Christ (Ephesians 1:13). How could it be otherwise? It is impossible to have Christ and still be missing something essential to our salvation. The “fulness” is in Christ.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (John 1:16 NIV)

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:23 NIV)

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (Colossians 1:19 NIV)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (Col. 2:9, 10 NIV)

When we truly trust in Jesus Christ, we receive the fullness of the Spirit just as much as we receive the fullness of cleansing for our sins. No arduous labor of praying, seeking, struggling and striving in order to experience the Spirit or to speak in tongues. Instead, one rejoices because Jesus ascended to Heaven in power and victory to poured out His Spirit on those who trust in Him. As His children we have been given the Spirit of Adoption through faith in Him. (More about this in “What Does It Mean to be ‘Born Again’?” and “Can the Gospel Be Fractured?”)

“Finished Work” of Christ Cannot Be Reenacted

We must realize that the work of Christ on this earth is finished. It cannot be repeated or reenacted:

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30 KJV).

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:28 KJV).

The phrase “it is finished” comes from the single Greek word *tetelistai*, which means to fulfill, accomplish or complete. If there is anything we can say about the work of Christ on Calvary, it is

complete. It cannot be repeated. It cannot be undone. It does not need anything else added to it to make it more complete.

God's act in Christ is absolutely unique and unrepeatable. God Himself cannot repeat or add anything to what He has done. Christ, the Intercessor at God's right hand, does not reenact his doing and dying. He Himself rehearses it.⁴⁰

When we believe in the "reenacted gospel" we move the attribution of glory from the finished work of the Cross, to the actions of the Christian done in response to Christ's work. The appeal is less to the glory of what Christ has done for us in His infinite grace, and is more to get people to follow a series of steps. The preoccupation with Acts 2:38 is evidence of this very mistake. With this thinking, a church (or Christian) makes the mistake of thinking that IT is responsible for recreating the gospel. The stages of Acts 2:38 are acting out in the church service in such a way that the church is integral to recreating each step. The altar for repentance, the baptistry for baptism, and the laying on of hands of the ministry (and laity) to affect Spirit reception. In this way, a church begins to see itself as responsible for *recreating* the Gospel when: 1) the Lord's Supper is turned into a recreation of the bloody sacrifice of Jesus; 2) Baptism is the act which takes away sin, rather than the work of Jesus on the Cross; 3) the "new birth" Jesus spoke of is turned into the redemptive act itself (rather than the moment faith is created); 4) We think that Christian testimony is telling of new-found joy, love and peace, rather than telling the work of Christ for us (outside of us in history); 5) People are excited about a new personal experience, but are uncomfortable with hearing about the righteousness of God imputed to them. For a larger article on this subject link to my article "The Gospel: Our Reenactment or Our Recital."⁴¹

How the Bible is "Read"

The UPCI version of the plan of salvation come from an inherited form of Bible reading. The "see" the plan of salvation in Acts 2:38 because their inherited theology trains them to see it that way. This issue goes to the serious question: "Why is it that Christians around the world have basically the

⁴⁰Robert D. Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History*, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1979), p. 77.

⁴¹ <http://www.inchristalone.org/Reenactment.htm>

same Bibles, but come up with so many different understandings of what it says?" Obviously, it is because they "read" or interpret the Bible differently. Why do Christians read the Bible differently? That is a very involved subject, but I would like to try in the next pages to give a few helpful insights and possible answers.

Because this is a large subject, I have written a separate paper entitled "How We 'Read' the Bible."⁴² This paper will cover: 1.) All readers are interpreters; 2.) Those with whom we read the Bible; 3.) How the Bible is used; 4.) The Docetic Bible; 5.) The "word-within-the-Word" fallacy; 6.) "Revelation" within Revelation; 8) The problem with the allegorical method; 8) The clarity of Scripture; 9) The Bible is the story of Redemptive history. I hope that you take the time to read this paper thoroughly. It is necessary to understand the rest of this paper. How one reads the Bible is pertinent to the points I make in the next section. There are systems of reading (interpretation) which act as templates, to overlay the biblical text. Most of the time, groups and whole denominations are not aware how they read the Bible *through* their system. They are like fish who do not think about the water they live in. They simply assume the water and never consider how it influences their entire world. Systems of interpretation can work the same way. *A group can be unconscious about its system and thereby read the Bible without realizing how much their interpretation or reading restricts and controls all their conclusions about a particular Scripture text (or Scripture as a whole).* These systems can obscure the message of Scripture to the point of confusing or obscuring the Gospel itself. One of those systems is known as Dispensationalism. One's view of Dispensationalism will directly shape one's view of the plan of salvation.

Dispensationalism Obscures the Plan of Salvation

One clue to how a group reads Scripture is to see how they treat the Old Testament, and how they relate it to the New Testament. The approach Yohe follows is a pattern closer to the dispensationalism held by many Fundamentalists and Pentecostals around the turn of the 1900s, and by Pre-millennialists and Adventist in the early 1800s. The Old Testament was broken into a number of dispensations or eras of time which progressively offer a better or "fuller" plan of salvation. They saw the New Testament as the progressive continuation of a series of salvation eras. Rather than seeing the

⁴² <http://www.inchristalone.org/HowWeRead1.htm>

Scripture as governed by two covenants⁴³ and understood as speaking of Law and Gospel⁴⁴. A different way to be saved was attributed to each era. Instead of the two covenants of works and grace, there are covenants assigned to each dispensation. In the place of salvation by works - which only Christ achieved - and salvation by grace - which is received by faith - one is saved by obeying the knowledge or "light" that is offered in each era. Thus, *one is not saved by grace through faith in the Promise of God, but by appropriating God's grace through obeying the "revelation" of God's will for that particular economy or dispensation.* It should be obvious that the dispensational system is a significant departure from the Reformation view, and I believe, the biblical teaching. It is a serious departure from the essential message of the Bible.

Dispensationalism Defined

What is dispensationalism? Dispensationalism, as an interpretive system, functions as a hermeneutical template for reading Scripture. It operates like stained glass letting in sunlight. It colors the light as it comes through and even bathes everything it shines on with the color of the glass. In like manner, the UPCI's interpretation of the plan of salvation is deeply colored by the "stained" glass of dispensationalism (a Pentecostal form of dispensationalism) as the light of Scripture is refracted through it. It is a system of Bible interpretation, distinct from Scripture itself, that:

. . . builds on the idea of God's administration of or plan for the world describing the unfolding of that program in various dispensations, or stewardship arrangements, throughout the history of the world. The world is seen as a household administered by God in connection with several stages of revelation that mark off the different economies in the outworking of his total program.⁴⁵

⁴³The two covenants would be: the Covenant of Works, which was only fulfilled by Christ, and the Covenant of Grace, which Christ makes with those who trust in Him.

⁴⁴ <http://www.inchristalone.org/BalanceLaw&Grace1.htm>

⁴⁵"Glossary of Terms," *Modern Reformation*, Jul/Aug 1993, Online. Available @ <http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/mr/mr93/1993.04.JulAug/mr9304.glossary.html>, Accessed: 6 June 2001.

The word dispensation means an “order of things regarded as established or controlled by God” (Oxford Dictionary, 4th edition, p.233). According to Walvoord it is a “stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life.” Ryrie says it is a “distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose.”⁴⁶

Dispensationalism is rooted in early American and British revivalism and the apocalyptic speculation that accompanied its radical forms. The current versions are descended from the American Adventism of William Miller in the early 1800s and the British form advocated by Mary MacDonald (first person to coin the word “rapture”), Edward Irving, and John Nelson Darby in the 1830s and later. The former was generally discredited because of the other eccentric views and practices of Miller’s followers. But, the British version was accepted and subsumed into evangelical orthodoxy through Fundamentalism. It was brought to American soil through the Niagara Bible Conferences on Bible prophecy held by John Nelson Darby. John Brooks systematized Darby’s views. Then they were popularized by C. I. Scofield, Brooks’ apprentice, through his Scofield Bible. Many of the Fundamentalists of the Keswick branch adopted pre-millennial dispensationalism and passed it on to their descendants in the later Pentecostal movement.

Key Distinction of Dispensationalism

The key distinction of Dispensationalism is the teaching that God has *two plans* at work in salvation history: one for Israel and one for the Church. One of the leading dispensationalists today, Charles Ryrie makes this clear:

The essence of dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the Church. This grows out of the dispensationalists’ consistent employment of normal or plain interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Greg Herrick, “Dispensationalism and God’s Glory,” Online. Accessed 7 June 2001 @ <http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/dispen/glorydis.htm>.

⁴⁷Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 1995), pp. 4-8.

This distinction between Israel and the Church has serious implications for the nature of the Church and the Gospel itself. Since the Church is considered by dispensationalists to be a “parenthesis” in God’s plan for Israel, dispensationalists say the promises to Israel in the Old Testament are not fulfilled in the Church. The Church came about because Israel rejected the Kingdom Christ offered to them. Thus, Christ went to the Cross to bring salvation to the Gentiles and create the Church. But, God will pick His plan for Israel back up after the Church is raptured.⁴⁸

The influence of dispensationalism led many Christians to believe that Redemptive history was divided up into a number of time periods or dispensations (usually seven). Within these time periods a person was saved according to their obedience to the “revealed will of God” for that period.

A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.⁴⁹

This understanding of salvation is truer to Pelagianism, the semi-Pelagianism of the Roman Catholic view of merit, or to the teaching of revivalist evangelist Charles G. Finney, than it is that of Scripture. For them, salvation is predicated, in some measure, on the obedience of the sinner. Of course, this is what Finney believed and preached. The title of one Finney’s sermon epitomizes this: “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.” He also rejected original sin:

⁴⁸This is why Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Daniel 9) was broken in to 69 weeks (already fulfilled) and the final week (yet to be fulfilled in the tribulation). It was necessary for dispensationalists to do this to make their system work. They believed that there are prophecies not yet fulfilled that only could be fulfilled if the Seventieth week was after the Church Age. Since they could not make the prophecies of the Old Testament fit Church Age, they devised a scheme which called the Church Age a surprise or mystery revealed as a “parenthesis” in God’s time-table. Why did dispensationalist work so hard to come up with these ideas. They were fighting a terrific battle with liberal German rationalist theology which attacked the authority of Scripture. Dispensationalism was the conservative Christian response in reaction to the troubling questions of Bible prophecy brought up by theological Liberalism.

⁴⁹C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1909, 1917 (notes on John 1:17 sec. 2), p. 1115.

Finney believed that human beings were capable of choosing whether they would be corrupt by nature or redeemed, referring to original sin as an "anti-scriptural and nonsensical dogma"⁵⁰

Tragically, this thinking led him to reject the orthodox view of justification by faith⁵¹. Instead he subscribed to a Pelagian form of salvation, that is, one is saved through one's own right choices and actions:

[Subhead:] Foundation of the justification of penitent believers in Christ. What is the ultimate ground or reason of their justification? 1. It is not founded in Christ's literally suffering the exact penalty of the law for them, and in this sense literally purchasing their justification and eternal salvation.⁵²

He defined saving faith as obedience to God rather than trust (fiducia) in God for what he did to save us:

The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys or Antinomianism is true ... In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground.⁵³

If Salvation comes through obedience to the currently revealed plan, then it becomes something earned by the "obey-er." In dispensationalism, salvation is given to those who meet the conditions:

If, indeed, man is tested in respect to obedience to the will of God in each of these "dispensations", what is the reward - or punishment? If the reward is salvation, as obviously Scofield taught concerning the dispensation of Law, that salvation is not of grace but of works! The dispensationalist, misunderstanding the concept of Law and Gospel, offers salvation to those who meet the condition of the "dispensation" in which they are tested, thus even in the dispensation of Grace, faith becomes a work which entitles us to Christ. If one can only muster from the depths of one's heart enough

⁵⁰Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology*, 1851, Online: accessed 12-21-2000, Available at: <http://www.gospeltruth.net/1851%20Sys%20Theo/st56.htm>

⁵¹ <http://www.issuesetc.org/resource/journals/horton.htm>

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

"faith", one can meet the condition of this dispensation and be rewarded with salvation.⁵⁴

Pentecostal 'Modified' Dispensationalism

The distinction between Israel and the Church and the belief in dispensational ages was *modified* by Pentecostals who divided the Church Age up into various stages of progressive revelation - a sort of dispensationalism-within-dispensationalism.⁵⁵ One was saved according to the how much they walked according to the "light available to them." (Based on John 12:35⁵⁶) This was not acceptable for most dispensationalists, but it was strangely logical and consistent to the method of dispensationalism. Since one could arbitrarily divide the history of salvation in the Bible into different economies of salvation, why couldn't one do the same with the Church Age? If one accepts the former, there is nothing in a Dispensational reading of Scripture to prevent the latter.

Since there was more light revealed to each stage of Church History it was logically incumbent upon all Christians to search out what new truth was waiting to be revealed from the Bible. This contributed to the view of the Bible as truth-within-Truth. Fused with the restorationist impulse of

⁵⁴*Dispensationalism: A Return to Biblical Theology or Pseudo Christian Cult?* Online, Accessed 7 June 2001, Available at: <http://www.frii.com/~gospow/disp2.html#c5>

⁵⁵This idea was propagated by Aimee Semple McPherson in her book *Lost and Restored*. Many Pentecostals have interpreted church history as a sequence of restorative steps back to the pristine or Apostolic era of the Church. McPherson claimed that she received this understanding by direct revelation without a premeditative thought about it. This almost exact view of Church restoration, with McPherson's modified chart, is found in S. C. McClain's *Highlights in Church History*. His book has shaped many Oneness people's views of Church history and its restoration. It also has influenced their understanding of the place of Oneness theology in Church history. McClain says that the Pentecostal movement brought "the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the Christian church. Many new organizations, standing for different phases of gospel truth, had sprung up as results from the great revivals in the previous church period, . . ." McClain believed that within the Age of the Church itself there were "different phases of gospel truth."

⁵⁶John 12:35 Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.

Holiness-Pentecostal theology, dispensationalism encouraged many early Pentecostals to search the Bible for new truth to be revealed in their day. Not merely fresh understanding and application of the Gospel of Christ, but a new order or economy of God's working. This included the expectation of a fuller salvation - greater light which God required of people that was not known previously in Church history.

I am not saying that all teachings of dispensationalists are questionable or wrong. Many Gospel preaching people have been and are dispensationalists. What I am saying is that dispensationalism is a system that is brought to the Bible and then, creating a restrictive grid, it directs the reader to only see certain texts in a way that harmonizes with dispensational theology. The serious problem with this is that the Gospel is usually obscured or lost and another agenda, or even a foreign doctrine of salvation, supplants the biblical one. I believe this has happened in the case of the UPCI. Their view of salvation and interpretation of Acts 2:38, both in original conception and now as they perpetuate and modify it, is deeply conformed to and restricted by the dispensationalist view.

For a more thorough treatment of Dispensationalism read my paper Dispensationalism and the Everlasting Gospel⁵⁷.

The "Plan of Salvation" As An Accordion Phrase

The plan of salvation is misunderstood and confused in groups like the United Pentecostal Church because of the way the phrase, the "plan of salvation," and accompanying language, is *inconsistently used* among its writers and preachers. As we mentioned in the section on Dispensationalism above and in the paper How We Read the Bible⁵⁸, the *UPCI sees the plan of salvation as unfolding in a sequence of revelations (or "illuminations" as some would prefer) in the Church Age*. A person is thus saved by "walking in the light available," i.e. obeying all that is required of them within a given dispensation. This salvation truth increases as "greater light" is given by God until it is completed at the Second Coming of Christ.

⁵⁷ <http://www.inchistalone.org/DisEverlast1.htm>

⁵⁸ <http://www.inchistalone.org/HowWeRead1.htm>

This interpretive grid predominated later Holiness teaching and early Pentecostalism. This is the system of interpretation which informed Frank J. Ewart when he formulated the basic Oneness doctrines:

How has the Pentecostal platform been formed as far? The first plank was “the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.” How did God nail down this plank? By giving the Scriptural experience, and this proved the glorious harbinger of greater light. The planks of “Divine healing,” “baptism by immersion,” and the “pre-millennial coming of the Lord,” were quickly added. God has graciously perpetuated his work by reconstructing the “Pentecostal platform.” This platform, in conformity with the name, is the platform given to Peter on the day of Pentecost, when he used the keys and opened the door into the present dispensation. This platform must be completed before Jesus comes. We find God working along the same lines as of old. “He taketh away the first that he may establish the second,”⁵⁹

Ewart explains the practical way this shedding of new light occurred:

He first gave the true light to a few, and then signally expressed His approval by a startling revival through the instrumentality of the new teaching.⁶⁰

UPCI Modified Dispensationalism

The most serious argument I have with the dispensational interpretation is that it confuses and often creates an unbiblical view of the Gospel. In the UPCI version of “modified” dispensationalism, *salvation can be different for different groups - depending on the era of the Church Age in which they lived.* This understanding requires Pentecostals to use the word “Gospel” with a number of unbiblical modifiers. The modifier “full” was commonly attached to “Gospel” by many early Pentecostals. The idea of the “full Gospel” is a Holiness idea which was passed on to Pentecostals and applied by Oneness Pentecostals to their view of Acts 2:38. (Cp. “Can the Gospel Be Fractured?”) As a result of this, UPCI writers speak of the “entire Gospel” as if, at one time, there was a less than entire Gospel, and “more entire” Gospel at another:

⁵⁹Frank J. Ewart, “Defending Heresies,” *The Good Report*, 1912, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 12.

⁶⁰Ibid.

When Paul returned to Ephesus, he found several disciples who had not received the entire gospel.⁶¹

The Bible speaks precisely about the Gospel as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-14). It also speaks broadly about the Gospel as all of the blessings of God which pertain to the Work of Christ in redemption. Thus, as fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace could be seen as part of the good news of Christ. We could say that the Second Coming of Christ is good news. Everything Christ does for us is good news in one sense. The problem develops when we begin to define the Gospel more as the blessing of Christ's Work rather than as the Work of Christ itself. Then we begin to speak a strange or foreign language to the Bible. We begin to think of the Gospel as being applied or coming in stages. It alters our view of the Gospel into something that occurs through levels of revelation played out in stages of history.

All the aspects of our redemption were achieved for us by Christ through His death, resurrection and ascension (Hebrews 9:28). He is our salvation (Luke 2:30; Acts 4:12). This includes the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14), the imputation of Christ's righteousness (Romans 4:24), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 3:17), Adoption and Sonship (Romans 8:14; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:4), Victory (2 Cor. 2:14), spiritual gifts (Ephesians 1:3, 4:8), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9), the ministry of the Church (2 Cor. 5:18), the Second Coming of Christ (Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28), Heaven (1 Peter 1:3,4) and eternal life (1 John 5:11). All of these are our's through what Christ did (Ephesians 1:3). How do we obtain these things? We receive these things "in Christ." (Ephesians 1:6; Galatians 3:26) We are placed "in Christ" through faith. (Ephesians 1:12,13). This faith consists of trusting in Him alone as the only Lord and Savior.

All of these are progressively understood and fulfilled over the course of time. This is where many people misunderstand the meaning of salvation and the Gospel. The fact that we are not fully sanctified or mature in the benefits of salvation does not mean that we need a new revelation or deeper truth than the biblical Gospel of Christ. It only means that we have not come to full understanding of the richness of what it means to be in Christ. It means that one has not fully grasped the depth of one's

⁶¹"The Water Way," *Century Series*, Word Aflame Adult Teacher, Vol. 7, (Hazelwood, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, 2000), p. 73.

justification. We have already been granted all the blessings of Christ, but we must grow into realizing them. Not through a new “part,” level or revelation of the Gospel. Rather, it comes through faith in the Gospel that we already know and believe.

If we admit such a thing as an “entire gospel,” then, there is implied a partial or incomplete gospel. From the beginning, the language and teaching of a “full” Gospel was rejected by many non-Pentecostal Christians:

Finally, Fundamentalists have generally been concerned about an attitude of spiritual superiority that characterizes Pentecostal teaching. There is almost an arrogance to the claim that Pentecostalism has the "full gospel." The implication is that non-Pentecostals have only a partial gospel. Such an idea is unscriptural. Paul told the Colossian believers, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10). The salvation of Christ through the gospel is perfect and complete. Christians should grow in grace (II Pet. 3:18), but this growth is the realizing of what Christ has already granted to the believer. As Paul wrote, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12).⁶²

Operating from the assumption that more is discovered to be in the gospel, as God further reveals it, during the Church Age, the UPCI and other Oneness teachers claim they have the final or completing part of the plan of salvation:

Paul did not attack or detract from the message that Apollos had brought to Ephesus; he only amplified their understanding by revealing the complete plan of salvation. They needed to believe on Christ Jesus, be baptized in His name for the remission of sins, and receive the Holy Spirit.⁶³

The result of the “all the light available” doctrine, the partial and entire or full gospel notion, and the need for a “complete” plan of salvation teaching, is that the UPCI has to use “plan of salvation” as

⁶²Dividing Line: *Understanding and Applying Biblical Separation*
Chapter 10, “Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism,” Online, Accessed 18 June 2001 At:
http://www.itib.org/articles/dividing_line_10-4.html#13

⁶³“The Water Way,” *Century Series*, Word Aflame Adult Teacher, Vol. 7, (Hazelwood, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, 2000), p. 73.

an accordion phrase. It is necessary because the phrase has to adapt to the instances where the idea of the plan of salvation changes in the Church Age. It has to expand to embrace those who don't know the Acts 2:38 message and it has to shrink when referring to only those who obey Acts 2:38. Thus, the Gospel is like an accordion, expanded in one instance and contracted in another.

Conflicted Theologies

These ideas create an unconscious, inherited conflict in the theologies of those who follow them.⁶⁴ This conflict arises from a struggle between, on the one hand, the UPCI's dispensational heritage, and on the other, their Reformed legacy, which comes to them through the Keswick and Baptist roots of Pentecostalism. One of the best examples of this can be found in the writings of David Bernard. At times he expands the phrase - like an accordion - to include a more extensive "five steps" or "five phases" of God's plan:

Romans 8:28-30 describes five steps in God's eternal plan of salvation for fallen mankind: (1) Foreknowledge. God foreknew man would sin and would need salvation. He also foreknew that when He provided salvation, some would accept it. (2) Predestination. Because God foresaw this response, He planned from the foundation of the world to provide salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice (I Peter 1:18-20;

⁶⁴I say unconscious because it is never addressed as a topic in any of the writings of the UPCI. When something is not given intentional reflection it still can have powerful influence while operating below the "radar" of consciousness. They appear to look at the history of interpretation as irrelevant to them. They do not believe it is necessary for them as a group of Christians to account for their method of interpretation nor for historical validation for their claims. They believe their method of interpretation is simply the plain teaching of the Word of God. This does not account for how they differ from others who claim the very same thing but come up with very different doctrines. The rationale behind this view can be seen in a statement by David Bernard: "why is it 'incumbent' upon the UPCI to cite historical evidence for the continuity of the full salvation experience? We derive our teaching from Scripture, not from church history, and its validity is not dependent upon historical inquiry." ("Response to Keith Tolbert's Paper Attacking UPCI" by David K. Bernard) Granted, all the doctrines of the church must be derived from Scripture. But Bernard misses the more obvious issue. If a group tells the rest of the Church that it has missed the real full truth for 1800 years, then it is very much incumbent upon that group to not only show a very high degree of knowledge of church history and quality expertise in historical theology, but it must show in very precise terms just how it has found the truth that the rest of the Church has missed.

Revelation 13:8). Those who choose God's plan are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. The church is ordained to be successful, but each individual must choose whether to be part of this foreordained plan or not. (3) Calling. Acting upon His plan, God has extended a call to all mankind ("whosoever will") to be part of it. [p. 333] Romans 8 speaks of an effectual calling; only those who respond to God's universal call actually become part of the church (Greek *ekklesia*, literally meaning "the called out ones"). (4) Justification. God then justifies those who accept His call. He declares them to be righteous, which entitles them to all the benefits of salvation. (5) Glorification. The last step is glorification, which is the ultimate work of sanctification. Romans 8 speaks of it in the past tense because in God's mind it is an absolutely certain, predestined event for His church. At that time we will receive glorified bodies with absolutely perfect and sinless natures. When God's plan is complete, we will have complete, eternal deliverance from all the power and effects of sin.⁶⁵

These "phases" have a more Evangelical "ring" to them, as though borrowed from the book of a Wesleyan evangelical writer. At other times, Bernard retracts the "accordion" half-way to speak of *his* view of "justification by faith" as the plan of God throughout both testaments of the Bible.

Throughout history, God has always provided salvation to man by grace through faith based on Christ's atoning death. God has dealt with man in various ways through the ages, but all His dealings rest upon this plan. Our age has seen the fullness of grace such that we can call it the age of grace (John 1:17), but salvation has always been by God's grace, not man's works. The principle of faith has also become so clear that we can call this the age of faith (Galatians 3:23- 5), but God has always required faith. Abraham (before the law) and David (under the law) were justified by faith (Romans 4:1-9). Even though some Jews thought their salvation rested in the works of the law, keeping the law was never of any value without faith (Romans 2:29; 4:11-16; 9:30-32). Of course, saving faith always includes obedience, for faith is only genuine when put in action.⁶⁶

To support this startling statement, verse 6 appeals to the words of David in Psalm 32:1-2. David is an example of someone under the law. By using both Abraham and David as examples, chapter 4 establishes that God's plan of salvation was justification

⁶⁵David K. Bernard, *The New Birth*, (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1984), p. 333-334.

⁶⁶David. K. Bernard, *Essentials of the New Birth*, p. 24.

by faith both before and during the law. It is hardly surprising, then, for it still to be His plan today.⁶⁷

Redefinition of Justification

These quotes convey a tone more broadly found among evangelicals. However, Bernard does not define justification the same way. The injection of obedience into Bernard's definition of justification would not be acceptable to most evangelicals. Yet, his acknowledgment of the language of justification is commendable in light of the fact that many Oneness Pentecostals do not even use that biblical term. Regrettably, his definition of justification is a complete departure from Christian orthodoxy, the Reformation, and more seriously, the teaching of the New Testament.

More often, though, the plan of salvation in Bernard's writings is contracted fully to denote only the specific elements of Acts 2:38:

Oneness Pentecostals base their doctrine of salvation on the Bible, which they regard as their sole authority in this matter. The major Oneness groups hold that repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit constitute "the plan of salvation" for New Testament believers. While there are differences between groups and even within groups on the proper theological characterization of these three steps of faith, there is agreement that God commands everyone to obey them.⁶⁸

Only those who have followed the UPCI interpretation of Acts 2:38 are considered "true believers" by Bernard and most of the UPCI.

Of course, believing is a process that first begins with hearing of the Word of God and continues throughout a Christian's walk with God. When the Bible uses the term "believer," it is referring to someone who has experienced the full plan of salvation. (See Acts 2:38.) There are many instances where people have believed to some degree

⁶⁷David K. Bernard, *The Message of Romans*, p. 106.

⁶⁸David. K. Bernard, "The Whole Gospel: Oneness Pentecostal Perspectives on Christian Initiation," Society for Pentecostal Studies, Collected Papers: "Teaching to Make Disciples," Mar. 8-10, Tulsa, OK., p. 450.

but have not believed to the extent of obeying God's plan of salvation. As a result, they cannot be called true believers.⁶⁹

Conflict Between 'Restorationist' and 'Remnant' Views of Christian History

Not only is the phrase "plan of salvation" treated as an accordion phrase, but Bernard tends to mesh together two conflicted, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, interpretations of Christian History: the restorationist view, and the remnant view. The restorationist view sees the history of the church consisting of a steady decline into apostasy from the time of the Apostles until the Dark Ages. Then at the Reformation, God begins to restore the historical Church to its original condition over the following centuries. In each century God restores an original truth from the earliest Church which was lost in the spiritual decline of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, the truths of salvation are reconstituted in stages within the Church over long eras of time. According to the UPCI, it was not until the end-times at the turn of the 20th century that the time was right for God to completely restore all the Apostolic truth as was in the original.

On the other hand, the remnant view of Church history is that God has preserved a number, sometimes more, other times less, who retain the original apostolic truths and status of the Church. They have transmitted these truths and spirituality to each succeeded generation, although most generations have not received it well:

The Bible reveals only one plan of salvation for the entire New Testament church age, and the Bible has been available throughout church history. Historical accounts from the early post-Apostolic age have also been available to later generations, and they confirm the apostolic message of baptism in Jesus' name and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with tongues. Furthermore, it appears that these doctrines have existed throughout church history.⁷⁰

⁶⁹"The Water Way," *Century Series*, Word Aflame Adult Teacher, Vol. 7, (Hazelwood, MO: Pentecostal Publishing House, 2000), p. 73. The author (names are not given) of this lesson must be quoting from David K. Bernard, *In Search of Holiness*, p. 240-241.

⁷⁰Dividing Line: Understanding and Applying Biblical Separation
Chapter 10, "Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism," Online, Accessed 18 June 2001 At:
http://www.itib.org/articles/dividing_line_10-4.html#13

The last several quotes show the full “contraction” of the plan of salvation to the UPCI model. They seem driven by a dispensational and restorationist impulse. Instead of salvation coming to all eras of time through justification by faith, salvation in the UPCI model is obtained by obeying God’s “full” plan (dispensational). Only those who “obey God’s plan” (Acts 2:38) are the “true believers.” For Bernard, it is a plan that has been hidden from the church only to be restored by fresh discovery in the present era of Church history. This irregular and inconsistent use of the phrase “plan of salvation” has contributed to the confused way others in the UPCI tend to describe and explain it. For a more extensive treatment on David Bernard’s interpretation of the “plan of salvation,” see my separate article: “The “Plan of Salvation” as an Accordion Phrase”⁷¹

I must repeat, it is not whether the “revelation” comes from Scripture that is at issue, but *how the Scripture itself is interpreted as containing different messages or “revelations” for different dispensations* - especially the dispensation of the Church itself. The story of the Bible is progressive – it moves toward Christ. The understanding about God’s plan also unfolds through history. Each phase of Old Testament history draws upon the other to expand the knowledge about what God is doing. Nevertheless, that is not the same as God revealing contrasting plans of salvation through history. *The progressive nature of the Bible provides a graduated revelation of salvation by Christ and not the incremental appropriation of salvation by Humanity.*

The Status of the “Unborn”

It is well known by students of early Oneness Pentecostal history that a struggle existed among New Birth advocates in defining the status of those who did not accept or follow the Acts 2:38 plan. Frank J. Ewart, Garfield T. Haywood, Andrew D. Urshan, et. al. provide evidence through their writings of conflicted statements as to the destination of those who fail to hear or follow the Oneness Pentecostal, New Birth message.

A seminal leader of the Oneness movement was **Garfield Thomas Haywood** (1880-1931). He believed that one was saved by faith in Christ alone until after his conversion to the Oneness

⁷¹ <http://www.inchristalone.org/AccordionPhrase.htm>

doctrine by Glenn A. Cook.⁷² He struggled with the implications of this New Issue. His students often asked him about the status of those who do not follow the Oneness view of salvation:

The one question that is so often asked is, 'are all those people who thought they were born of the Spirit, and were not, lost?' No, not by any means. They shall be given eternal life in the resurrection if they walked in all the light that was given them while they lived. God is a just Judge, and there is not unrighteousness in Him. But those who refuse to walk in the light shall be overtaken with darkness. (John 13:35, 36; see also John 15:22-24).⁷³

This quotation shows Haywood's assumption that some who are not born of the Spirit will yet be saved. He is speaking about salvation in the Church Age as dispensations-within-the-dispensation of the Church. This is a radical new step in the dispensational view. The Pentecostals adopted the "walking-in-all-the-light-available" idea to explain the relationship between non-Pentecostals, who were justified, and Pentecostals who had received the "full blessing of Pentecost," – a subsequent Spirit

⁷²In *The Good Report*, March 1914, page 4, which was published in Los Angeles, CA by Frank Ewart and R. E. McAlister, Haywood wrote an article entitled: "The Simple Gospel." In it he said that "the gospel has been corrupted from its primitive simplicity," and then he quoted these verses: "But God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Repent ye and believe the gospel!" These verses are standard Baptist "believe only" texts. They were used by Durham, who was a Baptist. Durham had a direct effect on Haywood's Finished Work theology. The following is a telling paragraph in this article: "In face of these fundamental truths what more are we to do than to go forth and tell the story of Jesus how He came and dwelt among us, sharing our sorrows, our burdens, our cares, and last of all how the Lord laid upon Him the iniquities of us all, and he bore them away to Calvary and suffered and died in our stead. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and chastisement that we should have received fell upon Him. Though He had done no violence, yet for our sake He suffered, and it pleased the Father to bruise Him. So that He could be just and yet free every man from under the sentence that was passed upon him through the fall of Adam. And now though our sins be as scarlet, as soon as we believe, they become as white as snow." Haywood's quote indicates that he did not yet look to Acts 2:38 or to the radical New Birth for salvation, but that he was still a "Finished Work" Pentecostal.

⁷³G. T. Haywood, *The Birth of the Spirit in the Days of the Apostles*, (Indianapolis, IN: Christ Temple Book Store, n. d.), p. 12.

baptism evidenced by speaking with tongues. The former were considered saved in the manner that all are saved in the Church dispensation - by faith in Christ. However, the latter had appropriated more of the blessing of their salvation.

Radicalized Dispensationalism

Haywood radicalized this Pentecostal modified dispensationalism into progressive stages of salvation. Now there was not only more than one way to be saved in the history of the world (*a la* dispensationalism), but there were progressive stages of salvation possible since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was a further qualification. Those who had not heard the Oneness message, e.g. Luther, Wesley, etc., were saved by the "light" they followed. But, those, being saved after Luther or Wesley's manner, who later hear the Acts 2:38 message, can no longer be saved by the former way, but must go on into the newer light. If not, they will fall into darkness, as Haywood states. Since, in the Church Age the truth of salvation was progressive, only those who progressed with the truth were saved. Therefore, the message of the gospel was a moving target and changed as the newer revelations or "insights" were given from God. Under this view of salvation history, there is no one timeless Gospel given to all generations of Christians.

The eccentric nature of this teaching must be understood clearly. This is a unique alteration of dispensational and Pentecostal thought. It is constructed to account for the Oneness New Birth doctrine. The general Pentecostal view of dispensationalism did not deny the salvation of non-Pentecostals. It might have questioned their piety, spirituality, and understanding of Scripture, but, it did not outright reject their salvation. However, the Oneness position, while leaving room for "saints" of past time prior to the Oneness revelation, nevertheless, denies the salvation of those who do not accept their Acts 2:38 interpretation of salvation.

A. D. Urshan's Struggle to Define the 'Saved'

Andrew David Urshan (1884-1967) conscientiously wrestled with the same issue. In his book *Apostolic Faith Doctrine of the New Birth*,⁷⁴ he included a set of questions at the end addressing the

⁷⁴Evangelist Andrew D. Urshan, *Apostolic Faith Doctrine of the New Birth*, (Cochrane, WI, self-published, 1941), pp. 13-15. There are several books by Andrew Urshan on the New Birth. In

same basic issue with which Haywood wrestled. He presents the questions and then follows them with these answers:

Q. What is the position of those who have believed in Christ but have never been immersed in Jesus name, and have not received the Holy Ghost with the sign of tongues?

A. These belong to the kingdom of heaven; these are the good seed in that kingdom; these can go on and be born of water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus and Cornelius once were of that type of men, also the Ephesians that Paul baptized. See Acts 19:1-16.

Q. Would these folks be lost if they had not gone on to the water and Spirit birth?

A. No, for when they continued to walk in the light they had, they consequently entered into the deeper and higher divine experiences. 1 John 1:4-7. Also John 8:31-36.⁷⁵

1921 he published *The Doctrine of the New Birth or The Perfect Way to Eternal Life*, (Cochrane, WI: Witness of God Publishers, 1921). The next was the first one above. That edition was reprinted in its original format, except, this time, with the questions being edited by Apostolic Book Publishers, Florissant, MO (with no date). It was later reformatted and republished by Apostolic Book Publishers, Portland, OR, with no copyright date again. The significance of this publication history is that there were editorial changes made from the original which were not made by the author. These changes effectively excised controversial statements by A. D. Urshan which would not be very popular with the leaders and members of the UPCI today. The comments of Urshan would cause the present and future generations to ask questions that present leaders would be hard pressed to answer. It also would cause those who read them to wonder why one of the earliest Oneness leaders, thinkers and writers would make such statements as contrary to the present UPCI position. What is disconcerting is that this redaction is another example in a pattern of doctrinal "corrections" made by unknown editors to the effect of making the past views of important Oneness writers line-up with the current UPCI theology. This should be very disconcerting to those within, as well as to those without the Oneness movement. The facts of history are truth. If one modifies the record of history to fit the current interpretations then truth is sacrificed, no matter how noble the motivation. This is more than a legal or ethical question. It goes to the heart of the fundamental integrity of those called by God to guard the truth.

⁷⁵Evangelist Andrew D. Urshan, *Apostolic Faith Doctrine of the New Birth*, (Cochrane, WI, self-published, 1941), p. 13.

Remember, as we stated above, that the key distinction of dispensationalism is the two plans of God, one for Israel and one for the Church. Because of this, dispensationalists make a distinction between Jesus' statements, "the kingdom of God," and "the kingdom of heaven." They asserted that one referred to Israel while the other referred to the Church. This was a significant error of biblical interpretation.⁷⁶ Urshan, working from this misunderstanding, modified the dispensational interpretation, saying that the two phrases apply to groups *within* the Church Age. One group - those of the "kingdom of heaven" - were those who believed in God or Christ, but did not follow the Oneness view of the New Birth. The second group was the "kingdom of God," who followed Acts 2:38 and were born of water and Spirit. Thus, you can have two ways to be saved in the same Gospel dispensation:

Q. Can one be called a child of God before he is born of the Spirit?

A. Yes, just as a baby is a child of the parents before birth when conceived, likewise those who have a real conversion or conception of the word in their life. Of these it is said, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His son into your heart, crying, Abba Father.' This is the Holy Ghost language. See Gal. 4:6,7.⁷⁷

Here the relationship between salvation and the New Birth are confused. Urshan believes that the New Birth can take place after "real conversion." One can be converted, or have some "conception of the word in their life" without being born again. This seems to fly in the face of what Jesus taught. One could not even see the kingdom of God without being born again. New Birth is required for one to even receive the knowledge of the Gospel. Urshan appears to be making an attempt to explain his position by saying the levels of salvation are like the physical birth process. That is, one who has not followed Acts 2:38 but has had "a real conversion" is saved just as a child, conceived in the mother's womb, is still a child. But, the child still needs to be born. Those who are saved by faith prior to the "revelation" of the Acts 2:38 message are children of God only if they go on to accept the Oneness

⁷⁶Dispensationalists did this without sound biblical exegesis. Both these phrases refer to the same thing. Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" because, being Jewish and writing to a Jewish audience, he could not use the sacred name "God." Therefore, he did as all Jewish teachers did: he substituted a euphemism for God which was the word "heaven." Heaven is the place where God dwells. Thus, Matthew refers to God's kingdom by speaking of the place where He dwells. This is a common Jewish practice of showing pious reverence for the name of God.

⁷⁷Urshan, *Apostolic Faith* . . . p. 13.

Acts 2:38 message. If the childbirth analogy holds true, those who do not go on to follow the Acts 2:38 steps will be still-born. But, are they the true "Spirit born" children at all?

Q. The folks that believe on Christ's name and repent but are not baptized by water and the Spirit, where do they stand?

A. They stand on the same ground that the saints of the Old Testament stood; they were saved by faith not receiving the promise of the Spirit. They are not the real Spirit born children of God and adopted children. See Heb. 11:30, and 1 Sam. 12:20-22, etc.⁷⁸

This answer by Urshan confounds his answer given to the previous question above. Here he states that those in the Church Age who have not followed the Oneness interpretation of Acts 2:38 are saved like the Old Testament believers. But, then he states they are not, "real Spirit born children." This view has people being saved without being the "real Spirit born children of God." This is because he cannot harmonize his understanding of Acts 2:38 with the concept of salvation in the Old Testament. The Bible indicates that the Old Testament believers are saved by faith in the promise of the Savior to come (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:18-25). Those who believe after Christ's coming are saved by faith that looks back to the work of Christ.

The thing that complicates this issue is that those who believe *after* Christ's incarnation are baptized with the Spirit *after* his Ascension. This is a problematic reality for many Bible readers. They don't see the Book of Acts as a transitional record - reporting how the Old Testament believers were incorporated into the New Testament Church. They interpret certain occurrences in Acts as universal obligations or privileges for all future Christians. The problem is cleared up when it is explained that those on the Day of Pentecost, in the upper room, were Old Testament believers. They needed to be baptized with the Spirit after believing, because they could not be so baptized with the Spirit until after Christ's Ascension.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:39, 39 NIV)

⁷⁸Urshan, *Apostolic Faith* . . . p. 14.

After Christ's ascension, all believers were baptized with the Spirit at the time of their faith in Christ, and not at a moment subsequent to it. Cornelius in Acts 10 is a perfect example of those who are baptized with the Spirit upon hearing and believing the Gospel.⁷⁹

What is remarkable about Urshan's statements is that he claims that those NOT born of the Spirit could still, 1) have a "real conversion"; 2) be a real "conception of the word"; 3) be a "child of God"; 4) belong to the "kingdom of heaven"; and 5) be "saved through faith." Yet, those not born of the Spirit are like Old Testament saint. They are "saved by faith not receiving the promise of the Spirit." Because of this, they are not "real Spirit born children of God and adopted children." The contradictory statements in these few quotes illustrates the conflicted nature of the UPCI interpretation of Acts 2:38 with orthodox Christian teaching. Urshan further remarks:

Q. Can one be saved and not be born again?

A. The word "saved" conveys a greater meaning than generally known. It implies deliverance from sin and also God Himself coming into our life. See Isa. 12:1. Yes, some can be delivered from hell though not being born of God, just like the Old Testament saints were saved through faith though not being born again. The thief on the cross may represent this class of saved ones who had not knowledge of the doctrine of the full salvation neither had a chance to perform it, his recognition of Christ and faith in Him saved him.⁸⁰

Again, Urshan applies what is *only* pertinent to the Old Testament believers – to those who are believers after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. He believes that those who are saved through trusting in the work of the Cross of Christ are saved only from hell, but are not necessarily born of God. The thief on the Cross is not an example of anyone today or those "who had not knowledge of the full salvation," because he died in the period *before* the resurrection and ascension of Christ. He was an Old Testament believer. His problem was not a lack of full salvation. His problem was he died before the work of Christ was *finished*. Therefore, he was saved by trusting in the promise of what Christ *would* do. This cannot apply to anyone today.

⁷⁹One might ask "What about Acts 8 and Samaria?" I address this in my work on "What Does It Mean to be 'Born Again'?"

⁸⁰Urshan, *Apostolic Faith* . . . p. 14.

This radical modification of dispensationalism was necessary for the Oneness writers because there was no other way to resolve the problem of the non-New Birth Christian. They had only two options: 1) the New Birth is the only way to be saved and all other Christians including Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon, as well as Charles Parham, William Seymour, and William Durham are not saved, and literally are not going to Heaven but Hell; or 2) they could be saved by obeying differing degrees of revelation within the Church Age. Many early Oneness writers opted for the latter, even though it introduced a radical form of biblical interpretation to Christian history. Today, many Oneness teachers share this position, but there are significant numbers who say that there is only one way to be saved in the Church Age and that is by obeying Acts 2:38. Thus, the attempt to account for "non-Acts 2:38" or non New Birth Christians is resolved by excluding them from the Church altogether.

Frank J. Ewart

Of the three men mentioned above, **Frank Ewart** (1875-1947) was the premier and most original thinker about these questions. I wish to give extra space to him in my paper "The Oneness-New Birth "Revelation" of Frank Ewart."⁸¹ This study deals with the historical events which led to Ewart's "revelation" and his personal explanations of his new understanding. In this paper I attempt to show how Ewart's approach to Scripture led him to formulate a form of the Oneness-New Birth doctrine, and then later, to go beyond it to even more unorthodox doctrines. This paper is very crucial to understanding Oneness theology and the UPCI view of the plan of salvation.

Ewart's Problem with Justification

His fundamentally flawed view of human nature led Ewart to minimize justification by faith. For Ewart the New Birth is no mere "legal" transaction, wherein Mankind is restored from having broken God's Law. "If it were merely a question of broken law, the New Birth would not be necessary, but now the fact of the nature faces man."⁸² He assumes, because Ephesians 2:3 calls sinful people "children of wrath," that Paul implies all humans by nature are like Satan. This verse would best be understood to refer to the judgment of God upon humanity because of their disobedience, which incurs

⁸¹ <http://www.inchristalone.org/RevelationFJE.htm>

⁸² Frank J. Ewart, "The New Birth," p. 2.

the wrath of God. Nevertheless, because he operates on this premise, it leads him into other inordinate or unorthodox views.

Adoption alone would not meet the issue for as this is purely legal, it does not effect the nature at all. Man must be born from above, he must have a new nature. Forgiveness of sins will not meet the issue. God might forgive a man for what he has done, but He cannot forgive him for what he is. Forgiveness deals only with the transgressions, but this is the cause of the transgressions. This devil nature fact; "this family of satan fact," demands more that forgiveness for what we have done. It is not what man has done that condemns him but what he is; what we do is the product or fruit of what we are.⁸³

This completely agrees with E. W. Kenyon who stated: "Fallen man is not judged by God for what he DOES, but because of what he is."⁸⁴ E. W. Kenyon's doctrine of identification has a direct and significant influence on Ewart's pastor, William H. Durham, and Ewart himself. The Oneness Pentecostal doctrine of Acts 2:38 as the "plan of salvation" cannot be properly accounted for in history without acknowledging Kenyon's contribution to it.

Influence of E. W. Kenyon

Instead of drawing all his ideas from the inspired doctrines of the Apostle Paul, or the sound and tested works of the fathers of the Reformation, or even the careful approach to the New Birth found in the writings of John Wesley and George Whitefield, Ewart drinks from the more untested and inventive waters of his one of his contemporaries – E. W. Kenyon. A significant number of Ewart's eccentric notions appear to come directly from Kenyon's novel teaching. This teaching is connected to a whole system of doctrines based on the assumption that the sinner's nature is Satanic.

The first man was a spirit in God's class. When he committed High Treason he became a partaker of Satan's nature. He was actually born again, and he became a new Satanic creation. Because man is a spirit being, it was his spirit that partook of Satan's nature. Before the fall in the Garden, during his fellowship with God, his spirit ruled him, and his

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Dale H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty*, (Lanham, Md: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), p. 28.

senses were subject to his spirit. But, when he sinned, and his spirit received the nature of the Adversary; it became subordinated to his senses.⁸⁵

In this statement, Kenyon claims that humans experience a “new birth” in the Fall. This shadow “new birth” is the equivalent of being born again of God, only in this case, one is sired by Satan. He reproduces his nature in the sinner. Because we have to be born again to a satanic nature, Kenyon reasons, we have to be born again by God to a Divine nature. Scripture states that a sinner needs New Birth because he is dead spiritually because of sin (Ephesians 2:1-4). The idea of a sinner being born of a satanic nature cannot be found in the Bible, much less the teaching that it is the reason a sinner needs New Birth.

Kenyon was strongly influenced by most of the Keswick leaders. He interacted extensively with their ideas. Historically, many of the leaders of the Keswick theology, associated with D. L. Moody at the turn of the 20th century, held the “dualistic” view of the Christian nature. Their position was contrastive to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, which taught that a second work of grace was to be sought by all Christians and that it would bring total eradication of the sin nature. Instead, most Keswick thinkers believed that, through an experience subsequent to justification, called the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (non-tongues-speaking), a Christian would be enabled to live victoriously over the sin nature. The sinful, or fallen nature was not removed through receiving this Baptism, but it was suppressed by the power of the Spirit indwelling the believer. Kenyon rejected both the Holiness and Keswick views, as Joe McIntyre writes:

... “Dual nature” is the idea that the believer receives a new nature in salvation, but also maintains an “old nature” or “sin nature.”) Although a great admirer of Moody’s warriors (particularly A. J. Gordon, A. T. Pierson, and many of the teachers from Keswick), Kenyon also felt the dual nature teaching that the majority of them (and the Brethren) embraced could not be validated from Scripture. Kenyon went on to describe the second work of grace teaching and the failure that even Wesley himself recorded in his journal. In the same periodical in which the earlier quote appeared, Kenyon also indicated his reasons for rejecting the dual nature teaching that was taught by many in the Keswick movement. Kenyon continued to voice his admiration for his mentors, both in the Holiness and Keswick movements, printing articles and quotes

⁸⁵E. W. Kenyon, *The Hidden Man*, (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, Inc., 1998), p.7.

from them in his periodical Reality. He did, however, challenge their teachings and offer his own perspective. His life had been changed by what he discovered personally, and he passed it on to his students and those who heard him. The other teachings had failed to bring Kenyon lasting victory. For Kenyon, the finished work meant man was a new creation. Man only had one nature, not two natures. As a new creation the old nature had passed away (2 Cor. 5:17). Man had become – through the new birth – righteous and holy (Eph. 4:24). The believer didn't need a second work of grace to eradicate indwelling sin (as the Holiness people taught). It was taken out at the new birth when man became, in reality, a new creature. The believer's needs after conversion were to submit to the lordship of Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, and renew his mind. A genuine submission of all to Christ's lordship and a humbling of the mind to be taught by the Holy Spirit were a more biblical approach to sanctification in Kenyon's perspective.⁸⁶

I submit, that, in theology, when one operates from a false assumption - especially relative to fallen human nature - one will not have a correct Biblical basis for defining other doctrines -- e.g. the New Birth. This was true for Kenyon, as well as for Frank Ewart, who adopted this portion of Kenyon's theology wholesale. Ewart taught that, when Paul says, "all things become new," and Christians are "new creations," he means that their nature is changed from satanic nature to divine nature.

The old nature is of the devil and if this old nature is really taken out they are then children of God; if it were not taken out they would still be the children of the devil.⁸⁷

The Significance of Kenyon's Doctrine of Identification

When we look at two of Kenyon's chief works, we see how he lays out his doctrine of the two sides or dimensions of the New Birth:

The teaching of Identification is the legal side of our Redemption. It unveils to us what God did in Christ for us, from the time He went to the Cross, until He sat down on the

⁸⁶Joe McIntyre, *E. W. Kenyon: The True Story*, (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1997), p. 200.

⁸⁷Frank J. Ewart, "The New Birth," *The Good Report*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Sept. 1, 1913, p. 2.

right hand of the Father. The vital side of Redemption is what the Holy Spirit, through the Word, is doing in us now.⁸⁸

It is very important that the believer know the difference between the legal side of redemption and the vital. The legal is always in the past tense. It is what God has done for us in Christ. The legal begins on the cross and ends when Christ sat down at the Right Hand of the Father. The vital begins with the New Birth and ends when we leave our personal habitation, the body, and go to be with the Lord. The vital is what He is doing in me today, taking the things of Christ and building them into me.⁸⁹

The adoption of Kenyon's ideas into Ewart's thought is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it dispels any notion that Ewart's doctrine was a direct revelation from Scripture. Not that Ewart expressed that this part of his theology was direct revelation from Scripture, but because those who are influenced by Ewart often claim as much about his distinctives. Obviously, he was working with the text of Scripture throughout his arguments. But, he was doing it under the influence of Kenyon's thought. He read Scripture and came to conclusions looking through the Bible-reading lens of Kenyon. Second, Kenyon's distinction between legal and vital provided Ewart with the rationale for including the experience of being Baptized with the Spirit with the experiential and physically objective manifestation of tongues speech. By splitting the forensic side of salvation – justification by faith – from the experiential side – the Baptism of the Spirit (evidenced by the experience of speaking with tongues), Ewart put forward a need for a more “full salvation” than that presented by the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. Beyond simple faith in the finished work of Christ on the Cross (legal) a person needed to obtain and “experience” the indwelling work of the Spirit in the human heart (vital).

Here we see Ewart's misunderstanding of the orthodox view of Justification by Faith and the adoption which takes place through it. He considers adoption as “purely legal.” This reductionism has serious consequences for his doctrine of salvation. The thrust of Ewart's argument is that since sinners have a satanic nature, a purely legal declaration by God, e.g. that one is the child of God, is not sufficient because it does not change the sinner's nature. That is why the New Birth, as Ewart understands it, is necessary for one to be truly saved. Otherwise, the proclamation by God that one is

⁸⁸E. W. Kenyon, *Identification: Romance in Redemption*, (Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1998), p. 7.

⁸⁹E. W. Kenyon, *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne*, (Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1998), p. 179.

righteous or adopted is only a legal statement with no real change affected in the heart of the sinner. This is a failed understanding of the biblical doctrines of justification and adoption.

Justification and Adoption

Ewart struggled with the forensic dimension of justification by faith. He could not accept the Reformation principle of *simul iustus et peccator* (same time just and sinner). Because he believed fallen humanity had a satanic nature, he could not conceive of a legal or imputed righteousness as sufficient salvation. Humanity's nature was utterly corrupted and unless that nature was transformed by the Holy Spirit, a person could not be saved. Here Ewart walks into the monumental debate between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformers. Roman Catholicism teaches that grace comes to the sinner by the infusion of supernatural substance into his soul. The magisterial Protestants rejected this and said that grace was not a substance but was God's favor or graciousness merited by Christ's work. For the Reformers, justification is a declaration by God and not the infusion of grace by the Holy Spirit in baptism. This infusion, the Catholic system maintains, takes place in the sacrament of water baptism. One is justified by cooperating with this infused grace (Holy Spirit) unto the performance of meritorious works. These works make one righteous, thus justification is being made righteous. However the Reformers argued that one is justified by the objective, imputed righteousness of Christ. This is, God declares the sinner righteous because she trusts in the finished work of Christ. In trusting Christ, the righteousness of Christ is accounted to the sinner just as the sinner's sins are accounted to Christ. The believer is not justified because they are made righteous through the process of cooperating with infused grace. They are declared or accounted righteous on the basis of the merits of Christ alone.

Roman Catholics rejected the idea of imputed righteousness and called it a "legal fiction." This is, in essence, what Ewart did. Because he misunderstand the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, he borrowed the Roman Catholic model and modified it. He retained baptism as vital in the justification process, but inserted the Pentecostal Spirit-baptism in the place of Roman Catholic "infused" grace. Ewart was right in saying, "It is not what man has done that condemns him but what he is." Nevertheless, he see justification as insufficient for salvation.

Ewart criticizes this idea (at the same time sinner and just) by saying that if a Christian had both the Divine nature and the satanic nature he would be a divided house. Hence, a Christian would be "heir of a home in heaven and in hell at once" and be forced to call God and Satan both father. Taking it a step further, he deplores the imputed righteousness view because he says that only death would then free the Christian from the satanic nature, making death, the tool of Satan, one's savior. This is an old Holiness argument which was formed against those of Reformed or what would be Evangelical today.

At the end of this article, Ewart expresses a view that is the exact language and view of Kenyon. Notice how he uses the two terms “Legal” and “Vital” to describe the New Birth:

The New Birth is twofold, Legal and Vital. The legal part is done in the Courthouse of heaven, the vital in the body down here. The legal is the act of justifying or legally acquitting us, giving us a legal standing in the Commonwealth of Heaven. It is also the legal act of adopting us into the Family of God. This legal act is necessary to make sure our right to the vast inheritance that falls to each member of the family. The Vital part is the giving of Eternal life to us, the witness of the Spirit, the kiss of peace of the Father to His child.⁹⁰

Ewart's theology flows in the stream of the Roman Catholic thought – that justification is infused grace working to sanctify or *make* righteous. This position also agrees with the Pietist's view that regeneration subsequent to justification is necessary for personal salvation. Ewart's theology views justification by faith as only a part of our initial salvation. For him, one must receive the Pentecostal Baptism of the Spirit in order to be fully saved. For much more on Ewart's view of the plan of salvation read “The Oneness-New Birth “Revelation” of Frank Ewart.”⁹¹

We will now go on to another important aspect of biblical interpretation relevant to Rev. Yohe's statement. That subject is the proper use of typology in sound biblical interpretation.

The Proper Use of Typology

Yohe's quote speaks of typology. One of the popular practices of Scripture reading among pietistic groups is a heavy focus on allegory and typology. During the early centuries of the Church there was an inordinate amount of allegorical interpretation. Later in the Middle Ages a four-fold method of interpretation became popular, known as the Quadriga. This method took every verse and interpreted by *four different meanings*: the literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical. This method encouraged such wild, unbridled speculation and exotic interpretations that much of the plain message of Scripture was hidden beneath flourishing subjectivism and “spiritual” opinions. It was the break-through of the

⁹⁰Frank J. Ewart, “The New Birth,” p. 2.

⁹¹<http://www.inchistalone.org/RevelationFJE.htm>

Reformation which brought the Church back to a more literal sense of the Bible. Because of the Reformation, the Bible was much more greatly valued for its grammatical structure as well as the context of its historical setting. This focus brought the world back to, not only the clear message of the Bible, but the Gospel as well.

A great deal of abuse exists today in the use of typology. I could cite a great many instances, but will use only one here. I visited a web site of a group which holds to the teaching of the Latter Rain. The article I read was by Bill Britton, and the piece was entitled, "Sons of God – Awake!" A diagram was used called "The Types of The 3 Experiences." His use of typology in the diagram is taken from early Pentecostal teachers who tried to explain the advanced status of Pentecostals vis-a-vis non-Pentecostals. First instance, he cites the progression of the Feasts in the Mosaic sacred year. First was Passover, second was Pentecost, and third was Tabernacles. Then, in parallel, he outlines the Tabernacle Plan's three accesses: first was the Outer Gate, second was the Door of the Tabernacle, and third was the Inner Veil. Next, he refers to the stages of Israel's deliverance from Egypt to Canaan: first was the Exodus, second the Wilderness, and third was the entrance to Canaan. Then, he refers to the teaching of Jesus about the three-fold harvest: first was the 30 fold harvest, second was 60 fold, and third was 100 fold. Finally, he orders the stages of the Christian's status: first is salvation, second is the "anointings" of the Spirit, and third is "adoption" into Sonship. The latter is called the "fulness of the Spirit." It is impossible to state all of the interpretive errors this author makes. It would take another paper. Needless to say, he is using an unbiblical form of typology to give credibility to his preferred doctrines. This is a very serious error. We can never teach doctrine through typology. At best, typology can amplify objective, propositional truth as found in the teaching portions of the Bible. Nevertheless, it is never sound nor wise to arbitrarily construct a questionable typology (at best) and then use it to prove a doctrine. This is very bad Bible interpretation and it leads to very bad theology.

This brings us back to typology. What is typology? Types are fore-shadowings of Christ as prophetic signs for those who read the Old Testament:

A type can be defined as a divinely purposed, Old Testament foreshadowing of a New Testament spiritual reality.⁹²

⁹²T. Norton Sterrett, *How to Understand Your Bible*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 107.

One example of a type is Jesus' reference in John 3:14-15 of the serpent which God told Moses to put on a pole (Numbers 21:4-9). Jesus states that the serpent on the pole was a foreshadowing, or we could say a type, of his crucifixion on the Cross. Another is where Paul speaks about the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6-7) that gave water to all the people. He treats this rock as a foreshadowing of Christ issuing spiritual water to his Church: "And that rock was Christ." This is a type.

One of the crucial principles we must follow when we consider a type is this: *Christ is NEVER a type, but is always the fulfillment* (anti-type). Therefore, when Rev. Yohe says that Christ's death, burial and resurrection are a type of something else to come, he is mistaken. This violates the principle of all typology in the Bible. *Christ is ALWAYS the fulfillment and never the shadow*. This breach of sound interpretation subverts the preeminence of Christ. It also contributes to an erroneous understanding of the true plan of salvation.

Scripture's Eschatological Dimension

There is one other very serious misunderstanding we must address in Yohe's statement. Typology like all prophecy is *eschatological*. This is a big, scholarly sounding word, but it is very important to our subject. The first part of the word - *eschatos* - means "last." The second part "logical" means "having to do with." Therefore, it means having to do with last things. Eschatology pertains to the end-time events and the plan of God. Why is the eschatological dimension of the Bible important? Let me try to explain.

The Bible has a beginning and an ending. Unlike other religious sacred books, which view history as cyclical, the Bible views history as having an end point. It is called an Omega point (Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet). That is why Jesus is called, "The Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8). God reveals in Scripture that history is going somewhere. It has a climax. All types and prophecy consists of a promise and a fulfillment. Every time God promises and fulfills his promise the fulfillment is greater than the previous time. This can be seen in the Exodus and the Return from Captivity. God promises in Exodus that he will deliver Israel from Egypt and then He did so by his mighty power. Later in Israel's history when they went into captivity because of their sin, God promised through Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah they would be delivered. These prophets spoke in the language of the Exodus. When

God fulfilled this promise the reality was even greater than the first Exodus. As time unfolded, God's promises began to be fulfilled with a staggeringly profound rhythm and power, until they all marvelously congealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost "this is that." He declared that the psalmist who spoke of one greater than David, actually spoke about Jesus, whom God made Lord and Christ. This is the eschatological dimension of Scripture. All the promises and the partially revealed plan of God uttered throughout Scripture - like individual instruments in a symphony - will come to a majestic, awe-inspiring, cosmic crescendo in the "Song of the Lamb" - the redemptive work of Jesus.

The eschatological dimension of Scripture is very important to understand. All promises by God to redeem His people point to an eschatological (future end-time) fulfillment. This fulfillment is the final and greatest fulfillment which is accomplished in Christ. "All the promises of God are Yea and Amen" in Christ. He is the ultimate or greatest fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. Therefore, *it is impossible for Christ ever to be the type or foreshadowing of another "plan of salvation."* Why? Because *he IS God's eschatological plan of salvation.* There is nothing beyond him. Nothing is above him. There is none greater. His name is higher than any other. He did not say, "If you think this is something, wait until you hear Acts 2:38." He died on the Cross and said, "It is finished."

This quote by Yohe demonstrates a reading of the Bible which inverts the eschatological fulfillment of Christ. It makes Christ's work a "type," and something else its fulfillment. It makes Christ's work subordinate to a human response to Christ. This inverts all prophecy and typology. This is not how prophecy was understood in the rest of the Bible. Acts 2:38 is not the fulfillment of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It is a our rehearsal - a recital - of what God has already finished through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. It, like the types and prophecies of the Old Testament point to Christ. The only difference is that the O.T. types pointed forward, while Acts 2:38 points backward to the finished work of Christ.

[T]he gospel is the final interpretation of God's revelation. All of Jesus' actions - his baptism by the Spirit, his identification of himself with the Servant, his claiming of the title "Son of Man," his participation in a new passover at the Last Supper - show that

he understood his work as the fulfillment of the relationship between God and man promised and hoped for in the Old Testament.⁹³

For a fuller treatment of Dispensationalism vis-a-vis the Gospel read “Dispensationalism and the Everlasting Gospel.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to address several pertinent truths relative to the plan of salvation. We have looked at the fact that the essence of God’s plan of salvation focuses on God’s purpose and His decrees, and not our response. Second, we introduced the error of “full Gospel” theology and its influence on the UPCI notion of salvation’s plan. Then, we examined the truth that the Gospel is not a reenactment of Christ’s work but it is a rehearsal or recital of it. Then, we found that the way one “reads” the Bible can cause one to miss the proper meaning of the “plan of salvation.” Fifthly, I wrote that 1) the phrase “plan of salvation” is not used consistently and becomes an “accordion” phrase, that is, it means different things at different times for those in the UPCI; and 2) that this confusion demonstrates itself in a misunderstanding of the proper nature of the “plan of Salvation and the makeup of the Church. Sixthly, we addressed the influence Dispensationalism has had on the misunderstanding of the plan of salvation. We then tried to answer whether or not the Gospel or Christ can be called a “type.” Finally, we finished with Scripture’s eschatological dimension and with the truth that Christ, as the eschatological fulfillment of all things, can never be a type or fulfillment of anything else.

I do not think that Rev. Yohe believes salvation is accomplished by us rather than Christ. I also think that he believes Christ is central to God’s plan of salvation. However, I believe he is confused as to the nature of the “plan of salvation.” And, I see this confusion coming as a result of the UPCI’s teaching that Acts 2:38 is the “plan of salvation.” The previous quote made by Rev. Yohe reveals a deeper issue than his particular interpretation. It is the logical consequence of a soteriology (theology of salvation) that is preoccupied with the “steps” a person must take in order to be saved. It is a

⁹³Bernard L. Ramm, et al. *Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 125.

⁹⁴<http://www.inchistalone.org/DisEverlastI.htm>

consequence of the general method of Scripture reading endemic to the United Pentecostal Church (and other Pietistic groups as well). As is common to much of Pentecostalism, there is a pietistic reading of the Bible that holds a form of the “Word-within-the-words” view of the Bible. That is, the deeper truths of Scripture lie hidden from average Christians, beneath the literal words, waiting to be discovered by those who are more “spiritual.”

This idea subverts the doctrine of Scripture’s clarity. It also tends to lead readers to follow speculative interpretations of allegory and typology, which distort orthodox truth. Also, it can encourage readers to search intently for unique “understandings” or “revelations” (albeit called biblical revelations), since that is the natural result of becoming “deeper” or more “spiritual.”

Interpretation that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be attributed to pride (an attempt to “out clever” the rest of the world), a false understanding of spirituality (wherein the Bible is full of deep truths waiting to be mined by the spiritually sensitive person with special insight), or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against the bias). Unique interpretations are usually wrong. This is not to say that the correct understanding of a text may not often seem unique to someone who hears it for the first time. But it is to say that uniqueness is not the aim of our task. The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the “plain meaning of the text.”⁹⁵

When a group or a movement adopts an approach to Scripture which influences its writers to subordinate the Gospel and the Work of Christ to the work of the believer - as conveyed by Yohe’s statement - then it is time for a reexamination of that group’s way of reading Scripture. It signals the need for any denomination or movement to revisit its Protestant-Reformation roots. It also indicates a need for those who follow this approach to engage their biblical hermeneutics in serious reflection. They should compare their method of interpreting Scripture with the rest of Church history. In addition, they should become acquainted with the principles of Biblical interpretation held by other Bible believing Christians. They should do this to see if they are failing to recognize and apply some vital interpretive principles. Most seriously, when any group’s, movement’s or denomination’s particular approach to biblical interpretation incites its writers to turn the Gospel upside down, it is time for critical doctrinal and theological evaluation. Judging by history, most groups are incapable of this self-evaluation, criticism, and change. It usually comes from challenges by those outside of it. It is my hope and prayer

⁹⁵ Fee & Stuart, p. 16.

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that God will open the hearts of many of my brothers and sisters to see the need for this self-reflection and change. God give us some modern day Luthers who will accept the challenge, not just to merely have another revival, but to see a great reformation of the worldwide Church to the Gospel of Jesus.