

# The Talmid



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



**Dr. Eddie Ildefonso**

*West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center  
Los Angeles, California*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary  
Honduras, Pakistan, Zimbabwe Extensions  
International Dean, Covington Theological Seminary*

## The Doctrines of Grace

### Christ's Purposeful Atonement (Part-7) *(Continuation from last month)*

#### 4. The Spirit's Effective Call

The concept of irresistible grace, the **I** in **TULIP**, is closely linked to the doctrines of regeneration and effectual calling.

When **John H. Gerstner** was a college student, he took a course in theology from

John Orr, one of the nation's most learned and distinguished scholars in the early twentieth century. During one lecture Orr wrote on the blackboard in large letters: Regeneration precedes faith. These words stunned Gerstner. He was sure his professor had made a mistake and unintentionally reversed the order of the words. **Did not every Christian know that faith is a necessary prerequisite for regeneration, that one must believe in Christ to be born again?**

This was John Gerstner's virgin exposure to Reformed theology, and it startled him. That regeneration comes before faith, not after it or as a result of it, was an idea he had never considered. Once he heard his professor's cogent argument, Gerstner was convinced and his life was set on an entirely different course.

#### Table 7

##### The Tulip's Fourth Petal

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|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Total depravity</b>            | Humanity's radical corruption    |
| 2. <b>Unconditional election</b>     | God's sovereign choice           |
| 3. <b>Limited atonement</b>          | Christ's purposeful atonement    |
| 4. <b>Irresistible grace</b>         | The Spirit's effective call      |
| 5. <b>Perseverance of the saints</b> | God's preservation of the saints |

This tends to be something of a pattern for Calvinists. As **Roger Nicole** declared, **“We are all born Pelagians.”** Conversion to Christ does not instantly cure us of our Pelagian tendencies. From the earliest days of our conversion, our **Pelagianism** is reinforced on every side. We brought it with us out of paganism, and the secular world around us reinforces it with the humanistic view of **human freedom** and **inherent goodness**. In the church we are widely exposed to **Arminianism**, which has had American evangelicalism in a stranglehold since the days of **Charles Finney**.

During the controversy over justification in the sixteenth century, **Martin Luther** wrote a controversial work entitled *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. This book likened the Roman Catholic church to pagan Babylon of antiquity. If Luther were alive today, I suspect he would write a book entitled *The Pelagian Captivity of the Church*.

Though **Arminianism** is more properly speaking a variety of **semi-Pelagianism**, the “semi” is a thin patina. The essence of **Pelagianism** is retained in **semi-Pelagianism**, and it is carried through into **Arminianism** and, to a degree, into **Dispensationalism**.

The introductory essay to a current edition of *Bondage of the Will* asks what the modern reader should make of **Luther’s classic**.

**“That it is a brilliant and exhilarating performance, a masterpiece of the controversialist’s difficult art, he will no doubt readily admit; but now comes the question, is Luther’s case any part of God’s truth? and, if so, has it a message for Christians to-day? No doubt the reader will find the way by which Luther leads him to be a strange new road, an approach which in all probability he has never considered, a line of thought which he would normally label “Calvinistic” and hastily pass by. This is what Lutheran orthodoxy itself has done; and the present-day Evangelical Christian (who has semi-Pelagianism in his blood) will be inclined to do the same. But both history and Scripture, if allowed to speak, counsel otherwise.”**

From the vantage point of the twentieth century, **it appears that the central issue of the Reformation was the doctrine of justification**. To a degree this is an accurate assessment. *But behind and beneath the doctrine of justification was the deeper concern of the graciousness of our salvation, wrought entirely by God himself and by no human achievement whatever.*

**“Historically, it is a simple matter of fact that Martin Luther and John Calvin, and, for that matter, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and all the leading Protestant theologians of the first epoch of the Reformation, stood on precisely the same ground here. On other points, they had their differences; but in asserting the helplessness of man in sin, and the sovereignty of God in grace, they were entirely at one. To all of them, these doctrines were the very life-blood of the Christian faith. A modern editor of Luther’s great work underscores this fact: “Whoever puts this book down without having realized that evangelical theology stands or falls with the doctrine of the bondage of the will has read it in vain.”**

Simply because a theologian, even a highly respected one, declares that evangelical theology **“stands or falls”** with its view of the human will does not make it so. This scholar may be using hyperbole, like the proverbial board on the mule’s head, to gain our attention. Hyperbole involves the use of intentional exaggeration to make a point.

**This is not hyperbole**. In the judgment of the magisterial Reformers themselves, one’s view of the will and its state of bondage is absolutely vital to one’s understanding of the entire Christian faith. **Luther himself said:**

**“... this is the hinge on which our discussion turns, the crucial issue between us; our aim is, simply, to investigate what ability “free will” has, in what respect it is the subject of Divine action and how it stands related to the grace of God. If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatsoever of Christianity, and shall be in worse case than any people on earth! He who dissents from that statement should acknowledge that he is no Christian; and he who ridicules or derides**

it should realise that he is the Christian's chief foe. For if I am ignorant of the nature, extent and limits of what I can and must do with reference to God, I shall be equally ignorant and uncertain of the nature, extent and limits of what God can and will do in me—though God, in fact, works all in all (cf. 1 Cor. 12:6). Now, if I am ignorant of God's works and power, I am ignorant of God himself; and if I do not know God, I cannot worship, praise, give thanks or serve Him, for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to Him. We need, therefore, to have in mind a clear-cut distinction between God's power and ours, and God's work and ours, if we would live a godly life."

It is often assumed that the chief issue of the Reformation was the issue of justification. Luther hurled his thunderbolts at every form of human merit. Together the Reformers clearly *saw the link between the doctrine of justification and the primacy of grace.*

"The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this principle, and that not its deepest aspect. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration—the doctrine, that is, that the faith which receives Christ for justification is itself the free gift of a sovereign God, bestowed by spiritual regeneration in the act of effectual calling. To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith."

So important to the Reformers was the issue of our total dependency on grace for salvation that they saw all forms of semi-Pelagianism as serious threats to the gospel:

"Is our salvation wholly of God, or does it ultimately depend on something that we do for ourselves? Those who say the latter (as the Arminians later did) thereby deny man's utter helplessness in sin, and affirm that a form of semi-Pelagianism is true after all. It is no wonder, then, that later Reformed theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work) and a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, which was the deepest religious and theological principle of the Reformers' thought). Arminianism was, indeed, in Reformed eyes a renunciation of New Testament Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism; for to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle from relying on oneself for works, and the one is as un-Christian and anti-Christian as the other."

## MONERGISTIC REGENERATION

The doctrine of justification by faith alone was debated during the Reformation on the deeper level of monergistic regeneration. This technical term must be explained. Monergism is derived from a combination of a prefix and a root. The prefix mono is used frequently in English to indicate that which is single or alone. The root comes from the verb "to work." The erg of monergy comes into our language to indicate a unit of work or energy. When we put the prefix and root together, we get monergy or monergism. Monergism is something that operates by itself or works alone as the sole active party.

Monergism is the opposite of synergism. Synergism shares a common root with monergism, but it has a different prefix. The prefix syn comes from a Greek word meaning "with." Synergism is a cooperative venture, a working together of two or more parties.

When the term monergism is linked with the word regeneration, the phrase describes an action by which God the Holy Spirit works on a human being without

this person's assistance or cooperation. This grace of regeneration may be called operative grace.

Cooperative grace, on the other hand, is grace that God offers to sinners and that they may accept or reject, depending on the sinner's disposition.

**Monergistic regeneration is exclusively a divine act.** Man does not have the creative power God has. To quicken a person who is spiritually dead is something only God can do. A corpse cannot revive itself. It cannot even assist in the effort. It can only respond after receiving new life. Not only can it respond then, it most certainly will respond. **In regeneration the soul of man is utterly passive until it has been made alive. It offers no help in reviving itself, though once revived it is empowered to act and respond.**

Perhaps a good illustration of monergistic, life-giving power is the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a story told in the [Gospel of John](#):

**John 11:38-46 (NASB)**

**<sup>38</sup> So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, \*came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.**

**<sup>39</sup> Jesus \*said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, \*said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days."**

**<sup>40</sup> Jesus \*said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"**

**<sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.**

**<sup>42</sup> "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."**

**<sup>43</sup> When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."**

**<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus \*said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."**

**<sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.**

**<sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and**

**told them the things which Jesus had done.**

Lazarus was dead, not critically ill or at the point of dying. He was already a corpse and was decomposing. The stench from his rotting body was repugnant to his sister Martha. The miracle of his resurrection was accomplished without means, that is, without balms, medicines, CPR, and so forth.

The only power Christ used here was the power of his voice. He uttered a command, not a request or an invitation. He made no attempt to woo Lazarus from the tomb. **This resurrection was strictly monergistic.** Lazarus rendered absolutely no assistance. He was incapable of assisting in any way because he was completely dead.

Some may argue that though Christ supplied the initial power of Lazarus's resurrection, Lazarus nevertheless had to respond to Christ's command to come forth from the tomb. Is this not a cooperative work, a synergism between Christ and Lazarus? Most of the confusion regarding regeneration enters the picture here. Obviously Lazarus did respond. He came out of the tomb in obedience to Jesus' command. After life flowed anew in Lazarus's body, he became quite active.

**Monergistic regeneration has to do**, not with the whole process of redemption, but strictly with the initial condition or first step of our coming to faith. To be sure, Lazarus acted. He responded. He came forth from the tomb. But the crucial point is that he did none of these things while he was still dead. He did not respond to the call of Christ until after he had been made alive. His resurrection preceded his coming forth from the tomb. His restoration to life preceded his response.

**Arminians do not appreciate this analogy** and protest that we are here comparing apples and oranges. Obviously in the case of physical death, a corpse cannot respond or cooperate. It has no power to respond because it is dead. But there is a difference between physical death and spiritual death. A physically dead person can do nothing either physically or spiritually. A spiritually dead person is still alive biologically.

This person can still act, work, respond, make decisions, and so forth. He can say yes to grace, or he can say no.

Here we reach the ultimate point of separation between semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism, between



Arminianism and Calvinism, between Rome and the Reformation. Here we discover whether we are utterly dependent on grace for our salvation or if, while still in the flesh, still in bondage to sin, and still dead in sin, we can cooperate with grace in such a way that affects our eternal destiny.

**In the Reformation view, the work of regeneration is performed by God and by him alone.** The sinner is completely passive in receiving this action. Regeneration is an example of operative grace. Any cooperation we display toward God occurs only *after* the work of regeneration has been completed. Of course we respond to this work. We respond in a manner similar to that of Lazarus when, after being loosed, he stepped out of the tomb.

In like manner we step out of our tombs of spiritual death. We also respond when we hear the call of Christ. Our regeneration does not preclude such a response, but is designed to make this response not only possible but certain. *The point is, however, that unless we first receive the grace of regeneration, we will not and cannot respond to the gospel in a positive way. **Regeneration must occur first before there can be any positive response of faith.***

Arminianism reverses the order of salvation. **It has faith preceding regeneration.** The sinner, who is dead in sin and in bondage to sin, must somehow shed his chains, revive his spiritual vitality, and exercise faith so that he or she may be born again. In a very real sense **regeneration is not so much a gift in this schema** as it is **a reward for responding to the offer of grace**. The Arminian argues that in this schema grace is primary, in that God first offers grace for regeneration. God takes the initiative. He makes the first move and takes the first step. But this step is not decisive. This step may be thwarted by the sinner. If the sinner refuses to cooperate with or assent to this proffered grace, then grace is to no avail.

## RESISTIBLE GRACE

*There is a crucial difference between **pure Pelagianism** and **semi-Pelagianism**.* In **pure Pelagianism** grace may facilitate salvation, but it is by no means necessary for it. A person can be saved without grace, either operative or cooperative. In **semi-**

**Pelagianism** grace is not only helpful for salvation but necessary for it. Grace is necessary to assist the sinner in responding positively to God. Grace is necessary, *but not necessarily effectual*. Grace may be **resisted** and **overcome**.

In the final analysis **semi-Pelagianism** removes the odious problem of **Pelagianism**, but only by one step. **Semi-Pelagianism** salutes the necessity of grace, but under close scrutiny one wonders if the difference between **Pelagianism** and **semi-Pelagianism is a distinction without a difference**.

**The problem is this:** If grace is necessary but not effectual, what makes it work? Obviously it is the positive response of the sinner, who is still in the flesh.

Why does one sinner respond to the offer of grace positively and the other negatively?

Is the difference in response found in the power of the human will or in some added measure of grace?

Does grace assist the sinner in cooperating with grace, or does the sinner cooperate by the power of the flesh alone?

If the latter, it is **unvarnished Pelagianism**. If the former, *it is still Pelagianism* in that grace merely facilitates regeneration and salvation.

“No, no, no,” cries the semi-Pelagian. “Brother Ed-die has missed the point entirely. **Semi-Pelagianism rejects pure Pelagianism** at the point of saying that grace is necessary for salvation, not merely helpful.”

We know this is what **semi-Pelagians** say, but how in fact does this work out in their understanding of regeneration?

If the flesh can, by itself, incline itself to grace, where is the need of grace?

If the grace of regeneration is merely offered and its efficacy depends on the sinner’s response, what does grace accomplish that is not already present in the power of the flesh?

What the unregenerate person desperately needs in order to come to faith is regeneration. This is the necessary grace. It is the *sine qua non* [**an indispensable**

**and essential action, condition, or ingredient] of salvation.**

Unless God changes the disposition of my sinful heart, I will never choose to cooperate with grace or embrace Christ in faith. These are the very things to which the flesh is indisposed.

If God merely *offers* to change my heart, what will that accomplish for me as long as my heart remains opposed to him?

If he offers me grace while I am a slave to sin and still in the flesh, what good is the offer?

**Saving grace does not offer liberation, it liberates.** Saving grace does not merely offer regeneration, **it regenerates.** This is what makes grace **so gracious:** God **unilaterally** and **monergistically** does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

**The phrase irresistible grace,** like others that make up the acrostic **TULIP**, can be misleading. **TULIP** stands for **total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace,** and **perseverance of the saints.**

If we adjusted these phrases in the interest of accuracy, we would have something like this: **radical corruption, sovereign election, definite atonement, effectual grace,** and **preservation of the saints.** This would give us the acrostic **RSDEP**. This seems such a waste of tulips that we will stay with the original acrostic and simply labor the clarifications necessary.

**Irresistible grace** is not irresistible in the sense that sinners are incapable of resisting it. Though the sinner is spiritually dead, he remains biologically alive and kicking. As Scripture suggests, the sinner always resists the Holy Spirit. We are so opposed to the grace of God that we do everything in our power to resist it.

**Irresistible grace** means that the sinner's resistance to the grace of regeneration cannot thwart the Spirit's purpose. The grace of regeneration is irresistible in the sense that it is invincible.

**Since the grace of regeneration is monergistic and requires no cooperation from us, its efficacy lies in itself and not in us.** We can do nothing to make it effective; we can do nothing to make it ineffective. We are as passive with respect to our own regeneration as Lazarus was to his resurrection, and as the universe was to its creation. We were not cooperating agents in our original biological conception or generation, nor are we active agents in our regeneration.

The **doctrine of irresistible grace** is so called *because* of its **monergistic action** and **efficacy.** Historically it has been called effectual calling.

## EFFECTUAL CALLING

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* devotes an entire chapter to the doctrine of effectual calling. It begins by declaring:

**“All those whom God has predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.”**

**Effectual calling** is effectual *because* in it and by it God *effects* exactly what he intends in the operation: the quickening of spiritually dead souls to spiritual life.

**Calling** refers to the Holy Spirit's inward or secret operation on the soul. The confession's metaphor of turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh is drawn directly from Scripture. The image may be a bit confusing because of the positive reference to the word *flesh*.

In the Bible *flesh* usually refers to our fallen nature, which stands in contrast with and in opposition to the Spirit. **In this image, however, *flesh* is not contrasted with spirit but with a stone.** The same point is in view in both sets of images, namely a transformation from

death to life. Apart from the grace of regeneration, the person's heart or soul is, with respect to the things of God, like a stone. It is inert, unfeeling, unresponsive. It is reified and calcified. It is called stony because it is morally hard. The heart of stone is also a heart of darkness, lacking both life and light.

The grace of regeneration changes the heart or soul from something cold, lifeless, and stony into something living, pulsating, sanguine, and responsive. The heart is "made alive" to the things of God.

**Calvin** quotes **Augustine** as saying: "This grace, which is secretly imparted to the hearts of men, is not received by any hard heart; for the reason for which it is given is, that the hardness of the heart may first be taken away. Hence, when the Father is heard within, he takes away the stony heart, and gives a heart of flesh. Thus he makes them sons of promise and vessels of mercy, which he has prepared for glory."

God's call is made effectual by the Word and the Spirit. It is important to see that Word and Spirit are here conjoined as two vital factors in regeneration. *The Holy Spirit is not working apart from the Word or against the Word, but with the Word. Nor is the Word working alone without the presence and power of the Spirit.*

The call referred to in effectual calling is not the outward call of the gospel that can be heard by anyone within range of the preaching. The call referred to here is the inward call, the call that penetrates to and pierces the heart, quickening it to spiritual life. Hearing the gospel enlightens the mind, yet it does not awaken the soul until the Holy Spirit illumines and regenerates it. **The move from ear to soul is made by the Holy Spirit.** This move is what accomplishes God's purpose of applying the benefits of Christ's work to the elect.

**The Westminster Confession** speaks of the Spirit's renewing the will and of determining it to what is good by his almighty power. This refers to the omnipotence of God. Far from a mere enticement, God's effectual call on the human soul derives from the power source of omnipotence. *The same power that called the world into existence out of*

*nothing is now exercised in our redemption. **As God calls the world into being out of nothing, so he calls us to saving faith out of "nothing,"*** calling us who have no spiritual virtue whatever.

The confession speaks of God's determination. This is not to be confused with the blind determinism of fate or of mechanical physical forces. This is the determination of an omnipotent and holy Being, who is determined to bring about the salvation of his elect. God is determined to accomplish his plan, and by his determinate counsel that is exactly what he does.

In the phrase *effectual calling*, the stress is on the word effectual. The confession speaks of God's drawing the sinner to Christ, borrowing the word draw from Scripture but qualifying it with the adverb effectually. *The Holy Spirit's drawing is effectual; it accomplishes its purpose.*

The effect of this inward calling on the sinner is real. Regeneration and effectual calling effect a real change in the person. He is not merely induced to a particular action that he otherwise might not take. **Regeneration produces a real and substantive change in the person's constituent nature.** His will is renewed and liberated. He is freed from the bondage of original sin. He receives a new disposition for the things of God. Saving faith is worked in the heart. *As a result of regeneration, the person becomes a new creature.*

## **CORAM DEO** (Before the face of God)

### Integrity, *Coram Deo*

The uncompromising spirit of Olympic sprinter and Scotsman Eric Liddell was made famous by the award-winning film *Chariots of Fire*. For months Liddell trained to run the 100-meter dash at the Paris Olympics in 1924. Sportswriters across Britain predicted he would win. But when the schedules were announced, Liddell discovered that the heats for his race were to be run on a Sunday. Because he believed he would dishonor God by competing on the Lord's Day, he refused to enter the race.

Eric's fans were stunned. Some who previously

praised him called him a fool. But he stood firm. Professor Neil Campbell, a fellow student-athlete at the time, describes Liddell's decision:

Liddell was the last person to make a song and dance about that sort of thing. He just said, "I'm not running on a Sunday"—and that was that. And he would have been very upset if anything much had been made of it at the time. We thought it was completely in character, and a lot of the athletes were quietly impressed by it. They felt that here was a man who was prepared to stand for what he thought was right, without interfering with anyone else, and without being dogmatic.

(Sally Magnuson, *The Flying Scotsman* [New York: Quartet, 1981], 40)

Unlike the film version, which takes dramatic license with the facts, Liddell knew about the heat schedule months before the Olympics. He also declined to run in the 4 x 100 and 4 x 400 meter relays, races that he had qualified for, because their heats also were to be run on Sunday. Since he was such a popular athlete, the British Olympic Committee asked if he would train to run in the 400 meters—a race he had performed well in before, but one he'd never considered seriously. He decided to train for it and discovered that he was a natural at that distance. His wife, Florence, says of his decision, "Eric always said that the great thing for him was that when he stood by his principles and refused to run in the 100 metres, he found that the 400 metres was really his race. He would not of known that otherwise" (Magnuson, 45).

Liddell went on to win the 400 meters and set a world record in the process. God honored his uncompromising spirit. But what was there about Eric Liddell that gave him the resolve to stand firm with his decision in spite of the pressure from the authorities and the press? The filmmakers of *Chariots of Fire* unknowingly provide the answer in a scene dramatizing the British Olympic authorities' attempt to change Liddell's mind about running in the 100 meters. After their unsuccessful attempt, one of the men comments, "The lad ... is a true man of principle and a true athlete. His speed is a mere extension of his life—its force. We sought to sever his running from himself." In spite of the writer's labeling God as a generic "force," the statement is true. The

Christian life cannot be lived apart from God. To do so is to compromise your very being.

That's where the power of integrity begins. Only as you and I derive our being from our relationship with Christ can we ever hope to live like He did, to suffer like He did, to withstand adversity like He did, and to die like He did—all without compromising.

The heart and soul of all Christianity is our relationship with Christ. Our salvation begins with Him, our sanctification progresses with Him, and our glorification ends with Him. He is the reason for our being, and thus He is more valuable to us than anyone or anything.

## Pastoral in Nature

### 7 Ways to Do a BAD Word Study

Sometimes it's hard to wade through the muck and know when you're being short-changed. My guess is, you've encountered some sort of word study in the last couple of months: a Bible study, a sermon, a commentary, a quip about agape love or a defense of a biblical viewpoint you're not sure of. But sometimes it's hard to wade through the muck and know when you're being short-changed.

How can a lay person (or pastor) know whether a word study is legitimate? Here are some bad ways to do a word study, courtesy of Dr. Jennings of Gordon Conwell and Dr. Grant Osborne of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School:

#### 1. The Root Word Fallacy

You've heard this: "The word *ekklesia* is a Greek word for the church that literally means 'called out ones.'" Technically, this isn't true. While combining the two root words ("called out from") does indeed create something like "called out ones," the truth is, the word *ekklesia* is never used that way in the New Testament or its contemporaries.

In fact, *ekklesia* was used to refer to a group of philosophers, mathematicians or any other kind of assem-



bly in the Greco-Roman world. So unless we're supposing that actors and gladiators were called to a holy lifestyle by assembling together, we can't create a relationship between holiness and *ekklesia* necessarily.

While it's true that the church is composed of "called out" ones — that's not the particular point of this word. It just means "**assembly**" or "**gathering**."

## 2. The Origin Fallacy

If a commentary ever drives you back 50–100 or more years to find the origin of a particular word, steer clear.

Fifty years ago, "gay" meant something totally different in America than it does today. I would hope someone living 300 years from now wouldn't pick up a newspaper and say, "Aha! The debate about gay marriage in the early 2000s is, in fact, a debate about whether marriage ought to be 'happy.' Just look at the word's origin!"

The meaning of a word can change very quickly over time, so any legitimate word study won't find much help by going back to the "origin" of a word, or even looking too far to the future.

## 3. The "Everything" Fallacy

John writes, "**God so loved the world that he gave his only son.**" The word "**world**," or "**kosmos**," is one of John's favorites. But the word *kosmos* has a flexible meaning — it can mean man, mankind, humankind, world, universe or dirt. So which meaning did John intend?

We can be sure of this: *John did not intend all the meanings*. In other words, John didn't mean to say, "God so loved not just sinful mankind, but the entire creation, even the dirt we walk on!" No — John uses the word "**kosmos**" in a very particular way in all of his writing, and by knowing John's writing we know that he meant "**the sinful world**," not "**all of the above**."

While certain Bible translations might lead you to believe that we can pick and choose any one

among a number of alternate meanings (ahem ... maybe just one translation) this is a recipe for a Bible that means whatever we want it to mean.

## 4. The Lexical Fallacy

While it might be tempting, pointing to the lexical definition of a Greek word doesn't tell you what the word means in a particular context.

Consider this sentence: "I know a pilot who likes to fly, who went camping and put a fly over his tent, went fly fishing, then realized he was late for a plane and had to fly to an airport, where he realized he didn't look very fly because his fly was undone, and just at that moment a fly landed on his nose (Thank you, Dr. Jennings!)."

There's one word used seven times in seven different ways, and my guess is you had no question what I meant each time I used it. *Words have meaning only in relationship to other words*; for this reason, a lexicon can only tell you potential meaning, not actual meaning.

## 5. The Word-Argument Fallacy

No matter what anyone tells you, don't suppose that the definition of one word can solve a theological argument.

As a general rule, resorting to the meaning of a particular word to make a theological point is unhelpful at best, destructive at worst. If I need to appeal to the meaning of a word in a certain verse to settle a theological debate, I've already lost.

Don't get me wrong — sometimes word studies are great aids to good theology. But if my whole argument hinges on one flexible word, I'm probably off.

## 6. The Authorless Fallacy

Not every author speaks the same way. James doesn't use the word "**justify**" the same way Paul uses the word "**justify**."

By the same token, the same author usually speaks the same way. So when Jesus says to Peter, "**Do you *agape* me?**" or "**Do you *phileo* me?**" is he making a giant distinction between selfless love and brotherly

love that can only be seen in the Greek? Actually, no. John uses the words *phileo* and *agape* interchangeably in his narrative to refer to Jesus' love for his disciples, their love for them, etc. To make a credible case, we're going to need to cite the same author's use of the same word to justify its definition.

## 7. The "Webster's Dictionary" Fallacy

**First**, Noah Webster didn't write the Bible.

**Second**, taking a Greek word like "**Dunamai**" (I have power or authority) and saying, "This is where we get our word for '**Dynamite**,' which Webster defines as 'a high explosive, originally consisting of nitroglycerin mixed with an absorbent substance, now with ammonium nitrate usually replacing the nitroglycerin,'" is just plain abusive. It's a backward way of defining a term. Just because we borrow from the Greek doesn't mean there's a univocal relationship between root words and modern terms.



**Pastor Gary C. Fleetwood**  
Chime Bell Baptist Church  
Windsor, South Carolina

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary  
Aiken, South Carolina Extension  
Dean, Covington Theological Seminary  
Country of Romania*

## Hebrews 4 - Overview Part 2

*Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise.*

This study is Part 2 of the overview of [Hebrews 4](#). In Part 1 the concept of spiritual "rest" was addressed and it was seen that spiritual rest is something that a believer has to "enter" into, and that resting is accomplished through simply trusting God. Trusting is very different from the idea of believing, but the two are very complementary and integral to one another. This study will examine the other major elements of a chapter overview process. If someone is going to approach the Scriptures with meaningful purpose, then they must have a certain kind of disciplined approach that allows them to glean from the Scriptures what is the "obvious". There are key verbs, key words, repeated words and phrases, small words, conjunctions, exaltations of Christ, exhortations, reproofs, doctrines, warnings, promises, historical narratives, OT quota-

tions, context, dialogue passages, parables, the “therefore’s”, the tense and mood of the verbs, various figures of speech.

First, there are five “**therefore’s**” – v1, 6, 9, 11, and 16. The first “**therefore**” in v1 points the reader back to the fact that a rest remains for the people of God, but v1 does so by emphasizing one of the “minor” warnings of the letter of just coming short, or just failing to reach that rest.

**Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.**

The fourth “**therefore**” (v11) points back to the encouragement that this rest needs to be entered into, and the fifth “**therefore**” (v16) points back to the encouragement that every believer has a great High Priest. When all of these are put together, it is identifying that very often the believer has a tendency to not enter into God’s rest. That happens because for some strange reason we all think that we can do a great deal on our own and without God’s help – which ultimately is the by-product of our pride. Many Christians simply are not in the habit of really seeking God for the various needs of their life. Too often they have succumbed to the old adage that God helps those who help themselves – which by the way is not a quote from the Bible. God helps those who seek Him. He helps the fatherless and the widows. In fact, the Holy Spirit is actually called the “Helper” four times in [John 14-16](#). So, what is God’s solution to someone not entering His rest? It is v11 where Christians are encouraged to be “**diligent**”. In the last study, we saw that the word “**diligent**” means to make effort, to be prompt and earnest, to endeavor, to labor with purpose. It is almost as if it appears to be a paradox. On the one hand the word “**rest**” implies ceasing from labor, and then the phrase “**be diligent to enter that rest**” implies an effort on our part. However, living within a paradox is a normal part of the Christian life. Trusting and being “**diligent**” are not exclusive spiritual elements from each other. In reality, being “**diligent**” is evidence that someone is actually trusting God. Believers witness, evangelize, pray, serve, exhort, reprove - but simply because they do trust that God is the one who will bless their efforts on His behalf.

The key words in [Hebrews 4](#) are the words “**rest**” (used eleven times) and the word “**enter**” (used eight times). The word “**rest**” implies trust and the word “**enter**” implies something that the believer is responsible to do. One requires trust and the other requires effort – and they simply are not exclusive of one another, but to the contrary are dependent on one another. For instance, believers know that God is an omnipotent, powerful God, but often that power is not released on their behalf apart from prayer. Obviously believers can trust in the power of God on their behalf, but at the same time God has ordained that actual prayer is what very often releases that power in their lives.

There are no verbs in the imperative mood in [Hebrews 4](#). At first reading the following four verbs would seem to be in the imperative mood, but they are all in the subjunctive mood: - “**let us fear**” (v1), “**be diligent**” (v11), “**hold fast**” (14), and “**come boldly**” (v16). The subjunctive mood indicates probability or objective possibility. In other words, the action is still very optional to the individual. In English, words like “might” or “should” are used when speaking in the subjunctive mood. It is simply expressing the possibility of doing something. Each of these four verbs are still compelling encouragements to the believer, but they are not as strong as the verbs in the imperative mood. The following are the four exhortations of [Hebrews 4](#):

[Hebrews 4:1](#) says,

**Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.**

The phrase “**let us fear**” means exactly that – to be afraid, to be alarmed, to be in awe of, or to reverence. Believers need to have a reverent approach to the things of God. If they do not, then what will happen is that they will simply come short of what God intends for their life. The problem that the modern cultural church has is that it treats that which is sacred as if it is common. It minimizes God’s standards and maximizes personal preferences, and the result is that many in the average church have become desensitized to what is holy

to God. For instance, the more television that someone watches the more they become desensitized to violence. Children are constantly playing video games that expose them to violence. Within the modern church, individuals have watered down the gospel and its demands on the Christian's life to accommodate cultural preferences, and in the process the church has lost its reverence for the things of God. They simply are not as important to most as they should be. They are not the priority of their lives, and the result is that the church is inundated with people who have little to no convictions regarding the things of God. They have been raised in a church environment that is constantly accommodating their fleshly appetites and therefore the holiness of God has become virtually non-existent in many churches.

The second exhortation is found in [Hebrews 4:11](#),

**"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.**

What this verse is teaching is that a lack of diligence will ultimately lead to "**disobedience**". The spiritual formula from this verse would look like this: less diligence = more disobedience. It is important to appreciate that diligence has two distinct elements associated with it. The first is a certain kind of attitude, and the second is a corresponding action. A believer's attitude towards the things of God, towards His church, toward Bible study, towards prayer, and towards the advancement of His kingdom is what creates the strength and desire to be godly. Personally, I do not know one single person who is being mightily used by God who does not have an attitude of diligence and discipline towards the things of God – not one single person. Diligent believers have a goal, a purpose about their life that leads to a kind of spiritual productivity in their life that cannot be denied. No one will mature in their Christian faith by being spiritually lazy or careless. Earlier it was stated that the Greek word for being "**diligent**" means to make effort, to be prompt and earnest in what someone is doing, to endeavor, to labor with purpose. It is a word that by its very nature implies exertion, energy, spiritual "sweat", and determination. It demands a certain level of purpose and resolve about what someone wants to happen in their life. It is highly unlikely that

any Christian will be able to live a holy life without it. It is a spiritual attribute that requires a high degree of sacrifice and commitment. And unfortunately these are the essential elements that are generally missing in many people's lives – this diligence, this attitude of sacrifice and commitment. Renn's Dictionary says that it means "to strive" in the sense of "making every effort." [Hebrews 12:1](#) puts it this way,

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.**

Paul said in [I Timothy 4:7](#),

**<sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

The third encouragement is found in [Hebrews 4:14](#),

**<sup>14</sup>Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**

Part of this spiritual diligence involves holding fast to our confession. "**Confession**" has to do with the believer's testimony of his faith in Christ, but it also includes a testimony of his faithfulness to live for Christ. Anyone can make a confession, but the reality of that confession has to be demonstrated for the confession to have any substance or significance. If someone is having an affair outside of their marriage, the simple confession that they are married is meaningless. And in a similar way, just to say that we are followers of Christ has no validity if in reality we are not actually following Him. The way that Jude emphasizes this is by simply using the term "**hold fast**". The term "**hold fast**" denotes seizing something with great strength. Often times we have seen people caught up in a flood in their car and the water is rising and they are literally "holding on for dear life". That is the picture of what this word means – that of gripping on to something and not letting go of it. True believers have made a confession of faith and trust in the person of Christ, and because of that they need to "**hold fast**" to that confession in their life. It needs to be demonstrated by their life and in their life. It



should be the constant testimony of their life that they belong to Christ.

The last encouragement is in [Hebrews 4:16](#),

**16Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

This is the hinge on which all of the exhortations turn – this idea of coming boldly to God’s throne of grace. Once again we find ourselves in a paradox. These encouragements cannot be fulfilled on our own and in our own strength. Sometimes it seems that the harder that someone tries that the more they fail. What the author is identifying here is that in order to be reverent, in order to be diligent, in order to hold fast, the believer still needs God’s divine help to do so. No one can be godly without God. The word “**come**” is in the present tense which means that it is a present continuous action and could be translated as “**come and keep coming**”. If a believer genuinely and sincerely wants to live a godly life, then at some point they have to develop the discipline of “coming” to God’s throne of grace and mercy. Obviously, this is something that takes place through prayer. The average Christian has very little confidence in prayer. Someone will say, “Well, how do you know that?” to which I would reply, “Just ask them how much deliberate, intentional time they actually spend in prayer”. For most people prayer is an almost insignificant part of their life. They have never developed a personal need for continually coming to God for His help, wisdom, strength, and guidance. It just does not exist in their life. No wonder so many Christians are spiritually weak and have little to no hunger for the things of God. No wonder the modern church is more absorbed with being entertained than being committed. No wonder so many Christians are weak in the Word of God. One major reason is because they have never developed the discipline of continually approaching God for mercy and grace to live out the Christian life. Every Christian needs to personally evaluate whether or not this may describe their life, and if it does, then they need to come boldly to God’s throne for His grace to make the necessary adjustments in their life

that will help strengthen their life so that it can be spiritually effective.

In [Hebrews 4:12-13](#) the author shows that the word of God exposes us for what we really are.

**12For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**

There is something extremely critical and important being stated in these two verses. First of all, the believer must understand something about the Word of God and one of its primary functions in their life (v12), and then they must understand something about God (v13). In v12, the word of God is something that is constantly exposing the spiritual reality of the believer's faith in God. The Word of God cannot be read it without it speaking to the believer’s life. One of the first truths gleaned from [Hebrews 1](#) is that God is a speaking God. His Word is constantly speaking to our lives, constantly providing conviction and encouragement, constantly giving strength for our weaknesses. The NIV says that the Word of God “**penetrates**” into our life. It is never superficial in what it says to the believer, but is always penetrating into the very core of their being and their conscience. The Message Bible (a paraphrase) seems to capture the idea when it says that the Word of God is “**sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel, cutting through everything**”. It takes diligence to mature spiritually, and so a believer needs to allow God’s Word to continually be speaking to their life and then to apply God's Word faithfully to the various areas of their life to which the Word of God has spoken. No believer is exempt from this work of God’s Word in their life.

Secondly, [Hebrews 4:13](#) is clear that there is nothing that can be hidden from God. It says that” **there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we**

**must give account**". One day every believer will be called into account for how they lived, for how they treated the things of God, and for how they ignored or obeyed His truth. Every believer will be called into account as to whether or not they revered the person of Christ and honored Him in their life, and to whether or not they treated the holy things of His kingdom indifferently and as if they were just things that were common and not sacred. No one escapes. No one is exempt. Nothing is "**hidden**" from Him and all things are "**naked and open**" to His view, and it is critically important that we humble ourselves to God's omniscience.

Lastly, [Hebrews 4:14-15](#) says that we have a great High Priest.

**<sup>14</sup>Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

These two verses are actually the beginning of the central section of Hebrews 5-9 that speaks of the great high priestly ministry of Christ on the believer's behalf. In fact, v14, 15, and v1, 5, 6, and 10 of [Hebrews 5](#) all speak of this great High Priest. We have "**a great High Priest**" and it is His high priestly ministry that actually opens the door to God's mercy and grace in our life (v16). The implication should be obvious that God's grace and mercy are intimately interwoven into Christ's ministry on the believer's behalf. So, the more that the believer comes to Christ, the more that they are willing to obey Christ, and the more that they avail themselves of His Word, then the more mercy and grace they will experience in their life. The idea is not that Christians just "**come**" to the throne of grace, but rather that they come **through** Christ. They come because of His blood, because of His sacrifice, because of His obedience. They never come on their own merit, for they have none. always They come into the presence of God on the merit of Christ. The more that they continue to seek and follow Christ, the more they will experience the grace of

Christ in their lives. Too often the only time that people really come to Christ is when things are not going well for them, and unfortunately their expectation is this overflow of grace and answered prayer into their life. In so doing they treat God as if He is some kind of spiritual genie that will come at their beckon call. However, in reality they have been continually ignoring Christ. They have ignored Christ, disregarded and disobeyed His Word, and treated His claims on their life lightly and indifferently. They have not been diligent to have an intimate and abiding relationship with Him. And the result is that they simply find it difficult to enter into His rest or even find the grace that they need in their lives to make it through the trying moments that have afflicted them. Through their continual neglect they have just reached a very real place in their lives where they cannot believe God's Word, cannot trust Christ with their life, and cannot draw close to Him in their heart. The world has become their home and the love of the world has become their god. And eventually they blame God for their misfortune and discomfort and simply fall away. God becomes the designated scapegoat for their disappointments – not them, not their disobedience, not their indifference, not their spiritual neglect – but God. It happens all of the time.

Knowing the Scriptures is only an advantage to believers if they obey it. The modern church has developed a religious culture that has deceived people into thinking that all they need is a knowledge of God, just a knowledge of Christ, just saying that they "believe". However, if they were being careless while driving, ran a red light in a major intersection, and a policeman sees that and pulls them over and gives them a ticket, it would do them no good to pull out a copy of the state's driving laws and give it to the policeman. To the contrary, it would be to their detriment. Far from making them innocent, what they knew would only make them more guilty. Knowing the truth is only an advantage if someone's obey it and it becomes a condemnation if they do not obey it. Being a Christian is not a matter of someone knowing and understanding the gospel, but a matter of trusting their life to it.

Clearly the issue is not what we know but what we do with what we know. Do we believe the Scriptures?

Are they impacting our life, are they changing our life?

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Vine, 303.

<sup>2</sup> Renn, 284.

<sup>3</sup> Strong's, 1198

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6520 Arizona Avenue  
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