

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Number 304 Copyright 2012 The Trinity Foundation Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 January-Mar 2012  
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## Sanctification, Half Full: The Myopic Hermeneutic of the “Grace” Movement by Timothy F. Kauffman

*Editor's note: In this article, Mr. Kauffman (PCA) evaluates the teachings of Keller, Brown, and Tchividjian (also PCA) on progressive sanctification, and limits the terms of the discussion to those identified in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 13, "Of Sanctification." In this article, the term sanctification, when used by Mr. Kauffman, is in reference to the sanctification described in Philippians 2:12-13.*

In the midst of the New Perspective/Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue controversy in 2005, Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Theological Seminary, provided one of the most penetrating criticisms of New Perspective exponent N. T. Wright:

Wright avoids outright denials of Reformation theology, but introduces unanswered questions (particularly since he seems willing to define faith as faithfulness) that are inappropriate for one as theologically skilled and influential as he.<sup>1</sup>

The facility with which new movements can stoke confusion by redefining terms or making opposites equivocal, is breathtaking. Perhaps the reader will recall Cornelius Van Til's defense of Norman Shepherd, explaining that in *John* 6:28, "faith and works are identical. Not similar but identical."<sup>2</sup> We can

all be thankful for Bryan Chapell's clarity when he finally weighed in on the issue.

A similar controversy is brewing in Reformed circles, but with a new twist. Instead of alleging that our personal holiness in sanctification participates in the final verdict of justification, the new view (occasionally called the "Grace movement") appears to allege that justification completes our sanctification; that is, the holiness of sanctification is that same righteousness that was already secured for believers via Christ's substitutionary atonement, and is obtained by the same instrumental means of faith alone.

There are several problems with this new view, but the greatest, in this writer's opinion, are these: first, the approach frequently conflates justification and sanctification, asserting of the latter what is declared in the former, and thus denigrates intentional obedience as it manifests in the lives of believers; second, proponents of the new view are so persuaded that they have rediscovered an essential truth of the faith that they read their view into the Scriptures when expounding them; and third, for the same reason, they read their new view back into the writings of great men who came before them, even those who explicitly disagreed with the strained formulations of the new movement. These three problems are largely interrelated, and often occur together. This article examines them as they are manifested in the writing and preaching of three contemporary proponents.

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, "An Explanation of the New Perspective on Paul," May 2005, Covenant Theological Seminary, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/explanation-new-perspective-paul/>.

<sup>2</sup> John Robbins, *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy*, Unicoi: The Trinity Foundation, 2003, 43-44. Transcription of a speech by Cornelius Van Til at

the Justification Controversy meeting of the Committee of the Whole of the OPC Philadelphia Presbytery.

**Steve Brown**

Steve Brown is an author, broadcaster, and professor at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS). He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). In his book, *A Scandalous Freedom*, he explains, “The focus of my teaching is grace.... In our broadcast, in my teaching, and in my books....”<sup>3</sup> We rejoice that grace is preached, but in his book, Brown clearly demonstrates that his teaching conflates justification with sanctification, confusing the instrumental means of the former with that of the latter. We know that Jesus was certainly put to death for our sins, and raised up from the dead because of our justification (*Romans 4:25 NKJV*), but our sanctification was to be accomplished by God’s Word and Spirit, for Jesus prayed to His Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (*John 17:17*), and Paul gave thanks to God for the Thessalonians: “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation *through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*” (*2 Thessalonians 2:13*). Sanctification is by the Word and Spirit. But Brown confuses sanctification and justification, and teaches that the holiness of sanctification does not need a book, because Jesus has already accomplished our justification on the cross:

[I]n the case of our sin, God resolved the problem by sending his Son to die on a cross as our redeemer. If we could be as good and as faithful as some would suggest, God would have sent a book instead of his Son.<sup>4</sup>

It is helpful to know that Brown was writing here of sin *inside* the church family—in the lives of justified believers like Charles Spurgeon and Martin Luther<sup>5</sup>—that is, of sanctification and its challenges for us. Note, in Brown’s comments, his sudden transition from justification (the problem of sin) to sanctification (goodness and faithfulness of believers), without pausing to consider the difference in the means. Justification is a once-for-all legal declaration of righteousness received by faith alone in what Christ has done, and sanctification is an on-going work of mortification of sin and a living unto holiness by means of the Word and Spirit He gave us. Because Brown appears to confuse the two, he concludes that *intentional obedience* to the Word is the greatest hindrance to sanctification:

The greatest cause for our not getting better is our obsession with not getting better. There is a

better way of getting better than trying harder. Sanctification becomes a reality in those believers who don’t obsess over their own sanctification.<sup>6</sup>

To substantiate the historicity of these claims, Brown invokes a giant of the faith, Walter Marshall, a seventeenth-century English Puritan. In his introduction to Chapter 3, Brown writes,

Walter Marshall, the seventeenth-century pastor and author of *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*,...said to his congregation, “May God bless my discovery of the powerful means of holiness so far as to save some from killing themselves.” The people in Marshall’s church were literally killing themselves in their efforts to be godly. They practiced self-mutilation, deprivation, and inflicted all kinds of pain on themselves in efforts to please God and be pure.<sup>7</sup>

Based on Brown’s invocation, one might expect to pick up a copy of Marshall’s great work on sanctification and discover that he had been preaching to a congregation of one-eyed, self-flagellating, suicidal, amputees, and that the only hindrance to their sanctification was that they were trying too hard to be holy. But this is not what we find. Rather, Marshall also believed that many were not trying hard enough. Contrary to Brown’s depiction, Marshall addressed his comments not only to “ignorant zealots [who] inhumanly macerate their bodies with fasting and other austerities,” but also to “many [who] reject the way of holiness as austere and unpleasant, *because they did not know how to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, without intolerable pain;...putting off repentance from time to time as an uncouth thing.*”<sup>8</sup> And while Marshall indeed believed that one possible blessing of his work might be to prevent some “ignorant zealots” from killing themselves, for “such a fruit as this would countervail my labor,” nonetheless he hoped the greater good would be an actual increase in personal and intentional holiness, for he continued: “*though I hope God will enlarge the hearts of many by it to run with great cheerfulness, joy and thanksgiving in the way of His commandments.*”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Marshall’s primary goal was for his flock to learn how to improve in their obedience to God’s commandments. Preventing ignorant zealots from killing themselves was only a hopeful byproduct. It is important to highlight that fact, because Brown thinks to use Marshall as evidence that Christians should stop trying so hard to be holy,

<sup>6</sup> Brown, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 52.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, section 1.2.8, emphasis added, [www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/GospelMystery.pdf](http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/GospelMystery.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Marshall, section 1.2.8, emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Brown, *A Scandalous Freedom*, (New York: Howard Books, 2004), 60.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, 122.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, 121.

so scandalous is the freedom we enjoy in Christ. If Marshall actually believed and taught that, we would have no criticism of Brown on his use of him. But that is not the case.

Marshall actually invests a considerable effort in *countering* Brown's personal philosophy of sanctification, which can be summed up as: "I'm about as good as I'm going to get, and I'm tired of trying"<sup>10</sup>; and freedom in Christ is so scandalous that it means that we are "free to cuss and spit."<sup>11</sup> "You are free. You can do it right or wrong. You can obey or disobey. You can run from Christ or run to Christ. You can choose to become a faithful Christian or an unfaithful Christian."<sup>12</sup> To shore up his position, Brown reminds the reader that "free" literally means "free":

When Jesus used the word free (as in, "the truth will make you free"), he employed a term that means "liberation from bondage." In other words, the Greek word for free means "free."... It ought to be that simple. If Jesus said we're free, we ought to accept his declaration at face value and run with it.<sup>13</sup>

To this, Marshall properly responds,

And others, when they are taught by the Scriptures, that we are saved by faith, through faith, without works, do begin to disregard all obedience to the law, as not at all necessary to salvation, and account themselves obliged to it only in point of gratitude; if it be wholly neglected, they do not doubt but free grace will save them harmless. Yea, some are given up to strong Antinomian delusions, that they account it a part of the liberty from the bondage of the law, purchased by the blood of Christ, *to make no conscience of breaking the law in their conversation.*<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, Brown has a philosophy of sanctification that is incongruous with Marshall's. Must we remind Brown that Jesus also said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the *servant* of sin" (*John* 8:34), and that Paul taught "even so now yield your members *servants* to righteousness unto holiness" (*Romans* 6:19)? We will leave it to him to confirm that the term servant, in both cases, means "slave." And "slave" means "slave." But can Brown accept this declaration at face value and run with it? We will let him answer that, but to our point, his hermeneutic is so narrow that he can cite Marshall to support his view, yet cannot appear to see that Marshall emphatically disagrees with him; and

further, he appears to miss that the Bible's teaching on sanctification goes beyond mere freedom from the bondage of the Law, but includes freedom from the slavery of sin, as we eagerly enter into slavery to righteousness.

As plentiful as the examples are, Steve Brown is just one example among many, showing that the Grace Movement, as a movement, struggles to consider rather weighty historical and Biblical matters in their full and original context, and to apply them with the care of trained theologians.

### Tullian Tchividjian

Tullian Tchividjian is senior pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and is a Visiting Professor of Theology at RTS. He has been vocal in discussions on the movement, and in his recent book, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, he expresses that in regard to the Gospel "my focus has become myopic."<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more myopic than he realizes, for he asserts that *intentional obedience* in the life of a believer is a rejection of Christ's work on the cross:

Think of what Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12; "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We've got work to do—but what exactly is it? Get better? Try harder? Pray more? Get more involved at church? Read the Bible longer? What precisely is Paul exhorting us to do? He goes on to explain: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (v. 13) God works *his* work in *you*, which is the work already accomplished by Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Now, aside from the fact that Paul interprets his own epistle quite clearly (and differently) in the next verse, (*i.e.*, Paul is exhorting us to "Do all things without murmurings and disputings"), note that Tchividjian conflates justification and sanctification—and unfortunately, the work of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity—by teaching that the holiness of our sanctification has already been accomplished on the Cross by Jesus. As he himself summarizes the book, "The Christian life is not about my transformation; it's about Christ's substitution."<sup>17</sup> To the contrary, *justification* is about Christ's substitution, but *sanctification is about my transformation*. The

<sup>15</sup> Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, 96, emphasis in original.

<sup>17</sup> Matt Johnson, "This Entire Thing Has Nothing to Do with Pastor Tullian," interview, January 24, 2012, retrieved February 15, 2012 <http://theresurgence.com/2012/01/24/this-entire-thing-has-nothing-to-do-with-pastor-tullian>.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, 6, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall, section 8.2, emphasis added.

Scriptures, for example, teach not that the personal “worked out” holiness of the believer was accomplished by Christ on the Cross, but rather that both the ingrafted Word and the indwelling Spirit accomplish our sanctification, our transformation, the result of which is *our* obedience to the Law (*Romans* 8:4, *Ezekiel* 36:26-27)—not Christ’s forensically credited or imputed righteousness for justification, but ours actually by the Word’s and the Spirit’s power for sanctification.

Tchividjian’s myopic hermeneutic is also clearly manifested when he presses Martin Luther into service, as Brown did with Marshall:

Think of it this way: Sanctification is the daily hard work of going back to the reality of our justification. It’s going back to the certainty of our objectively secured pardon in Christ and hitting the refresh button a thousand times a day. Or, as Martin Luther so aptly put it in his *Lectures on Romans*, “To progress is always to begin again.” Real spiritual progress, in other words, requires a daily going backwards.<sup>18</sup>

But is that what Luther meant? Did he mean that to progress means to return constantly to our justification? We need go no further than Luther to discover that Tchividjian has turned him upside down. When Luther wrote “To progress is always to begin again,” he did so in his exposition of *Romans* 13:11a, where Paul writes, “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.” This is Paul writing on sanctification. On this verse, Luther expounds,

We should note that the apostle does not speak of those that are dead in the sins of unbelief, or of believers who have fallen into mortal sin, but of Christians *who are listless in what they are doing and have fallen fast asleep because they feel so secure*. What he wants them to do is that they should go forward but solicitously so. As it says in *Micah* 6:8: “I will show you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: Verily, to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitously with your God.”<sup>19</sup>

Luther clearly is not saying that progress means constantly going back to our justification. But Luther continues, and he does so in a way that would appear foreign to Tchividjian’s formulation that progress requires that we go ever backward. When Luther says going forward means to begin ever anew, he is

exhorting us to begin ever anew *with the next incremental step in our sanctification*:

For it is those who are not solicitous and not watchful from fear that are the ones *who make a beginning but do not progress and put their hand to the plow and look back* (*Luke* 9:62);...to stand still on God’s way means to go backward, and to go forward means to begin ever anew.<sup>20</sup>

Luther is here emphasizing that the Christian must never assume “he has already apprehended,”<sup>21</sup> but rather must begin again *with the next step*: doing justice, loving mercy and walking with God. That Luther has it right, and Tchividjian has it wrong, is evident from *Hebrews* 6:1, where the saints are urged to move beyond the foundation of repentance and faith, and on to personal holiness: “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; *not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.*” Yet that, it seems, is precisely where Tchividjian would have us remain. His myopia prevents him from seeing beyond laying the foundation over, and over again—missing *Hebrews* 6:1, and overturning Luther in the process.

Tchividjian returns to this mistake when he invokes A. W. Pink. Recently, Tchividjian engaged in an online conversation with Kevin DeYoung about the role of effort in sanctification. In one of his responses to DeYoung, Tchividjian wrote,

Bad behavior, therefore, happens when we fail to believe that everything we need, in Christ we already have; it happens when we fail to believe in the rich provisional resources that are already ours in the gospel. Conversely, good behavior happens when we daily rest in and receive Christ’s “It is finished” into our rebellious regions of unbelief (what one writer calls “our unevangelized territories”) smashing any sense of a self-aggrandizing and narcissistic need to secure for ourselves anything beyond what Christ has already secured for us. As A.W. Pink put it, “Repentance is the hand releasing those filthy objects it had previously clung to so tenaciously while faith is extending an empty hand to God to receive His gift of grace.”<sup>22</sup>

Note here that Tchividjian is speaking of *sanctification* (i.e., “bad behavior” vs. “good behavior”), yet his myopia may have clouded his

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<sup>20</sup> Pauck, 370.

<sup>21</sup> Pauck, 371.

<sup>22</sup> Tchividjian, “Work Hard! But In Which Direction?” June 8, 2011, retrieved January 25, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2011/06/08/work-hard-but-in-which-direction/>.

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<sup>18</sup> Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> Pauck, Wilhelm, translator, *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 370, emphasis added.

reading of Pink. So conflated are his views, that he cites Pink on *justification* to prove his own views on *sanctification*. The quote from Pink comes from his work, *A Fourfold Salvation*, Chapter 2: "Salvation from the Penalty of Sin," where he writes of justification by faith alone:

The human side of our salvation from the penalty of sin respects our repentance and faith.... Repentance is the hand releasing those filthy objects it had previously clung to so tenaciously; faith is extending an empty hand to God to receive His gift of grace.<sup>23</sup>

Pink has it right, but he was not here treating on sanctification. When Pink actually addresses it in Chapter 3: "Salvation from the Power of Sin," he treats on sanctification by the Word in a manner wholly repugnant to Tchividjian, for the fruit, Pink says, *is intentional obedience*:

[T]he only way by which we can strengthen and develop the new nature, is by feeding it.... The nourishment which God has provided for our spiritual nature is found in His own Word.... In proportion as we feed upon the heavenly Manna, such will be our spiritual growth. Of course there are other things besides food needful to growth: we must breathe, and in a pure atmosphere. This, translated into spiritual terms, signifies prayer. Exercise is another essential to growth, and this finds its accomplishment in walking with the Lord. If, then, we heed these primary laws of spiritual health, the new nature will flourish.... To starve the old nature, to make not provision for the flesh, means that we abstain from everything that would stimulate our carnality.... Not only must we deny ourselves the pleasures of sin, shun such things as the saloon, theatre, dance, card-table, etc., but we must separate ourselves from the worldly companions, cease to read worldly literature, abstain from everything upon which we cannot ask God's blessing. Our affections are to be set upon things above, and not upon things upon the earth (Col. 3:2). *Does this seem a high standard, and sound impracticable? Holiness in all things is that at which we are to aim, and failure to do so explains the leanness of so many Christians.*<sup>24</sup>

The contrast between Pink and Tchividjian is rich. Recall that Tchividjian glibly asked how we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling: "We've got work to do—but what exactly is it? Get better? Try harder? Pray more? Get more involved at church?"

Read the Bible longer?" Yet that is exactly what Pink prescribes for effective sanctification. We could argue whether or not Pink has it right on the specifics, but the point here is that Pink treats on sanctification in a manner that Tchividjian calls "our self-centered refusal to believe that God's approval of us in Christ is full and final."<sup>25</sup> Thus Tchividjian has turned Pink on his head, and cites him on justification to support his own view of sanctification, arriving at a conclusion that is in fact the negation of Pink's plain meaning.

Tchividjian returns again to this mistake when he invokes Walter Marshall. In a recent entry in his blog, Tchividjian continued his writing against legalism under the title, "Might As Well Face It, You're Addicted to Law." Here he calls on Marshall to undergird his position, as Brown did before him:

[I]t doesn't surprise me at all when I hear people react to grace with suspicion and doubt. It doesn't surprise me that when people talk about grace, I hear lots of "buts and brakes," conditions and qualifications. That's just the flesh fighting for its life.... As...Marshall says in his book *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, "By nature, you are completely addicted to a legal method of salvation. Even after you become a Christian by believing the Gospel, your heart is still addicted to salvation by works.... You find it hard to believe that you should get any blessing before you work for it."<sup>26</sup>

Thus Marshall is made by Tchividjian to preach that blessings ("comforts" in the original) come by faith in Christ completely apart from works of the law, and that to believe otherwise is evidence of "the flesh fighting for its life." But what Marshall wrote in the very next paragraph completely undoes Tchividjian, for Marshall explicitly anticipates Tchividjian's misunderstanding, and corrects it:

That you may rightly understand what I have asserted in the direction against such vulgar errors, take notice that I do not make the only place of gospel comfort to be before the duties of the law. I acknowledge that God comforts His people on every side (Ps. 71:21), both before and also after the performance of their duty, *and that the greatest consolations do follow after duty*, yet some comforts God gives to His people beforehand, as advance money, to furnish them for His service, *though most of the pay comes in afterward.*<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Tchividjian, "Work Hard! But In Which Direction?"

<sup>26</sup> Tullian Tchividjian, "Might As Well Face It, You're Addicted To Law," January 5, 2012, retrieved January 13, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2012/01/05/might-as-well-face-it-youre-addicted-to-law/>.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall, Introduction to Chapter 9, emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> Pink, A. W., *A Fourfold Salvation* (1938): "Salvation from the Penalty of Sin," <http://articles.ochristian.com/book12552.shtml>.

<sup>24</sup> Pink, emphasis added.

To summarize Marshall, some of God's blessings come before obedience, but most come after. Tchividjian gets Marshall backward. This is the result of his myopic reading of the text—*intentional obedience*, Tchividjian appears to believe, must always be legalism. And so focused is he on eradicating legalism, that he imagines that it is the only thing against which to preach. It is the only enemy of the Gospel. To arrive at this conclusion, he redefines legalism to include its opposites: licentiousness and lawlessness. Tchividjian writes,

It's part of a common misunderstanding in today's church, which says there are two equal dangers Christians must avoid. On one side of the road is a ditch called "legalism"; on the other is a ditch called "license" or "lawlessness."... I believe it's more theologically accurate to say that there is one primary enemy of the gospel—legalism—but it comes in two forms.... In other words, there are two "laws" we can choose to live by apart from Christ: the law that says, "I can find freedom and fullness of life if I keep the rules," and the law that says, "I can find freedom and fullness of life if I break the rules." Either way, you're trying to "save" yourself, which means both are legalistic because both are self-salvation projects. So what some call "license," is just another form of legalism. People outside the church are typically guilty of break-the-rules legalism, while many inside the church are guilty of keep-the-rules legalism.<sup>28</sup>

That is a rather strained redefinition, and it serves only to confuse the issue and make the myopia chronic. If Tchividjian can redefine lawlessness to be legalism, then he is free to preach only against legalism. What else is there? And because he cannot imagine that there might be other enemies of the Gospel—say, just for an example, a failure to bear fruit because one could not get beyond faith and repentance (see *Hebrews* 6:1-8)—he has no reason to preach on them. It is a very debilitating case of myopia that leads a preacher to think that the only enemy of the Gospel is the one he prefers to preach against, and a chronic case of self-inflicted blindness that leads a man to think Pink, Luther, and Marshall agree with him, when their disagreements with him are explicit in the original context.

### **Tim Keller**

Tim Keller is the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, PCA, in New York City. He received his Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and his Doctor of Ministry from Westminster Theological Seminary. Keller strikes the

same tone as Tchividjian, essentially equating the functional implications of legalism and leniency:

Legalism and leniency are not just equally bad and wrong but they are basically the same thing. They are just different strategies of "self-salvation."... The only way into a ministry that sees people's lives change, that brings a joy and power and electricity without authoritarianism—is a preaching of the gospel that deconstructs both legalism and leniency equally.<sup>29</sup>

And how does this play out in his preaching? Keller continues by explaining how to preach to different worldviews. When trying to reach Sadducees, you must "deconstruct Phariseeism"; when trying to reach antinomians, you must "distinguish the gospel from legalism"; when trying to non-Christians, you must use the good news of grace against legalism"; when pressed to teach against "license and antinomianism," he disagrees and says instead we must "critique moralism."<sup>30</sup> If legalism and leniency are the same, then by preaching against legalism, he has covered them both.

This is myopic, and the effect is profound as it manifests in his teaching. Keller has written and taught extensively on many topics, most notably and recently on the Parable of the Prodigal Son in his book, *The Prodigal God*. Keller's myopia is revealed when he expounds on the Parable, which he is unable to do without first adopting the same position as Brown and Tchividjian—essentially equating Bible-believing obedience with Pharisaical legalism: "Jesus' teaching consistently attracted the irreligious, while offending the Bible-believing, religious people of his day."<sup>31</sup> Of the Pharisees, Keller also writes that "[t]hey studied and obeyed the Scripture."<sup>32</sup>

This is a misrepresentation that Jesus will not allow, for He testified that the Pharisees were not Bible believers at all, and certainly were not obedient to the Scriptures:

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (*John* 5:46-47)

<sup>29</sup> Keller, Tim, "Preaching In a Post-Modern City," *The Movement*, e-newsletter of the Redeemer Church Planting Center, June 2004, viewed January 25, 2012 <http://www.westerfunk.net/archives/theology/Tim%20Keller%20on%20Preaching%20in%20a%20Post-Modern%20City%20-%202/>.

<sup>30</sup> Keller, "Preaching In a Post-Modern City."

<sup>31</sup> Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, (New York: Penguin Group (USA), Inc., 2008), 15, 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, 50-51.

And he said unto them, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.... Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye." (Mark 7:9, 13)

Clearly, Jesus did not consider the Pharisees to be the obedient Bible-believers of His day, but it suits Keller's purposes to cast them as such as he interprets the Scripture through his myopic lens.

As he continues, we note that he takes the same tack as Brown and Tchividjian, denigrating intentional obedience in the life of the believer. He does this in his exposition of *Luke 15*, where he briefly turns to the Parable of the Sower and writes, "The only group of people who produce changed lives are not those who have worked harder and been more obedient, but those who 'hear the word of God and *understand* it' (Matthew 13:23)."<sup>33</sup> That this is a rather un-careful and peculiar interpretation becomes obvious upon inspection. Keller introduces a false dichotomy to the text, awkwardly distinguishing between "bearing fruit" and intentional obedience. According to Scripture, obedience and hard work is the fruit of the Word in the life of a believer (*John 15:7-10; Luke 19:8-9; Hebrews 12:4*). Keller's false dichotomy is made clear when we re-read his observation in that light, and reduce his statement to this absurd contradiction: "The only people who bear fruit are not those who bear fruit but those who hear the word of God and understand it." That is nonsense, but it is the necessary implication of Keller's reading of the text. *Contra* Keller, the truth is that hearing the Word of God and understanding it, is the seed being well planted. Hard work and obedience is the fruit itself. Keller would have done very well to say, "Those who hear the Word of God and understand it are they who respond to the Word with hard work and obedience," for that is the plain meaning of the Parable based on Jesus' teachings—the very fruit that is produced by the indwelling Word. We note, for example, that following the parable of the Sower in *Luke 8*, Jesus provided a live illustration of what the parable signified, saying, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (*Luke 8:21*). Thus it appears to this writer to be a rather unhelpful hermeneutic that could read Christ's words in the Parable of the Sower and attempt to separate *intentional obedience* to the Word of God from the fruit of the implanted Word. This should not be taken, of course, to suggest that Keller does not believe the fruit of the Word is to love God and love our neighbor, or that one should never try at all. Rather it highlights the propensity of the Grace Movement for diminishing intentional obedience to the Law as the fruit of

sanctification, regularly equating hard work and obedience as hindrances to, rather than the fruit of, sanctification.

Yet this is the ultimate end of Keller's own acknowledged practice, which is to preach "grace, grace, grace" in every sermon.<sup>34</sup> The danger of interpreting the Scripture in this manner is that it downplays God's many other attributes, and opens the door to making the Scripture say whatever one thinks it ought to have said. Keller succumbs to this temptation when he expounds on the Prodigal's speech preparations in *Luke 15:18-19*. The Prodigal says, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

There is no mystery here, no hidden meaning that has to be coaxed out of the text, no unspoken message that only a prophet can discern for us. The boy, at the end of his rope and empty of himself, *is hungry, and does not want to be hungry any more*. Note the progression:

[T]here arose a mighty famine in that land; *and he began to be in want*. (v. 14)

And *he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him*. (v. 16)

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, *and I perish with hunger!* (v. 17)

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him...make me as one of thy hired servants. (vv. 18-19)

Clearly the son is aware of his sin—"I have sinned against heaven, and before thee"—but the desire to be made a hired servant is explained clearly in the text: he is hungry; his father's hired servants are not; given the option, he would rather be the latter than the former. That his sin has brought him here is now plain to him. But this explanation cannot satisfy Keller who must cast even the Prodigal, not as a repentant sinner completely emptied of himself, *but as a legalist attempting to establish his own works as a basis for justification*. Keller so expounds:

The son intends to say, "Father, I know I don't have a right to come back into the family. But if you apprentice me to one of your hired men so I can learn a trade and earn a wage, then at least I

<sup>33</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 123, emphasis in original.

<sup>34</sup> Keller, "Preaching In a Post-Modern City."

could begin to pay off my debt.” That was his plan.<sup>35</sup>

Yet there is not a hint of such a plan in the text. It is un-careful and unhelpful to begin an exposition of the text by informing the reader that the Prodigal *intended* to say something that he did not. The text is sufficiently clear on its own. Yet in his preaching, as in his writing, Keller confirms this interpretation, explaining that only by reading carefully do we discover the Prodigal’s true intent:

If you read carefully, you’ll see the son knows that the only way that he can get back into a relationship with the father is if he deals with this dual debt.... First of all he says, “Make me like one of your hired men.” He wants to pay back the financial debt. He doesn’t want the father to assume the debt, he says “I’m going to pay it back.”... He’s trying to pay it back.<sup>36</sup>

This is pure conjecture. The purpose of the three parables of *Luke 15* (the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son), was to show that Jesus preached to sinners because “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (*Luke 15:7*), and “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (*Luke 15:10*). It is His delight to run after them. This is why the Father in *Luke 15* ran out to greet his son and celebrated his return—rejoicing over a sinner who repented. The younger brother in the Parable is a model of true repentance, signifying the authentic repentance of the harlots and tax collectors (*Matthew 21:28-32*) with whom Jesus associated. Jesus placed this illustration before the Scribes and Pharisees, perchance that they might emulate it. That an expositor could read works righteousness into the Prodigal’s return is initially a surprise, but only until Keller’s novel hermeneutic is understood. Given his myopia, it is no surprise at all to find that Keller sees the younger brother as just another legalist. When all you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. Under that constraint, even the repentant Prodigal is said to be a legalist.

Remarkably, Keller continues his exposition by explaining that Jesus intentionally left someone out of the Parable, and that Keller knows whom He left out, and why He left him out:

Jesus deliberately left someone out of the Parable. He did this so that we would look for him and, finding him, find our way home at last....

[When] we hear about the plight of the lost son, we are fully prepared to expect that someone will set out to search for him. No one does. It is startling, and Jesus meant it to be so.<sup>37</sup>

Keller ultimately concludes that Jesus left Himself, our true Elder Brother, out of the Parable that we might seek Him.<sup>38</sup> This is troubling for two reasons. First, Jesus *did not leave Himself out at all*. He spoke the parables to the Pharisees when they questioned why He associated with the unwashed (*Luke 15:2*). The three parables show Jesus as three different characters in three different situations, *playing the same role*, seeking and saving that which was lost: the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the Woman seeking the lost coin, and the Father, running out to the lost son. In all three cases, there was rejoicing because what was lost was found, and it is Jesus in all three parables doing the finding and rejoicing.

Second, and more troubling, is that when expositors think to know what Jesus meant by what He left out—and then provide it for the hearer—they run the danger of simply reinforcing what they already believed by inserting their own thinking into the Scripture, and then preaching it as such. Roman Catholics and Orthodox, by way of example, have been known to teach that Jesus may have left the mother out of the story that we might seek her—whether she be Mother Mary or Mother Church<sup>39</sup> depends on the predisposition of the expositor. It certainly is not found in the text, yet how can we object to these, and not to Keller as well? Such are the dangers of his hermeneutic.

Just as Tchividjian did, Keller also presses Luther into service to advance the movement. Keller, like Tchividjian, believes that the means of sanctification is essentially by hearing about our justification:

I believe the classical Reformed view—that on the one hand, sanctification is not by “works” but by a continuous re-orienting ourselves to our justification.... When we feed on, remember, and live in accordance with our justification, it mortifies our idols and fills us with an inner joy and desire to please and resemble our Lord through obedience.<sup>40</sup>

Now we are only too happy to affirm that sanctification is not by works, and further, not even by

<sup>37</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 71, 80-81.

<sup>38</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 84.

<sup>39</sup> See “The Prodigal’s Mother,” <http://www.antiochian.org/prodigals-mom> and “Mama Mary,” <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/219330/mama-mary-svd-birthday>.

<sup>40</sup> Monergism, “Interview with Tim Keller,” March 2008. <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/kellerinterview.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Tim Keller, from his sermon on the Prodigal’s return, *Luke 15:11-24: “And Kissed Him,” 8:26-9:30*; retrieved January 21, 2012 from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/>.



works done in faith. Rather, we affirm with Jesus that sanctification is by the truth (*John 17:17*), and that works are the fruit of the Word in the life of a believer by the power of the indwelling Spirit. We are even willing to acknowledge that *part* of our sanctification is by learning what the Word says about our justification, which informs us of our right standing with God, even as we struggle in sin. Where Keller goes wrong, however, is that he essentially teaches that *all* sanctification is by hearing about justification, and would have Luther support him in this. Consider, for example, “The Centrality of the Gospel,” Keller’s widely circulated paper on the meaning of *Galatians 2:14* from 2000:

In *Galatians 2:14*, Paul lays down a powerful principle. He deals with Peter’s racial pride and cowardice by declaring that he was not living “in line with the truth of the gospel.” From this we see that the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life—spiritual, psychological, corporate, social—by thinking, hoping, and living out the “lines” or ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving. The implications and applications of *Galatians 2:14* are vast.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the implications of *Galatians 2:14* are vast—so vast that hearing about justification is said by Keller to be the implied means of sanctification. To bolster this position, he concludes his study of *Galatians 2:14* by invoking Martin Luther’s exposition of *Galatians 2:14* to make the point—namely that the main problem with our progress in sanctification is that we have not sufficiently heard about justification:

The main problem in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel. We fail to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther said, “The truth of the Gospel is the principal article of all Christian doctrine.... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually” (Luther on *Galatians 2:14f*).... So the key to continual, deeper spiritual renewal is *continual rediscovery of the gospel*.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, it appears, Luther supports Keller, and Keller uses the full weight of Luther’s exposition of *Galatians 2:14* to conclude that “all deadness, divisiveness, fear, pride, [and] spiritual stagnation, in the church and in your life” is because justification has

not been thoroughly beaten into the heads of believers.<sup>43</sup>

We agree, of course, that learning more about justification was *part* of Peter’s sanctification in *Galatians 2:14*. We cannot agree, however, that “*all* deadness, divisiveness, fear, pride, [and] spiritual stagnation” can be so diagnosed. But that is not the only problem with Keller’s use of Luther here. The larger problem is that *Luther did not say this about Galatians 2:14*. Keller does not appear to realize that he is quoting Luther’s exposition of *Galatians 2:4-5* about the false brethren, and not Luther’s exposition of *Galatians 2:14* about Peter. What we find when we visit Luther on *Galatians 2:4* is that “beating it in” was not what Luther prescribed for sanctification at all, but what Luther prescribed as a defense against the false brethren who were harassing the church on every side *on the doctrine of justification*. In this section of his commentary, Luther rails against the pope, Papists, popish schoolmen, Anabaptists, heretics, false apostles, and “our adversaries” who “say, that we must believe in Christ, and that faith is the foundation of our salvation: but it justifieth not, except it be furnished with charity.”<sup>44</sup> And then he concludes with this exhortation for the church to be equipped to “cry against” the error, for the doctrine of justification is so tender, and so easily wounded:

Wherefore, like as our adversaries will not leave this free unto us, that only faith in Christ justifieth; so on the other side, neither will we nor can we give place unto them, that faith furnished with charity justifieth. Here we will, and we ought also to be rebellious and obstinate against them, for else we should lose the truth of the gospel.... But because we cannot obtain this at their hands, we again for our part will not yield unto them one hair’s breadth...he suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The gospel willeth me to receive this, and to believe it. And this is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. *Most necessary is it, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually. For as it is very tender, so it is soon hurt.* This Paul had well tried, and of this have all the godly also good experience...moreover, to add that life and salvation, or death and damnation, consisteth in the observation of [the pope’s traditions], is a devilish superstition, and full

<sup>41</sup> Tim Keller, “The Centrality of The Gospel,” [2000], 2009 *Redeemer City to City*, 1, <http://redeemercitytocity.com/resources.jsp>.

<sup>42</sup> Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel,” 8, parentheses and emphasis in original.

<sup>43</sup> Keller, “How the Gospel Changes Us,” [sermon] 1:48-3:30; retrieved January 23, 2012, <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/>.

<sup>44</sup> Luther, Martin, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, (London: William Clowes, [1575] 1830), 72.

of blasphemy. *Whoso will not cry against this, accursed be he.*<sup>45</sup>

Here again, we have a prominent teacher invoking a giant of the faith on justification, extracting him from his original context, and then applying his words to a new view on sanctification. That this is no small issue is evidenced by how widely the misattribution has spread. It is a tribute to Keller's great influence that studies on *Galatians*, sermons, church planting proposals, ministry resources, training materials and blogs cite and recite Keller on Luther on *Galatians* 2:14f, without checking to see if what he has said is correct. By way of example, we note that Tchividjian repeats Keller's error uncorrected at the Gospel Coalition blog:

Keller writes: "Luther says, 'The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine.... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.'" (on Gal.2:14f).<sup>46</sup>

Then another blogger posts Tchividjian on Keller, uncorrected, a week later:

To emphasize the point, Tchividjian quotes some of Tim Keller's comments... "Luther says, 'The truth of the Gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine.... Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually' (on Gal.2:14f)."<sup>47</sup>

We could argue, we believe correctly, that each man should be double-checking the references to see if they are true before passing them on, but above even this, we believe that Keller has truly missed Luther's thoughts on sanctification in *Galatians* 2:14. Luther had a much more balanced view *as indicated by his actual comments on this verse*, where he reasons earnestly in a manner incompatible with Keller's misattribution. Luther states not that justification needed to be beaten in, but rather, that a balanced and an appropriate distinction between Law and Gospel is what Christians must have, lest they conclude that all they need for sanctification is more Gospel:

Wherefore, if the question be concerning the matter of faith or conscience, let us utterly exclude the law, and leave it on earth; but, if we have to do with works, then let us lighten the lantern of works and of the righteousness of the law. So let the sun and the inestimable light of the Gospel and grace shine in the day, and the lantern of the law in the night.... This place, touching the difference between law and Gospel, is very necessary to be known, for it containeth the sum of all Christian doctrine. Wherefore let all that love and fear God, diligently learn to discern the one from the other.... Wherefore, when thy conscience is terrified with sin...[l]et the law now depart, and let the Gospel come...[b]ut...when external duties must be done, *there is no time to hearken to the Gospel*; then thou must follow thy vocation, and the works thereof.<sup>48</sup>

Note that Luther explicitly denies what Keller had him affirming. Keller had Luther affirming the need for more Gospel in this verse, but we find instead that Luther called for better instruction in both Law and Gospel for sanctification. Indeed we share Luther's concern that some preachers, in their unbalanced hermeneutic, "do not explain the law and the promises of God to such an end, and in such a spirit, that men may learn whence repentance and grace are to come":

For not one word of God only, but both, should be preached; new and old things should be brought out of the treasury, as well the voice of the law as the word of grace. The voice of the law should be brought forward, that men may be terrified and brought to a knowledge of their sins, and thence be converted to penitence *and to a better manner of life*. But we must not stop here; that would be to wound only and not to bind up, to strike and not to heal, to kill and not to make alive, to bring down to hell and not to bring back, to humble and not to exalt. Therefore the word of grace and of the promised remission of sin must also be preached, in order to teach and set up faith, since without that word contrition, penitence, *and all other duties*, are performed and taught in vain. There still remain, it is true, preachers of repentance and grace, but they do not explain the law and the promises of God to such an end, and in such a spirit, that men may learn whence repentance and grace are to come. For repentance comes from the law of God, but faith or grace from the promises of God, as it is said,

<sup>45</sup> Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 74-76, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> Tchividjian, Tullian, "The Ongoing Need for the Gospel," July 17, 2010, retrieved January 29, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2010/07/17/the-ongoing-need-for-the-gospel-2/>, parentheses in original.

<sup>47</sup> Pohlman, Mike, "The Ongoing Need for the Gospel," July 26, 2010, retrieved January 29, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2010/07/26/the-ongoing-need-for-the-gospel/>, parentheses in original.

<sup>48</sup> Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 96-98, emphasis added.

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. x. 17).<sup>49</sup>

To Luther, that “word of God” that sanctifies us must include both Law and Gospel—not Gospel only, and not “grace, grace, grace” only. Thus does Keller join Brown and Tchividjian in extracting a quote from its original context, pressing it into service for a new view on sanctification in a manner that the author explicitly rejected, and missing the original intent in the process.

## Conclusion

As we have surmised above, it appears that the specter of legalism is the primary focus of the Grace Movement, and its proponents attempt to exorcise it from the Body of Christ continually, relentlessly. It is both unfortunate and ironic that proponents of the Grace Movement tend to attribute generally to the Bride of Christ the particular offense of the Galatians—namely, that she has attempted to complete in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit (*Galatians* 3:3). It is unfortunate because it is irresponsible to do so, as each congregation within the Bride has its own particular sins to deal with, and legalism is just one of many from which to choose. Not all congregations face this same sin, as evidenced by the licentiousness of the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians* 5:1-2), or the divisions among the Philippians (*Philippians* 4:2-3). Likewise, the particular sins or weaknesses of the churches in Asia Minor were addressed particularly by Jesus (*Revelation* 1:11 – 3:22). To presume that every congregation within Christendom is rife with demons of legalism and must be exorcised of them is an approach unbecoming of teachers and shepherds in the Church.

But it is ironic, too, because sanctification is by the Word—Law, Prophets, Gospel, and all—and not just by the Gospel, or even just by the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Spirit moves within the believer to remind him of the Word (*John* 14:26), strengthening him to obedience (*Ezekiel* 36:27). And it is *all of Scripture* by which a man is “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (*2 Timothy* 3:17), not just one part or one doctrine. But Keller, Brown, and Tchividjian do not appear to be satisfied with what the Spirit can do with the Word, and by all appearances seem intent on adding more than what Jesus said (as in Keller with the Prodigal Son), or teaching less than what the Word contains (as in Brown who rests on “free” but cannot rest on “slave”; or Tchividjian who cannot entertain that salvation “worked out” (*Philippians* 2:12-16) might actually be *our obedience* (12), and something *we do* (14-15), having been

sanctified by the Word (16). Instead, these men would sanctify God’s people by their own message, precisely tailored for a church of their imagination, where every member is a legalist, and every intentional good work is an act of self-righteousness. Or more succinctly, these men would attempt to complete in the flesh that sanctification which was begun in the Spirit.

That these are not isolated occurrences of tailoring, but rather are a matter of practice, is evidenced by Keller’s own approach to sanctification. In the RTS Seminar Series, *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World*, Keller preached on the topic of sanctification using his preferred redemptive-historical hermeneutical method. He urged his listeners to preach Christ from every passage of Scripture, yet acknowledged that he would struggle to fit some of the Scriptures into this approach. Unable to make the Scriptures conform, he advised that, if one can do it discreetly, the preacher should just leave it out:

If you’re preaching the book of Esther, Esther ends on the note that Israel gets rest from its enemies by slaying them all.... The book of Esther ends that they get the legal right to turn on all the people who were trying to kill them and just slaughter them and take their money. That’s another problem with preaching from...Esther.... So if you’re really going to preach... Esther, you know what I’d do, in New York, I’d just never bring that out. I mean, people don’t come to church with their Bibles. They study the passage I print out in the text. So I’m just not going to bring that up. Is that dishonest? No. I mean I can’t say everything all the time. But if you have the kind of people who actually bring their Bibles, you’re going to have to deal with every single part of the book of Esther.<sup>50</sup>

Keller continued by explaining that, yes, there actually are ways to preach the conclusion of Esther using the redemptive-historical method if you have to—he just prefers not to do it. To be clear, we do not begrudge Keller the prerogative to select the passage to be expounded, or to print excerpts in the church bulletin. Nor do we assert that a preacher must preach the entire text in every sermon, or in every series. Nor do we withhold from the teacher the discretion to apply graphic texts of Scripture in a manner appropriate for the delicate and tender ears of the hearers. Our objection is rather singular: we object that Keller appears to think that he can accomplish the sanctification of God’s people by

<sup>49</sup> Martin Luther, *Primary Works: Concerning Christian Liberty*, retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1911>, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund Clowney and Tim Keller, *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World*, Reformed Theological Seminary, September 2008, Session 9: Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth Part Two, 1:01:15-1:03:02, (iTunes U).

withholding the Word from them. This is sanctification by the flesh.

Let it be noted here that Brown, Tchividjian, and Keller have on a great many occasions preached the Word well, and cited godly men accurately and in context. It is not the intent of this writer to suggest otherwise. Nor is it alleged that Marshall, Pink, and Luther are infallible expositors of the Word of God—they themselves would have denied the allegation emphatically. The purpose for this article is simply to serve as a *caveat lector* (“let the reader beware”) and a *caveat auditor* (“let the hearer beware”) for those who are concerned about the Grace Movement. As faithful Bereans, the sheep should be double-checking the source material of all teachers before ingesting it fully. Would that the teachers themselves would do the same!

That said, this besetting sin does seem to this writer to be an offense that manifests itself most egregiously with the proponents of the Grace Movement. It appears that there is currently very little hindrance to the propensity for glossing over the original meaning or context of any text, Biblical or otherwise, in order to advance the cause. As shown above, on many occasions an isolated statement is simply taken as supporting evidence of their position. The result is confusion—among the young, because as new believers they earnestly—and correctly—desire to obey the law and yet are cautioned that such desire is legalism and should be abandoned; among the old, because they have believed for many years with John

that evidence of their rebirth may be seen in their history of obedience (1 John 3:14; 5:2), and they are now told that this, too, is legalism. Such confusion should not overcome the church, and suggests that the proponents of the so-called “Grace” Movement have emerged from their studies too soon, and are not yet ready to propose a consistent or coherent Biblical message on sanctification to their readers and listeners. They need to spend a little more time examining their hermeneutical method, *and a lot more time on their source materials*, (and perhaps less time blogging, tweeting and publishing) before unveiling this new formulation to the Bride of Christ. Their current unscholarly approach is a recipe for disaster, their lack of academic rigor heralding a period of doctrinal confusion that is sure to follow. The Church will have to address this soon, as it did with the New Perspective controversy, and we pray that the Lord hastens that day.

In the meantime, perhaps Bryan Chapell can alleviate the concerns of the sheep by standing with authority to say,

These men avoid outright denials of Reformation theology, but introduce unanswered questions (particularly since they seem willing to define lawlessness as legalism) that are inappropriate for men as theologically skilled and influential as they.

That would be a great start.