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An Exegetical Discussion of Mark 2:1–12: Lessons for Forgiveness and Healing in Contemporary Christianity in Ghana[1]

Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh

Abstract

This essay discusses the relationship between forgiveness and healing in the context of Mark 2:1–12, and draws lessons for contemporary healing ministry in Ghana. Mark 2:1–12 has been interpreted by some scholars and Christian leaders to mean that they have authority to forgive sins, leading to healing. This view has been widely accepted by some contemporary prophets in Ghana. The phenomenon can hardly be in consonance with the stipulations in the gospels concerning healing. Hence, it has the potential of giving false hope to Christians and distorting the meaning of Scripture. Narrational analysis is engaged for the exegetical work, to attempt a re-interpretation of the text.

Keywords

Confession; Disease; Sickness; Forgiveness; Healing; Health; Mark 2:1-12; Sin; Prophets

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1 This paper is a revised PhD academic paper presented at a PhD colloquium at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon 2016, titled: Healing in the Gospel of Mark: Exegetical Discussion of Mark 2:1-11 in the African Religio-Cultural Context.

2 The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction: The Gospel of Mark and Healing

The gospel of Mark dedicates some substantial attention to the healing miracles of Jesus. One can literally identify a healing or miracle pericope in each chapter from chapters one to ten. According to L. Williamson Jr (2009:20–21), Mark gave considerable attention to healing, casting out of demons (exorcism), and miracles, more than the other canonical gospels. Of a total of 678 verses of Mark, 198 were dedicated to miracle stories, in which a greater portion concern healing. The healings took place mainly during the Galilean ministry recorded in chapters 1–8. Although Jesus' healings may have been referred to as myth, folklore, and legendary by Bultmann and Dibelius, and equated to Hellenistic and Greco-Roman magicians of his day, there is no doubt, Jesus' healings were distinct from his contemporaries, in that the healing sought to address humans' oppressive state and liberate them from the captivity of sickness (Eck and Aarde 1993:29), without claiming any glory for himself.

In addition, the miracles of Jesus differ remarkedly from legendary miracle-workers' stories. William R. Eichhorst (1968:19) argues that the healings of Jesus were not psychosomatic or 'feats of superior knowledge'. He asserts that, although physical ailment may often have psychosomatic consequences, the healings of Jesus were not psychosomatic healings. He supported his argument that (i) the miracles of Jesus were performed in public and were subjected to public scrutiny; (ii) the miracles were performed in the presence of unbelievers; (iii) Jesus' miracles were performed over a period; and (iv) the beneficiaries of Jesus' miracles went to testify to others. It indicates that the healings and exorcisms of Jesus were not hero-creating narratives, narratives designed to project a public speaker as possessing a divine power and performing miracles, which when critically investigated, show the result that no miracle took place, or that the miracle incident reported had been exaggerated.

2. Historical Context of Mark

In order to understand the pericope under review, it is significant to understand the *sitz im leben* of Mark, particularly 2:1–12. Many scholars support the assertion that the gospel was written to Roman Christians during times of persecution. Others suggest Syria, the Decapolis, Transjordan, and Galilee (Brown 2007:127). According to Eusebius (1962:64–65),

The divine word having thus been established among the Romans, the power of Simon [Peter] was soon extinguished and destroyed together

with the man. So greatly, however, did the splendor of piety enlighten the minds of Peter's hearers, that it was not sufficient to hear but once, nor to receive the unwritten doctrine of the gospel of God, but they persevered in every variety of entreaties, to solicit Mark as the companion of Peter, and whose gospel we have, that he should leave them a monument of the doctrine thus orally communicated, in writing. Nor did they cease their solicitations until they had prevailed with the man, and thus become the means of that history which is called the gospel according to Mark.

It shows that Mark, who was an interpreter of apostle Peter, was being urged by the audience of Peter in Rome to write the gospel for them in order to consolidate their faith. Hence, the gospel was written to Christians in the Roman Empire. It is not clear whether the gospel of Mark was written to the same congregation to whom Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans.

However, church tradition indicates that 'the Roman Church was "founded" by the two chief Apostles [Peter and Paul]' (Kidd 1936:18). This historical postulation has been challenged, to say that Christianity was established in Rome by Jews who might have been present at the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) (Edwards, Reasoner, and Porter 2000:1010–1018). Thus, prior to the edict of Claudius in 49 CE, Christianity was vibrant in Rome, and caused intense debate among Jews in the Empire (Bruce 1972:291-299). Although it is not clear who specifically started the Church in Rome (Caird 1955:91; Bruce 1972:291–299; Jewett 2007:19–20), it is probable that the two chief apostles addressed different church congregations within the Roman Empire. This assertion is supported by early church history that both Peter and Paul were seen founding churches in Rome (Gwatkin 1911:89). D. J. Harrington (2007:596) and Robert H. Stein (2003:68) support the Rome *sitz im leben* due to the persecutions that are evidenced in the language of Mark; hence it was written for Roman Christians during the reign of Emperor Nero in 60 CE. The Roman *sitz im leben* is again emphasized by the use of Latin words: '*legion* (5:9, 15); *denarius* (12:15); *praetorium* (15:16); *centurion* (15:39)' and the translation of Aramaic words: '*Boanerges* (3:17); *talitha cum* (5:41; 14:36); *corban* (7:11); *ephphatha* (7:34); *Bartimaeus* (10:46); *Abba* (14:36); *Golgotha* (15:22); and *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (15:34)' (Powell 2009:129). To sum up, the assertion of Roman *sitz im leben* has support from history and some semantics in the account of the gospel.

On the contrary, J. Marcus (1992:441–462) argues against the view of the early church tradition and the majority view that the gospel was written for Roman Christians. He holds that Mark

hailed from Jerusalem and that the name 'Mark' was a common name in the Roman Empire. There is no evidence to show that Mark, as mentioned in the statement of Papias, could not be John Mark; and that the Latin words in the gospel could only be attributed to a Roman 'Mark' who was familiar with Roman military terms, because the Latin words relate to military technical duties and law. He further postulates that 'Syrophoenician' (7:26) denotes a descent of a Phoenician, and the discourse in chapters 8, 11 and 13 reflect a period of the Jewish war leading to the revolt against the Romans between 66 and 74 CE. Hence the *sitz im leben* of Mark is Syria. Although Marcus' contention may have some limited evidence in the account of the gospel of Mark, it, however, lacked historical support. In addition, the Jewish war was known in the inhabited world; therefore, any allusion to it does not necessarily mean that non-Roman audiences were being addressed. In view of the overwhelming evidence for the Roman *sitz im leben*, this study adapts a Greek-speaking Roman audience, whose Christianity was predominantly Jewish. Nonetheless, it is important to state that 'the NT writers understood their intended audience not so much as individual readers but as a corporate audience of hearers' (Stein 2003:71). This suggests that even though the gospel might have been written for a Roman audience, it was not limited to them.

3. Literary Context of Mark 2:1-12

The pericope under discussion is a 'Q' document and therefore a synoptic material, which can also be found in Matthew 9:1–8 and Luke 5:17–26 with varied emphasis, similarities, and differences. W. G. Kümmel (1975:82–83) divides the gospel of Mark into five literary parts. The first part, to which the pericope for discussion belongs, begins from Mark 1:14–5:53 and is titled Jesus in Galilee or ministry in Galilee. In this part, the author of the gospel indicates the beginning and ending of a unit or subunit either by 'time (in a day), or by subject matter (controversies), or by form (parables)' (Brown 2007:128). The pericope fits into the subject matter of controversies (2:1–3:6). This can be chiastically expressed thus:

A 2:1–12 healing (the paralytic person)

B 2:13–17 dinner (in the house of Levi)

C 2:18–22 discourse about fasting and religious ascetism

B 2:23–28 dinner (heads of grain corn)

A 3:1–6 healing (the withered hand)

Mark 2:1–12 is a co-text to the cleansing of a leper (1:40–45) and the call of Levi (2:13–17). It is the first of five conflicts in a row. The uniqueness of the first conflict is that it combines healing and controversy concerning the authority of Jesus to forgive sin (Harrington 2007:601). S. H. Travis (1977:156) and F. B. Craddock (1981:43–44) aver that miracle stories take the form/pattern of, (i) the description of the illness; (ii) a statement of appeal to Jesus and his response; and (iii) the result of the miracle: (a) effect on the onlookers (b) the reaction of the healed person. It is obvious that the story in the pericope is the amalgamation of miracle story and pronouncement story. However, the miracle story will be given priority in this study.

4. Some Scholarly Interpretations of Mark 2:1-12

Before we embark on the exegetical task, it is imperative to discuss the views of scholars on the pericope. There are two views concerning the interpretation of the pericope: (i) the authority of Jesus to forgive sin and heal: Williamson Jr (2009:65–66) examined the pericope from the viewpoint of the relationship between forgiveness and physical wholeness or healing. He holds that the heart of the text is God's forgiveness and the authority of Jesus. One can be forgiven without being healed, and one can be healed without being forgiven. It is God's intervention in human predicament through Jesus Christ, who has power to forgive and heal. Similarly, F. B. Craddock posits that forgiveness is very important in the life of humans, because it leaves them off the hook of punishment and fosters reconciliation. He was quick to add that the word of forgiveness of sin did not heal the paralytic person, but the word of healing did (Craddock 1982:46). (ii) The enigma of 'son of man' as an awkward Christological designation: D. H. Juel (1990:48–49) excursively offers that the use of 'son of man' as put on the lips of Jesus is very problematic. It is an attempt to translate an Aramaic concept into Greek. Jesus' reference to himself as the 'son of man' is enigmatic. B. B. Thurston (2002:29) offers that (a) the 'son of man' was used as a circumlocution for 'I' by Jesus; (b) reference to human being; and (c) Messianic concept link to Daniel 7:13–14. F. F. Bruce (cited in Thurston 2002:29) concurs that the use of 'son of man' is Jesus' own way of referring to himself and his ministry. The views of scholars who have traced a relationship between forgiveness and healing are persuasive; however, they did not consider sin as a probable cause of sickness, as could be deduced from Jesus' procedure of healing. Obviously, the parallel nature of the text to African Traditional Religion (ATR) and contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana was also not discussed. This paper seeks to

contribute to the debate on forgiveness and healing as discussed by some scholars above, and move on to comparatively analyse it in the context of contemporary prophetic Christianity in Ghana.

5. Exegetical Outline

The pericope under discussion is outlined as follows

- Exordium verses 1–2;
- Description of illness verses 3-4;
- Jesus' response verse 5;
- The reaction of the Scribes verses 6–11; and
- Effect of the healing on the sick person and onlookers verse 12.

Exordium, verses 1-2

The exordium indicates the setting of the incident—Capernaum. Capernaum is the compound of the Aramaic *Kepar* and Nahum meaning the 'village of Nahum'. Notwithstanding, there is no evidence showing a relationship between Capernaum and the prophet Nahum. Matthew and Luke did not mention the name of the place where the incident took place; however, Luke later mentioned that Jesus was near Capernaum (Luke 7:1); it is an attempt to widen the scope of Jesus' audience, suggesting that Jesus was ministering to a varied range of people. Capernaum is located at the northwest of the 'Sea of Galilee' and is the modern-day Tell Hum (Lawrence 1977:306), a corrupted form of a famous Jewish rabbi called Tankhum. It is a fishing community, where it is traditionally believed that Peter's house was located (1:29–34) (Harrington 2007:601).

Πάλιν (again) and οικος (home, house) suggest that Jesus was using the house of Peter as a base to reach the whole of Galilee. The narrator used οικος at the opening and closing of the pericope (verses 1 and 11) to show the literary cohesion of the narrative, and also create a social location for any reader to follow towards understanding/interpreting the passage. Further, it also indicates progression in the narrative, beginning from Jesus going home or into a house, and restoring a paralysed person who might be rejected, to the care of friends back home. During the time of Jesus' ministry, the population of Capernaum was about 10,000 adult inhabitants (Coleman 1984:200–202). The narrative suggests that Jesus' ministry attracted many persons, such that the house was full. That the house was full of people to listen to him signifies

the importance that Jesus had assumed. This resonates with how famous philosophers and miracle workers during the period were sought after. For example, Simon Magus and Elymas were sought due to their ability to perform miracles (Richardson 1969:21). In that regard, miracles served during the period of Jesus as a curtain raiser, or a bait to attract the attention of people, in order to present one's philosophy or teaching

Houses vary in size and design based on the economic status and social worldview of house owners. In first-century Palestine, the average home was a one-room dwelling house measuring about 3 metres square, with minimal architectural decoration (Coleman 1984:12). Many homes had a courtyard where activities of the family took place. Courtyards were usually 'tiled and decorated with shrubs, flowers or even trees, and possibly a cistern to catch rain water' (Coleman 1984:18). The courtyard was slightly bigger than the room. In the scenario of the text, both the room and the courtyard were occupied by the audience. Using the example of the house churches in Corinth of between 40 and 50 persons (Gill 1993:323–337; Jongkind 2001:139–148), we can speculate that an average of more than 70 people were listening to Jesus in the house at Capernaum.

It is not very clear in the text how the audience of the gospel of Mark, being Roman Christians, would understand the presentation of something that took place in a Jewish setting. Probably, the narrator was attempting to re-contextualise a Jewish thought in a Roman worldview. The Romans had more elaborate homes than the Jews. They dedicated a room in the home for religious purposes. Sacrifices were offered to protective gods and spirits such as Genius and Penates (Pearson 2000:208–302). This reflects the household gods *teraphim* of Laban during the Patriarchal period (Gen. 31:19) (Ntreh 2006:8). During the Patriarchal era, many Hebrew homes had an altar to offer sacrifices where the husband and father was the priest of the family, until the institution of the priesthood by Moses, when their duties were transferred to the tribe of Levi (Wight 1969:118–120). Hence, socio-religio-theologically, the gathering of the people in the house of Peter to listen to Jesus may have been understood by the initial audience (Jews) as the religion of the Patriarchs to offer sacrifices unto Yahweh for favour, and the secondary audience (Romans) may have understood it as the worship of household gods and spirits for protection. The engagement of the worldviews of the audience by the narrator to communicate the activities of Jesus was to invite the key interest(s) of the readers/audience to the story, which may have involved cultural adaptations.

Description of Illness, verses 3-4

Four friends carried a paralytic to a publicised meeting of Jesus in the house of Peter. Probably they were late, so the room and the courtyard were filled-up. Παραλυτικός (paralytic) is 'a disease that begins in one's legs and proceeds quickly to the arms and neck, generally being fatal within three weeks' (Verbrusse 2000:437). It is a neurological disease, which was very prevalent in Palestine during the time of Jesus. Often, it was as a result of an accident, tuberculosis, polio and spine defects (Crown 2008:459–464). D. N. Peterson (2006:261–272) argues that the use of παραλυτικός is ambiguous, because it does not indicate its etiology. He explains that the term refers to any form of disability, which could be paraplegia or quadriplegia, therefore παραλυτικός should be understood as being crippled. Παραλυτικός during the era of Jesus began as paraplegia—paralysis of the lower half of the human body, and graduated into quadriplegia—paralysis of both arms and both legs. It alludes to a less emphatic παραλύω used by the author of the Lukan version (see 5:17–26). Being carried by four friends clearly shows that the illness was beyond three weeks, and the narrator wanted to aesthetically present how fatal and grievous the situation had become, and which demanded divine intervention.

Wight (1969:22–24) and Coleman (1984:12–14) posit that many homes had a staircase in front of the room, in the courtyard, that gave access to the rooftop. The roof was usually flat, made of clay and straw or stones bonded with mud. Usually, there were parapet walls at the ends with spouts, to prevent people from falling off the roof, and to make a way for rainwater to run off the roof. After heavy rain, the surface of the roof was re-dressed in mud or clay to prevent leakage. The rooftop was strong enough to hold a small family dinner, and during summer some family members slept on the rooftop. Generally, Jews like to pray on high-level locations; Peter used a rooftop as a place of prayer (Acts 10:1–23).

There is no evidence in the text to indicate that the owner of the house resisted the friends of the paralytic person pulling down or damaging the roof. Neither did Jesus or his audience stop them from causing an interruption, although it is very likely that the attention of the audience would be attracted to the opening of the roof, and the pieces of dry mud or clay may drop on the audience. According to Thurston (2002:28), the removal of the roof by the four was not an act of vandalism but the expression of faith. Commenting on the Lukan version of the narrative, I. Howard Marshall similarly states that 'the perseverance and ingenuity of the companions of the sick man are seen by Jesus as an indication

of the presence of a faith which believes in his power to such an extent that it is prepared to go to the limit in order to reach him' (Marshall 1978:213). This postulation suggests that other persons' properties could be vandalised in the process of expressing faith. Alternatively, the four friends could express faith by seeking a way through the audience to reach Jesus, which could have been easier than digging through the roof. In addition, if the four were able to get through the audience in the courtyard to the stairway in front of the room, then it would have been easier for them to force their way into the room where Jesus was, rather than to use the narrow staircase to the roof and dig through. However, it is obvious that the intention of the narrator was to praise πίστις (faith) as the highest virtue for his readers to emulate through difficult situations in issues of seeking for divine intervention. Faith is an indispensable *topos* in some miracles in the gospels. The efforts of the four directed towards the healing of the paralytic were said to have been described by Jesus as faith (Robbins 2012:62–63).

Nonetheless, since Jews would generally like to position themselves on serene mountain-tops, rooftops, and other elevated structures to pray (Exod. 19: 9–25; 1 Kgs. 19: 11–18; Matt. 3: 1–4; 4: 1–11; 17: 1–13; Mark. 1: 4–8; 3:13–19; 6: 46; 9: 2–8; Luke 4: 1–13; 6:12–16; 9: 29–38; Acts 10: 9), it can be argued that the four went up onto the roof as a sign of prayer before digging through the roof to let down the paralytic person for Jesus to heal. It is an attempt to draw on the Jewish preferred place for prayer. During the patriarchal period, Jews offered sacrifices on home altars for God's favour. Thus, the incident would have been understood by Jews as the four having carried the paralytic to Jesus for God's favour to spare the life of their friend, whilst the Roman audience would understand the incident as the four having brought the paralytic for protection against the illness becoming fatal, or even death.

Jesus' response, verse 5

In miracle discourses, usually there was an appeal to Jesus for healing, after which he would respond. In this narrative, there was no appeal to Jesus to forgive sin or heal. Probably, the tenacity of the four in digging through the roof and letting down the paralytic person had appealed to Jesus: 'when Jesus saw their faith' verse 5a. This is an enthymeme expression by the author. He attributed to Jesus that he referred to the paralytic as τέκνον. Τέκνον (child) can be used to refer to a relationship between a child and parents, an elderly son, descendants, the relationship between a disciple and a master, or as an address. In this context, it is used as an

address (Braumann 1975:285–287; Verbrusse 2000:558), to show affection (Harrington 2002:602). This is in agreement with the use of οικος in the opening and closing of the pericope, because one experiences unconditional affection in οικος.

Both Matthew and Mark used τέκνον as the opening word of address by Jesus to the paralytic. Conversely, Luke used ἄνθρωπος, a more universal term to advance the all-inclusiveness of his gospel. Jesus' initial remarks for healing: 'your sins are forgiven' is unusual with healing narratives. Usually, the demonstration of faith follows the healing command or words from Jesus. The remark of forgiveness of sins suggests that the paralysis was caused by the paralytic person's or his parents' sin(s). This assertion is substantiated in John 9:2, when the disciples asked Jesus if the blindness of the man was caused by his sins or the sins of his parents. In Jewish tradition, the consequences of sin are either sickness, death, or general misfortune (Verbrusse 2000:38). In the Greco-Roman setting, sickness can be caused by demonic activities (Kotansky 2000:269–273), and sin is 'intellectually oriented' (Günther 1975:577–585). In other words, intellectual deficiency leads to uninformed choices; these can cause sickness, which may culminate in sicknesses or misfortunes. It is obvious that the author was appealing to the Jewish concept of the consequences of sin. Unfortunately, the sin of the paralytic person had not been mentioned, neither did Mark provide a clue to indicate that the man was aware that the illness was caused by sin. It is probable that the author left out the particular sin committed because, technically, Jesus was not a priest to take offerings for ritual forgiveness.

Ἀφίημι (let go, forgive, release) is used to refer to forgiveness by humans on behalf of God, whilst its cognates ἄφεσις and πάρεσις refer to forgiveness directly by God (Bultmann 1965:509–512), through sacrifices or any laid-down rules or requirements for forgiveness and cleansing. Ἀφίημι in classical Greek and the New Testament 'denotes the voluntary release of a person or thing over which one has legal or actual control' (Verbrusse 2000:80–81). This gives justification for the author's statement attributed to Jesus that he has ἐξουσία (authority) to forgive sin. Ἀφίημι is used in a religious sense of forgiveness. In a Jewish religious milieu, there is a link between sin and sickness, and forgiveness and healing (Deut. 28:27; 2 Sam. 12:13; Pss 41:4; 107:17–18; 103:3; Isa. 38:17; 57:18–19; Jas. 5:15).

The paralytic person's sins would have had to be forgiven in the Temple after elaborate sacrifice (Lev. 9:2ff) led by a priest. Be that as it may, the author was presenting Jesus to his audience as a

priest who forgives sin leading to recovery/healing without cultic ritual. Theologically, Jesus' forgiveness in a house and without cultic rituals suggests that he was inaugurating a new era or covenant, which was misconstrued by the Scribes as lawlessness and blasphemy. The forgiveness of sins believed to have been caused by illness reflects Old Testament stipulations and Jewish tradition. According to the Talmud, sickness caused by sin must be forgiven to the letter before a person could be healed (*Nedarim* 41a) (cited in Thurston 2002:28). This justifies the reason why the paralytic person would have to be first forgiven before healing. Mark was appealing to the Talmud for support for Jesus' remarks.

H. Vorländer (1975:697–703) states that forgiveness is composed of 'making of no account the sin which has been committed … and the acceptance of the sinner … deliverance from the dominion of the powers [of evil] and transference to the kingdom of Christ, to whom a new life is given and with it the promise of eternal life'. The view of Vorländer combines Jewish understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and healing, and the Greco-Roman concept of demonic causality of sickness. Thus, both the Jewish and Greco-Roman audience may have understood Jesus as initiating a system to help the paralytic person recover from the illness. However, one may argue that since a particular sin was not mentioned, Jesus was referring to the digging through the roof by the 'four' friends as sin, because it was usually thieves who dig through roofs to steal (Matt. 6:19; 24:43 ARV margin). Although the breaking of the roof was undertaken by the four for the benefit of the paralysed man, the argument of Vorländer can hardly be sustained, because the forgiveness of sins was directed at the paralytic not the 'four' friends, who essentially broke the roof.

The Reaction of the Scribes, verses 6-11

Jesus' statement of forgiveness triggered a reaction from the scribes in the audience. Scribes were trained as the primary interpreters of the law. They knew that it was only God who could absolutely forgive sins, and the priest was the only mandatory religious officer who performed rituals for forgiveness of sins. Both Mark and Matthew mentioned scribes, only Luke mentioned scribes and Pharisees suggesting that Luke was zeroing in on scribes who were members of the Pharisee sect. It is an attempt to give details. A comparative statement in Mark 1:22 shows that Jesus' teachings have more authority than the scribes. Juel (1992:46–47) argues that the authority of the scribes is derived from the law whilst that of Jesus is from himself. This was considered by the scribes as blasphemy, which could be punished by death, because it was equivalent to taking the place of God. Juel

further postulates that the passive nature of *ἀφίενταί* shows that Jesus was declaring what God had done by forgiving the paralytic person. Therefore, it should be interpreted as 'God forgives your sins.' Hence the remark of the scribes that only God can forgive sins vividly reflects Jesus' declaration of God's forgiveness.

Consequently, Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic based on his special relationship with God, as his representative (see Thurston 2002:29; and Verbrusse 2000:571). In effect, the statement of forgiveness by Jesus to the paralytic is not blasphemous. Jesus rhetorically asked the scribes: what is easier than saying that one's sins are forgiven? This is an indication that Jesus was willing to forgive sins as much as possible and on every occasion. It is significant to note that Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic without cultic requirements or sacrifice, probably because he was not a priest.

Upon the forgiveness remark, Jesus referred to himself as the 'son of man' who has authority to forgive sins. The reference to Jesus as the 'son of man' is an enigmatic Greek expression (Juel 1992:47). The title 'son of man' has generated many speculative comments among scholars. Thurston (2002:29) offers that there are three opinions concerning this issue: (i) Jesus used 'son of man' as a euphemism for himself; (ii) as representing humans in general; and (iii) as a Messianic title reflecting Daniel 7:13–14. He added that the title had no significance for the audience, but Jesus used it to indicate that he had authority to do what he did. Harrington (2007:602) holds that the phrase occurred in 2:28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10: 33, 45; 13:26; 13:21, 41, 62, but each has a unique function. In this context, it denotes Jesus as the representative of God. Bruce (1986:66) complements the views of Harrington when he states that '… "the son of man" was Jesus' way of referring to himself and his mission…'. However, the early church generally understood it to mean the humanity of Jesus (Verbrusse 2000:571). In view of the various assertions concerning 'the son of man' and the affectionate opening word to the paralytic as *τέκνον*, it can be argued that the narrator presented Jesus as the father of all humans, who forgives and heals with the condition of faith, not sacrifices and offerings.

Effect of the Healing on the Sick Person and Onlookers, verse 12

The expression of onlookers is the climax of many miracle stories. At the command of Jesus, the paralytic took his mat and began to walk. This is proof that the paralytic's sin had been forgiven (Thurston 2002:28). All were amazed at the healing of the paralytic. Harrington avers that 'all' includes the scribes, and the

amazement was about both Jesus' authority to forgive sin and the healing event (Harrington 2007:602). However, in view of the opposition of the Scribe to Jesus, *πάντων* (all) was used as illustrative to emphasise the healing event, and show that an appreciable number of persons present were amazed. The glorification of God by the audience suggests that they were religious, and that the healing was the intervention of God in human suffering and illness.

To sum up the analysis of the pericope, the text is a narrative that reports events in order to keep it flowing with embellished scenes. The narrator was presenting Jesus as someone who had more power than the priest to forgive sins and heal the sick. He used the Jewish patriarchal system of domestic worship and praying on mountain-tops and high places, and the Roman domestic worship system to make his argument. The enthymeme attributed to Jesus having knowledge concerning the discussion in the heart of the scribes contributes to the issue of controversies concerning the miracles of Jesus and the Law (Mark 1:40–45; 3:1–6). The intention of the narrator as presented in verse 12 is to draw the readers to God through faith in Jesus, who is God's representative to forgive sins and bring recovery to the ailing in society. It is also significant to mention that the worldview of the audience was not left out in the exercise. Faith rather than religious rituals was used as a praised virtue to be emulated by the readers.

6. Healing Practices by Contemporary Prophetic Ministries in Ghana: The Case of Reverend Obofour

Faith healing or divine healing is emphasised by Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries in Ghana. The Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries organise healing crusades or revival programmes to pray for sick persons to be healed. F. M. Amevenku (2015:98–99) reasons that, due to lack of medical facilities, personnel and a weak National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), religious solutions for healing are highly patronised. Therefore, for the Ghanaian Christian the gospel must address issues of health, then it can be considered as the word of God. Generally, Pentecostals anoint the sick with olive oil, lay hands on them and pray for healing (Ajibade 2008:166; Gifford 1998:166–169) without a diagnosis to ascertain the cause of the sickness. The emergence of prophetism and neo-prophetism has introduced systems of diagnosing sicknesses prior to healing.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2002:43) avers that 'in the context of healing, prophecy helps in diagnosis and for the ailing African, who is familiar with the methods of the traditional diviner,

prophecy is important for establishing the *cause* of one's condition'. Demons, witches, ancestors, one's neighbours, relatives, and sin were mostly blamed as the cause of sicknesses.

Recently, the paradigm has been gradually changing. Reverend Obofour,[3] General Overseer of Anointed Palace Chapel (APC) located at Tabora Star Junction, Accra and owner of Sweet Television on Multi-Television Channel, often diagnoses HIV/AIDS, hypertension, diabetes and other fatal illnesses as a result of sin. Members are asked to confess their sins to him (Rev. Obofour) to forgive them before they can be healed. He does not point them to a particular sin committed, but insists that they confess in the presence of all the members present. These confessions are broadcast on Sweet Television for the general public to view. Forcing vulnerable, sick persons to confess to sin without pointing to the particular sin that caused the sickness is a very frustrating experience, which is evident on the faces of the sick who go to APC for healing. Most often, Reverend Obofour asks the sick person to describe how the sin was committed; those who have committed fornication and adultery describe, in public, how they had sex prior to or in an extramarital relationship. This does not foster reconciliation between the sinner/sick person and the spouse, because some of the spouses get to hear of it for the first time and feel deceived. In the traditional Ghanaian context, it is witches who are being forced to confess their sins publicly as a way of disgracing them and making the public aware of their evil deeds. This is because witches were considered as the cause of many misfortunes and sicknesses in society (Quarcoopome 1987:151).

3 The author tried to find his full name, but many of the members and Church workers reached claimed that they do not know his full name.

7. Comparative Analysis

Analysing sin, sickness, forgiveness, and healing in Mark 2:1–12, ATR, and contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana, I posit that, although seekers/members testify of healing after confession and being forgiven by Reverend Obofour, his approach does not reflect sin, sickness, forgiveness and healing as in Mark 2: 1–12 as he may claim. It is an innovation by contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana that must not be upheld, because it has the potential of publicly disgracing sick persons and blurring the meaning of Scripture. After confession of sins to Reverend Obofour, he often responds 'I forgive you'. Mark 2:1–12 did not suggest that Jesus had given his power to prophets or pastors to forgive sins committed against God, although they may facilitate the forgiveness process for God's intervention. Hence, for a prophet or pastor to act as Jesus, the Messiah, to forgive sins is usurping the

power of Jesus, which is highly deceptive. Meanwhile, Reverend Obofour does not point to a particular sin that caused the sickness. It is left to the victim to speculate.

The text did not show that Jesus mentioned a particular sin that caused the paralysis. Hence, there was no need for confession. Confession should be a personal private activity between God and the sinner. It is not the forgiveness statement of Jesus that triggered the healing of the paralytic, but the faith of his 'four' friends (Robbins 2012:62–63). Therefore, any healing event by a contemporary prophet purportedly based on Mark 2:1–12 but neglects the *topos* of faith is highly questionable.

In ATR, where it has been spiritually diagnosed that a person's illness was caused by a sin, that particular sin is mentioned by the priest for the victim's elaborate confession. Confession, forgiveness, and consequent healing of sick person(s) by Reverend Obofour resonates with some aspects of confession in ATR, where witches confess their wicked deeds against members of the community, which does not lead to healing but to the disgrace of the individual witch. But when the witch is sick and the only means of healing is through confession, then he/she will be healed through ritual means. Mark 2:1–12 did not suggest that the paralysis was as a result of personal sin.

The situation cannot be equated with penance. Penance was even done in private, that is, between the priest and the candidate (Christian) who was not necessarily sick. The aim of penance is to confess sin(s) that a Christian has just committed in order to have a good relationship with God. The goal is not necessarily to be healed of physical sickness. On the contrary, confession at Reverend Obofour's Church is done in public in order to receive healing. The challenge is that sins that do not result in sickness will not be confessed. Hence, the proliferation of nominal Christians in Ghana.

The phenomenon is due to poor biblical interpretation among contemporary prophetic churches in Ghana. Usually, any narrative that seems to have some resemblances with/to African religio-cultural milieu is expounded without recourse to its historical context and the goal of the narrator. This is more often referred to as being biblical. I state that being biblical or Bible-based is not merely choosing a passage to justify what one intends to do: a kind of proof-texting. It is to study the text in its historical context and allow the meaning of the text to determine what to do or not do. The text under study made reference to worldviews, but the intention of the narrator was to transform them to conform to faith in Jesus. The phenomenon raises issues of biblical interpretation

in the African context. There is the need to move from the popular interpretation to a more structured form of interpretation (Ossom-Batsa 2007:92–93) that exposes the historical underpinnings of a text to allow for appropriate contextualisation. I am not arguing that forgiveness does not lead to healing. Forgiveness repairs the relationship between a Christian and God, which may lead to healing. However, the process used must be gospel based.

8. Conclusion

During the time of Jesus in Palestine, religious meetings were usually held in the synagogues and the Temple. Acclaimed rabbis in the communities led teaching services at the synagogues whilst the priests officiated in the Temple. In this incident, Jesus was ministering in a house that was not set apart for religious functions. However, the inserting of a pronouncement story in a typical miracle story suggests that Jesus might have been preaching or teaching about forgiveness. It suggests that forgiveness must not be limited to only cultic rituals in the Temple, conducted by priests but it should be expressed in social and cultural settings. To the Jewish audience, Jesus might have been perceived as restoring the worship of Yahweh during the Patriarchal periods where altars were built in homes for sacrifices to Yahweh for favour. To the Roman audience, Jesus might have been using the system of religion at home where sacrifices were offered to the spirits and gods for protection.

The healing of the paralytic person demonstrates a thaumaturgical approach. It is an approach that deals with 'response [that] focuses on the concern of individual people to receive special dispensations for relief from present and specific ills' (Tate 2012:415). Jesus' procedure is to first forgive the paralytic before healing him. This procedure has some similarities in ATR and some contemporary prophetic procedure of healing. However, the contemporary prophetic procedure of healing has a closer affinity to ATR rather than to Mark 2:1-12. This misinterpretation is due to poor biblical hermeneutics by some contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana. The situation can be resolved by theological education of leaders of contemporary prophetic ministries and the willingness of mainstream theological seminaries/institutions to design programmes that welcome and respond to the theological needs of contemporary prophetic ministries. In addition, contemporary prophetic churches ought to complement the efforts of State institutions and health services/agencies in educating Ghanaians on preventing sicknesses.

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Evangelicals and Social Justice: Towards an Alternative Evangelical Community

Godfrey Harold

Abstract

The God of the Bible is unquestionably a God of justice and compassion. Christians have differences as to how human government and the church should bring about a just social order. Evangelicalism, amongst the many religious voices in South Africa, advocate separation between Church and State. Many Evangelicals understand the social engagement of 'doing justice' as inextricably linked to the loss of sound doctrine, spiritual dynamism, and a watering-down of the Gospel. Therefore, within Evangelicalism, right doctrine takes precedence over right action. This focus created a dysfunctional understanding of the world and how one engages it. De Gruchy (1986:33) protested the church's complicity with the apartheid government. What could have led most Evangelical churches to turn a blind eye to the murder and dehumanisation of the masses in South Africa (emphasis mine)? He concludes that it because of unbiblical privatisation of piety, which separated prayer and the struggle for justice. Evangelicalism had become dangerously individualistic and 'otherworldly' spiritual.

This article is an attempt to call Evangelicals in South not to abandon their prophetic mandate, and a call to creative action for

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an ascetic/privatised spirituality. Therefore, encouraging Evangelicals in South Africa to act against systems that assault or dehumanise the *Imago Dei* in a pluralistic and democratic South Africa, by becoming an alternative community. Using B.S. McNeil's work 'Road Map to Reconciliation', recommendation will be made to help the Evangelicals to become an Alternative community.

1. Introduction

In 1994, South Africa emerged from a State of legislated racial separateness known as Apartheid into a democratic State, when the African National Congress was elected to power by the majority. During the apartheid era, the Evangelical Church adopted this system either explicitly or implicitly by adopting a 'policy of no comment'. While there were personal members who supported political parties, there was no collective voice against the dehumanisation of the masses. What led the Evangelical church to adopt this policy of no comment or non-engagement in the socio-political realities of South Africa?

However, there were some sporadic voices from within the church, namely: Allan Boesak, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naudé, and David Bosch (all from the Reformed Tradition) that opposed this heretical system and called for an alternative community. The alternative community had to confront this oppressive system that dehumanised the majority. The alternative community, more so for Bosch (1982), had to be confrontational and liberative and not recuse itself from personal piety, but to embrace gospel performance. This type of movement had to be revolutionary in its engagement, but not violent. However, Pillay (2015) states 'in South Africa under apartheid the human community was separated and destroyed by racial and economic oppression. The task of the church is to rebuild this human community. Some 20 years after the establishment of a democratic South Africa it is questionable whether we are succeeding in the endeavour of building such a community'. This paper seeks to address this issue by suggesting that the Church must see itself as an alternative community to address through prophetic utterance and creative action and challenge issues that impinge upon the *Imago Dei* and dignity of being human in this present dispensation.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines alternative 'as something that is different from something else, especially from what is usual' and community as 'people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interest,

background or nationality'. For the church to become alternative in this new dispensation in South Africa, it must call itself to address the human needs in response to and in light of 'the active presence of God for the life of the world' (Dykstra and Bass, 2002:18). The church as an alternative community forms practices that are communal yet unique by demonstrating through its enactments that it is God's redemptive movements within society. The church becomes the embodiment and revelation of the living presence of God through its actions because of grace and a continuing relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Volf (2002:255) indicates this most clearly 'human beings (Church) are made participants in the divine activity and therefore are inspired, empowered and obliged to imitate it (Grace)'.

Swinton and Mowat (2006:83) describe Christian engagement as the 'resonance of grace' that occurs in response to the human experience of divine grace. Such practices are designed to sustain faith and hope in a context that often appears hopeless and less than grace-filled. The practices of the alternative community thus form the constituent element in a way that life becomes incarnate when the church lives in the light of and in response to God's gift of abundant life. The key to the success of the alternative community is practice. It is not enough just to know what to do, but to do it. By consistently doing, practice becomes a habit, thus, for the church Christian practice is not seen as something we do, but rather who we are, a community of reconciliation, compassion, and love. We become a people who are dependent on God because we know God. Before we engage, the practices of an alternative community attention must be drawn to the existence of early Judaic alternative communities. Due to the nature of the limited scope of this paper, a brief description is undertaken as part of our investigation on alternative communities.

2. Early Judaic Alternative Communities

During the times of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Jewish nation was under the control of the Roman Empire. Before the Roman control of Israel, the Jews were under the governance of the Greeks (330–30 BC). It was during this time that alternative communities developed within common Judaism to either help with the Hellenisation of the Jewish nations (Sadducees), or be like the Pharisees who maintained a legalistic religiosity that prevented Hellenistic spirituality from contaminating their religion. The Essenes isolated themselves from all public life by becoming ascetic, and the Zealots were made up of Jews who rebelled against the Greco-Roman empires by taking up arms.

Within Judaism, another community developed around AD 33, called the Church. The term church is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos* 'belonging to the Lord'. However, to define the word church, it must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and the Old Testament. Erickson (1999:1041) states that in classical Greek the word finds its expression in *ekklesia,* and is found as early as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Euripides. It refers to a *polis* (city). In the secular sense, the word relates to a political gathering or simply an assembly of persons or those called together by a herald, a meeting of people. The Greco-Roman usage of the term *ekklesia* would refer to a political gathering. Thus, the Christian usage of the term *ekklesia* is radically different from how the Greco-Roman world used and understood it. So, the etymology of the term resonates more with the Hebrew word *kahal* that is employed in the Septuagint to infer those gathered by God. Kung (1986:82) states, 'By taking over the term *ekklesia*, the early Christian community made its claim to be the true congregation of God, the real community of God, and the true eschatological people of God'.

The Christian church is that community of people called into being by the life and resurrection of Jesus, (Kung, 1981:75). Cone (1986:115) argues 'the identity of the church [is] found in Jesus. To ask "What is the church" is also to ask "Who is Jesus" for without Jesus the church has no identity.' Therefore, without the raising of Jesus from the dead, the church has no meaning. With the affirmation of faith that Jesus is what he claimed to be, the Messiah, a new alternative community was born. At the centre of the Church's teaching stands Jesus, Messiah, Man, resurrected Lord and Saviour. True God and true man, the Lord of the cosmos. The New Testament teaching is that Christians must now live the way of Jesus (Matt. 16:24). Christians are called to model Jesus everywhere, privately and in the public square. Therefore, understanding the gospel Jesus proclaimed underlines the practice of the church. This gospel calls all people, and those who 'enter do so by sheer grace.' (Sider 2007:171). This new alternative community that Jesus formed requires of his followers to live by a new radical ethic to minister to the oppressed and marginalised, to challenge the privileged or wealthy, to reject the way of violence and to love our enemies. For those who become part of this alternative community do so by responding in faith to Jesus Christ, and his message brings them to salvation. Therefore, this new way of life in Jesus Christ includes a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and a new economic sharing with others (Luke 19:9) as demonstrated when Zacchaeus responded to the message of Jesus. This new community also has a new social order,

where racial and social hostility is overcome by the power of the resurrected Christ (Gal. 3:28). Sider (2007:173) states that this 'new alternative community, the church is visible, public and in some very real sense political reality. The economic sharing and rejection of ethnic division were so visible that it drew non-Christians to embrace Christ.'

3. The Present South African Context

The present South African context is one of a burgeoning democracy, which is fast becoming one of the most socially unequal countries in the world in which to live. In South Africa, 26 million of the 55 million citizens are now living below the poverty index of 2 US dollars a day. Shabala (2016) in his article 'Entitlement is the keyword in racist thinking' brings this out most clearly:

> Most black South Africans—and most Africans in particular—remain severely disadvantaged compared to white South Africans. 4% of adult Africans have a tertiary qualification; 25% of white South Africans do. Throughout the South African economy, 70% of top managers and 59% of senior managers are white. The unemployment rate among Africans is 28.8%; among white people, it is 5.9%. 61% of white South Africans live in households that spend more than R10 000 a month; only 8% of Africans can spend that much. 16% of Africans live in extreme poverty and regularly suffer hunger; 99.9% of white South Africans are better off than that.

Over the last few months, South Africans have witnessed a rise in protestation. While most South Africans want to live in harmony with each other, this desire is being frustrated by the legacy of apartheid leading to hatred. It is in this context that the church must respond, not in living an 'ascetic' life by disconnecting itself and becoming otherworldly, but by immersing and identifying itself in words and deeds with the struggles of the majority in post-apartheid South Africa; to become the voice of the voiceless and marginalised by becoming the prophetic conscience to government and to those who hear the message of this community. The church as an alternative community in post-apartheid South Africa is to be the catalyst for the flourishing of others, thus requiring it to affirm the bonds of common humanity. This calls for the active caring for justice and the common good, flowing from identification with the needs and rights of others. Thus, 'solidarity is not a state of affairs or goal, but a virtue that impels the church into action' (Cochran 2007:5).

4. What must Evangelicals be in the Present South African Context?

The Church of Jesus Christ is a liberated and separated people, whose faith in Christ is a life lived in the presence of the Creator. This critical awareness of God's presence manifested through the Church calls for ethical responsibility: a responsibility to ask what should be done to restore the dignity of the once oppressed majority. To put it in the words of Brunner (1937:164) 'the true being of man, therefore, can mean nothing else than standing in the love of God, being drawn into his love for man. This means living life as a community which derives its source in God through Christ which is directed towards other human being and the interest of others'. In other words, this understanding sees 'Being' as a gift of the Creator God, who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, and is simultaneously the recognition that the end of humanity is active discipleship of love for God and neighbour. Thus, Evangelicals become a model which a wounded country can follow. While the church lives in a secular culture, it does not in any sense transcend the culture around it, unless it is willing to challenge its injustices. To do this, one needs to become alternative. The following section will deal with the features that must be demonstrated in the life of the Church if it wants to live as an alternative community in post-apartheid South Africa.

5. The Expression of the Church as Alternative Community in South Africa

The expression of the church in South Africa must be undergirded by our understanding of Scripture that calls us to love one another. Kant (1947:7) put it very clearly:

> For love as an inclination, cannot be commanded. However, kindness done from duty, also when no inclination impels it, and even when it is opposed by a natural and unconquerable aversion, is practical love, not pathological love. It resides in the will and not in feeling, in principle action and not in tender sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.

However, this love has its first expression in the action of Jesus on the cross. This action, which has its birth in the *missio Dei,* finds expression through the actions or praxis of the church in faithful communion with the God, who acts. Root (2014:81) states that in *participatio Christi* the Church participates in God through Jesus Christ. It affirms our cooperation with the divine life that our life is hidden with Christ in God. Thus, God's being is given in God's acts—God's act is the revealing of the Godself for the sake of

ministry (Barth, 1961:85). When the church engages ministry as the body of Christ, it reflects the being of God as a moved being—a compassionate Being. God moves towards humanity in the shape of ministry, as an invitation to take action and share in another's being. This act of God is seen in reconciliation. Therefore, Root (2014:94) argues that ministry as the act of God is the event of the God's being coming to humanity. This takes shape in the Christ action, what Root (2014) terms the *Christopraxis* of the church. When the church expresses compassion, it expresses the God Being.

The expression of this alternative community is thus one of engagement: in the internal (spiritual) and external (socio-political) through prophetic[2] engagements by speaking to institutional structures that keep people separated, and by acting out through creative compassionate acts that demonstrate love at its fullest. Reuther (1989:173) states:

> The theology of prophetic critique locates God and the spokespersons for God on the side of those victimised or despised by the social and political elites. The word of God comes as a critique of these elites, calling them to reform their ways in order to be faithful to divine justice.

Frame (2008:xxv) makes this clear by stating, 'For the Christian life is not only a matter of following rules of morality, but a dynamic experience: living in a fallen world, in fellowship with the living God'. One of the tests of the authenticity of the church's claim to transcendence or to be counter-cultural is its capacity to represent in its congregation a 'socially heterogeneous' people (Cone, 1986:119). This is a community that reflects Jesus Christ as the One who breaks down barriers that separate people.

2 By prophetic I mean, 'a theology that is socially critical and world transformative, that is, one that explicitly relates the Word of God to the social and political context within which it is proclaimed' See J. W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology* (1990:19).

5.1. Reconciliatory

The fundamental message of the church is one of reconciliation. McNeil (2015:22) states 'reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish.' The church becomes prophetic when it creates and sustains a reconciled and reconciling community. Thus, the task of the prophetic ministry of the church is to nurture, and nourish an alternative consciousness to the dominant culture around us (Bruggeman, cited in McNeil 2015). Reconciliation with God must be demonstrated by genuine reconciliation within the church and by continuing ministry of reconciliation to the world. Volf (1999:7–12) calls this a Pauline concept of social reconciliation. Such a community of reconciliation is then alternative in South Africa, because it is in active tension

with the surrounding context and culture of separateness. As South Africa can be still characterised as socially and racially separated, the church should structure itself to become an alternative conscience and counter-cultural, or what K. Barth refers to as a 'foreign community'. In the place of justice and righteousness, normal society brandished violence and oppression—and called it justice. Bonhoeffer (2005:63) encapsulated this function of the Church well:

> The church is the place where the witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ. The church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. The space of the church is not there in order to fight for territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely the world that is loved and reconciled by God.

While the church pursues justice and reconciliation, it defines its mandate in biblical terms and thus rejects all forms of violence, manipulation, and injustice. Liberation then is not a mere political movement and power struggle. The message of reconciliation of the church is to preach the good news about the peace Christ brings, reconciling man to God, man to man, and harmony with God's creation. Conradie (2013:27) calls this cosmic reconciliation. Reconciliation is thus with God, with the church and with those who have been sinned against. How then is reconciliation to be enacted? The alternative community must be agents of spiritual and racial reconciliation. Reconciliation is more than mere words, it demands action. Vellem (2013:111) underscores that if justice becomes subservient to reconciliation, then reconciliation is just cognitive, something that aborts the true reconciliation. He (*ibid*) states that what is needed is the discovery of reconciliation through experience. It is through restitution that this is possible. In a previous article, co-authored with Alexander (2015:29-42) we state 'that when the church fully understands the impact of decades of separateness has on the masses and the degradation it has caused, by making human beings non-persons requires a practical engagement' or what Vellem (2013:109) terms 'logic of experiential clarity regarding reconciliation'. If reconciliation is to be realised, restitution has to be made. This is where Evangelicals can challenge the government to speed up its programme of Land Reform, and where certain racial groups in South Africa benefited unethically from the 1913 Land Act reconciliation requires that restitution is made to those who suffered under an evil system. Restitution is perhaps the most human part of the reconciliation process, and restitution requires that we give up something, which brings us to a better understanding of the suffering that apartheid

caused to the majority. When the church as the community of God's people leads this process, it does so from a 'place' of compassion.

5.2. Compassion

In Exodus 33, Moses requested *YAHWEH* to show his glory; the request was denied because no man can see God and live. Yet, God did reveal to Moses who he is, a loving and compassionate God. The church is thus called to reveal the character of God demonstrated through its acts of compassion and love. Therefore, this requires that a definition of compassion be explored and applied to the South African context. The church in South Africa can become what all other communities aspire to be, a loving, caring and compassionate community. Davies (2001:17) states that compassion calls for the radical decentering of self, and putting at risk, in the free re-enactment of the dispossessed condition of those who suffer. Compassion begins with the recognition of the other as created in the image of God. It is because of this understanding that self assumes the burden of the other. It is here Davies (2001:17) argues that in recognising the veiled presence of God's image in the other we come to understand our identity. Nouwen, McNeil and Morrison (1982:3–4) state that the word compassion means to 'suffer with'. Compassion, therefore, requires one to enter spaces where one identifies with the weak, vulnerable and powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human. Compassion is not 'simple pity', but finds it is the purest expression unfolding in the incarnation of God. God's compassion becomes our compassion. This principle of self-denying or 'kenotic love' (Davies 2001:21) touches all levels of human experience, and tries to make social harmony a possibility. This radical manifestation calls for the very reflection of personhood to be seen in the other. Thus, the church as the alternative community seeks to see the image of God in all persons in society. This calls for a radical shift, from theology to ministry. Stone (1996:43) elaborates that 'ministry has a three-fold character: it is a response to grace, it is participation in grace, and it is an offer of grace.' Through the ministry of the church, the work of restoring the image of God in us is extended to the rest of the world. This calls for a very intentional entering into the suffering of others and working on behalf of their liberation. The church as an alternative community reflects its knowledge of God in two ways, namely theologically and practically. I believe the latter is a stronger demonstration of our love for God. Brown (1984:69) states this very clearly. 'This notion is so strange to us that 'knowing God' is a matter of deed rather than word, that one could affirm God

without saying God's name or deny God while God's name is on our lips is not so strange to the Bible.'

This is seen most clearly in Matthew 25:31–46 that distinguishes knowing God and knowing about God. James (2:19) qualifies this statement even further by mocking those who claim to have faith, but who fail to take care of the marginalised in society. 'You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder.' Mere knowledge of God cannot replace living faith, living a compassionate life. Thus, the Church as an alternative community is called to action.

This action to compassion is brought into focus, by asking the question, what is it to be created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*)? This 'image' is given by God and is central to human dignity, because the central theological issue in human dignity is the merciful, compassionate God. This understanding compels the church as an alternative community to be confrontational and transformative, to speak to institutional and economic barriers that keep people separated. Evangelicals must assume the responsibility to see people as children of God, created in his image rather than being directed to see people through the socio-economic and political policies of the land. The Evangelical churches in South Africa must become places where people who were once stripped of their humanity and dignity find hope and restoration of being human again. The church becomes the prophetic voice that speaks out against poverty that forces people to live in situations of inferiority and bondage in relation to those on whom they must remain dependent, and be enslaved to. Because the church understands the profound truth that human beings share with the character of God, even in a limited and derivative sense, it therefore allows us to engage and ask about the One who grounds the purpose and structure of our existence as being human, but also calls the church to live and minister as the 'authentic possibility of our existence' (Stone 1996:19).

Poverty is the starting point attacking the image of God, as revealed in the living condition of many South Africans. The reality in South Africa is that poverty is overwhelmingly Black. The results of almost 350 years of colonisation and oppression through restriction on freedom of movement and relationships have had considerable economic effects that are still crippling most Blacks in South Africa today. Thus, the church is called to a ministry that balances itself between support and development. Development ministries equip or enable those who are too poor to provide for themselves, because according to Myers (1999:14) when the church understands its true identity as children of God, it

recovers its true calling by seeing itself as 'faithful and productive stewards of God for the well-being of all.' Chester (2013:156) using Ezekiel 34 affirms the need for development ministries in that God condemned the shepherds of Israel for not strengthening the weak. Chester's point is to be noted that God does not rebuke the shepherds for failing to provide for the weak, but that they have not strengthened the weak. The church bears the responsibility to the poor and oppressed. God's community is called to defend the cause of the poor, the needy and those who have no social and economic power. The church works for the physical and social needs of people not as though this was the primary need or exclusive task, but as a testimony of a redeemed, holy and alternative community.

When the church shows compassion, it demonstrates the heart of God and is concerned with sharing God's love in words and deed. It becomes an alternative community.

Another aspect of the South African context that assaults the 'image of God' and human dignity is racism. Grant (1992:49) writes:

> Politically, racism disenfranchises; socially it ostracizes; culturally it degrades and robs the people of those characteristics that make them a people; religiously it brainwashes and indoctrinates so that the oppressed people believe not only that it is impossible for God to like them or for them to image God, but that God ordains racist oppression.

The church as an alternative community must speak out against these issues that blur the image of God in persons, by creating a community of faith where these differences do not impede fellowship and love one for another. When governed by this vision, the church will have adequate theological resources to resist the temptation to become accomplices in racial and socio-economic segregation (Volf 1999:19). Thus, through the acts of compassion, the church becomes an agent of reconciliation, where human flourishing takes place. St Augustine *On the Trinity* writes, 'God is the only source to be found of any good thing, but especially by those which make a man good and those which will make him happy; only from him do they come into a man and attach themselves to a man.' Human beings truly flourish in this alternative community, when love is demonstrated, by God becoming the centre of our lives. A human being as with all created things ought to be loved. However, the only way to properly love is to love people in God (Volf 2011:58).

5.3. Love

The good news of the Bible is that it that the 'kingdom of heaven has come near' (Matt. 10:7) and fundamentally through the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Luke 17:21). Therefore, the message of the gospel is 'a spontaneous love that forgives sins and serves others' (Jackson 2001:44). This love is beyond calculation and payment (Matt. 10:8). Thus, Jesus calls his followers to follow his example, to unconditionally love God, love your neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:29–31). This is the fundamental aspect for prophetic utterances and compassion. Therefore, within Christian thought God is love and loves unconditionally. A relational community, the triune God provides a model for human love. The life and practice of the church in response to God's love are summarised adequately in Mark 12:29–31. Hence the term 'living in love' is not something a community can achieve by its own efforts and in its own strength, but something that happens to them in faith, from God. The decisive element in this life in love is always to allow ourselves to be loved by God. By being loved by God, the church understands what it means to reflect the reality of God, to demonstrate the reality in all we do. This means we perceive through the lens of God's love (Labberton 2010:175). Brunner (1937:163) argues that this unique love is only manifested to those in faith through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the expression of loving that has its genesis in God through Jesus Christ is portrayed by the action of the Church.

6. Recommendation

When the church reverses its desire to conform to the world, it lives out a new social world, directed by Scripture. The actions of Evangelicals form a movement that is not their own, but God's being becoming. In her book *Road Map to Reconciliation,* McNiel (2015) illustrates this process by reflecting on four important steps that enable the church to become an alternative community.

6.1. Realisation Phase

This phase is more than an intellectual understanding or awareness for the sake of awareness. This state brings the church to a response that is contextually connected, and part of that realisation requires the church to 'lament' by accurately naming the situation and bringing our anger and frustration to God. This state of consciousness requires a response, and it creates a readiness for reconciliation, because it causes us to realise at a profound level that things must change.

6.2. Identification Phase

South Africa is still a racially divided nation, and the church becomes a picture of what South Africa can become. The church must see itself as kingdom people and reconcilers. It begins with building an alternative community that has a new collective identity. This community then sets its values, desires and experience they collaboratively hold, thus enabling the church to shift the cultural identity which sees people based on skin colour or social status. The motivation for identification is the realisation that human beings are no accident; we are created in the image of God. Without this belief, we are forced to face the implication that ultimately there is no good reason to treat a human being as having dignity. While at the same time, in the service of God, in this alternative community people are free to embrace their culture, their ethnicity, their personality, and gender, as part of what it means to be made in the image of God (McNeil 2015:71). With this comes the identification to the mission of the community of the Lord. Like the early Church, we are called to respond to Jesus' call for justice and mercy. The early Church gives us the clearest picture of how to live together (Acts 2:38) *koinonia.*

6.3. Preparation

Within this phase, the community gets ready to be transforming agents in society. This brings to remembrance the parable given by Jesus to count the cost. Reconciliation is going to be costly. In seeking God's guidance, we need to understand that God is already at work in a community; our responsibility is to ask what is God doing? Moreover, to join him. To join God on his agenda means presenting ourselves to be transformational. Following Jesus requires from us to help the poor make a living. This requires people to ask, what are we prepared to give up? This also requires the discarding of old patterns of thoughts, and facing up to our fears, individually and as a community.

6.4. Activism

Too often Evangelicals in South Africa see activism as a form of liberalism, and therefore shy away from their calling to be the presence of Christ in the world, the body of Christ. This non-engagement by claiming ascetic piety is seen to be orthodox. However, orthodoxy must lead to orthopraxis, doing the right thing. The church cannot see blatant oppression taking place and remain silent. To stay silent is to adopt the status quo, and therefore be accountable for our non-action. While holding mass prayer meetings to deal with this evil system that impinges upon the image of God in humanity, action must be taken. The apostle James (James 1:27, 2: 14–26) instructs us that if someone is

hungry or cold, do not just pray for them, help them. True faith within the alternative community is seen through its action. Actions through which love for God and people is demonstrated. People who know their God shall stand and take action.

7. Conclusion

Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his followers to continue his teaching to the entire world (Matt. 28:19). This prophetic engagement continues through the Church, the visible manifestation, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). For a follower of Jesus, this prophetic task continues by responding to challenges today. The reason the church can make a difference in the world, is because of Christ, who made the difference by becoming man and fulfilling the just requirements of God in reconciling man to God. Therefore, 'the church does not have a social ethic, the church is a social ethic' (Hauerwas 1983:99). This act of love, compassion and reconciliation is demonstrated through the life of Christ the head of the Church, and leaves us an example to follow empowered by the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. The Evangelical Church, therefore, has no excuse but to be Alternative by engaging, inviting and loving our friends and neighbours.

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Hearing God's Voice: Evaluating Some Popular Teachings on the Subject

Callie Joubert and Nick Maartens

Abstract

Hearing the voice of God is for many Christians part of their everyday life and undoubtedly biblical. But what exactly do they mean by 'hearing God's voice' and how do they distinguish between God's voice, their own thoughts or feelings and other voices? To assess whether certain ways in which some claim to be 'hearing God's voice' are scriptural, this paper presents the results of three studies conducted by researchers who have investigated the phenomenon. It then focuses on some of the things Christians are being taught about God's voice, which are nothing less than confusing and often unbiblical. The third section comprises a response to two widely accepted claims. The first is that God's voice is a 'still small voice' in a Christian's spirit, or that God's voice is the voice of Jesus referred to in John 10. The second claim allows for mistakes and inaccuracies when hearing 'God's voice' through prophecy. The paper concludes that Christian leaders should have reason to be greatly concerned about the beliefs of some of their followers. It then offers some suggestions about how spiritual deception can be minimised.

Keywords
Divine Guidance
God's Voice
Prophecy
Hearing God

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1. Introduction

For many Christians intimacy with God is central to their personal relationship with him. Hearing God's voice has also become part of their everyday life.[2] It is quite evident in everyday conversations between Christians and the expressions they use. It is also evident in the literature on hearing God's voice, everyday decision making and spiritual guidance through personal prophecies (Blackaby and Blackaby 2014; Cornerstone 2014; Deere 1996; Dein and Littlewood 2007; Dein and Cook 2015; Goosen and Peppler 2015; Huggins 2005; Hybels 2010; Jacobs 1995; Kessler 2009; Luhrmann, Nusbaum and Thisted 2010; Meyer 2003; Shirer 2009; Virkler and Virkler 2014; Wagner 1997; Willard 1999). The question is, therefore, not whether Christians hear from God, but whether *how* they hear from God is scriptural.

2 In *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard (1999:18) explains that God's face-to-face conversations with Moses are the 'normal human life God intended for us'.

2. The Problems

Three research studies and the literature on hearing God's voice reveal that Christians, specifically those in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, claim to hear God's voice mainly in three ways: through an audible voice; through an inner voice in their spirit, which is also often referred to as an 'impression' or 'prompting' and is expressed in words such as 'God spoke to me in my spirit', 'God laid it on my heart' and so on; and through personal prophecy from someone else.

In the next section we will focus on the results of the three studies conducted by researchers who investigated this phenomenon among Pentecostal and Charismatic believers. The results indicate that assumptions and claims about the hearing of God's voice are confusing, often unbiblical and sometimes blasphemous. What causes much tension and what is at the heart of the problem is the fact that Christians find it difficult to distinguish 'God's voice' from their own thoughts or feelings and other voices. We will then turn to the literature on this subject, and our aim is to show that what some Christians are being taught about guidance is often heretical. The third and final section offers a response to two core claims of those who hear God's voice through 'inner impressions'. The first claim that we address is the assumption that God's voice is a 'still small voice' in a Christian's spirit, or that it is the voice of Jesus referred to in John 10. Secondly, we point to the fact that hearing God's voice through prophecy spoken out in the first person, singular, present tense, for example, 'Thus say I the Lord your God', does not allow for the biblical principle that all prophecy should be judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 John 4:1). This mind-set of

indiscriminately listening to inner impressions and subjective prophecies leaves room for deception, mistakes and inaccuracies based on a mixture of truth and error. Our aim is to show why both assumptions are wrong.

The conclusion which we reach is that Christian leaders have reason to be greatly concerned about the beliefs of some of their followers. We therefore offer a few suggestions about how error and spiritual deception can be minimised. It is acknowledged that many issues in this paper need a far better specification and analysis, but because of space constraints, they cannot be worked out in greater detail. The issues addressed are meant to illustrate some of the more serious practices that lead to confusion.

3. Hearing God's Voice

3.1. Research results

3.1.1. Descriptions of the voice of God and discernment

Simon Dein and Roland Littlewood (2007) interviewed some members of a Pentecostal church in North-east London, who claim to be hearing God's voice. Forty members of the church were asked to complete a questionnaire on prayer; twenty-five (more than 60%) reported that they hear 'God's answering voice' and were interviewed together with their pastor. Fifteen of the twenty-five (60%) claimed that they have 'heard God's voice as coming aloud from outside themselves' (p. 2). However, all of the twenty-five who heard God's voice also claimed to hear God's voice internally; sometimes recognised as a 'still small voice'. Some referred to the voice as an '"impression" on their spirit – a sense of conviction which occurs in "another dimension" rather than the mind' (p. 3). 'All', according to the researchers, believe 'that hearing God's voice is normative for Christians' (p. 8) and that God would not say something to them that is contrary to scripture.

Of particular interest is the way the 'voice of God' was described by these Christians, as well as the fact that it was not critically appraised by the researchers. Although most described God's voice as being male, ten of the twenty-five said that the voice had no gender. One described God's voice as having an accent—a Northern Irish one (p. 3).[3] In a study conducted by Simon Dein and Christopher Cook (2015:103), 'Henrietta' reported that she receives 'words' from God through scripture and as having 'images in her mind'. However, Henrietta 'recognise[d]' God's voice 'as a child's voice' (Dein and Cook 2015:105). Although God is sovereign and free to speak to someone in any manner he sees fit, these

3 Luhrmann reports that many of the Christians in a Vineyard Christian Fellowship she studied over a two-year period in Chicago 'said that they had learned to recognize God's voice the way they recognized a person's voice on the phone. As one congregant explained, 'It's a different sort of voice … It's a different tone of voice' (Luhrmann, Nusbaum, and Thisted 2010:70). Although the church acknowledges that each person experiences God in his or her own way, the 'puzzle was that not everyone seemed to be able to do this equally well'.

descriptions lead to several questions. We need to know what is meant by a 'voice that is genderless', why God would choose to speak to someone in a foreign accent or even in a child's voice? Is God able to speak in a voice that sounds neither male nor female? And if so, how would someone recognise that voice as from God as opposed to any other voice that speaks in a foreign accent or a child's voice?

The problem becomes compounded when it is noticed that these Christians are often not able to 'differentiate between a thought, a voice and a feeling' (Dein and Littlewoord 2007:7). Or, in different words, these Christians often are unable to determine whether their 'impressions' are from God, whether they are 'from their own minds and imaginations, or even from 'the enemy' (Dein and Cook 2015:105). 'Naomi', for example, acknowledged that the information that 'popped' into her mind does not always 'work out in practice', and Mark said that spiritual warfare begins in the mind and quoted 2 Corinthians 10:4 (Dein and Cook 2015:106).

Most disconcerting is 'Jane's' inner dialogue she had with 'God' about 'paying her tithe' to her church. In response to the voice asking her what 'God's word say[s]' she must do, she said: 'I said that God's word says you give a tenth as tithe and a voice said, "Well you know what to do then". I said "Okay" and we paid all the money, but it meant that we had no money for food or bills or anything' (Dein and Littlewood 2007:5). It is disconcerting for at least three reasons. First, it is obvious that Jane was either poor or had difficulty making ends meet, and secondly that her pastor noted that her 'behaviour did not immediately change for the better after this incident'. And thirdly, no one corrected her misunderstanding of the Old Testament concept of tithing by comparing it with that of the New Testament concept of giving (cf. Köstenberger and Croteau 2006a, 2006b; Maartens 2014:1–31).

3.1.2. Personal prophecies and discernment

John Huckle (2009) investigated the use of prophecy in many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and amongst theological students in Britain. His results show that 89.5% of the churches use prophecy for general edification and 65.8% for general guidance and, therefore, that 'personal prophecies in these churches are by no means uncommon' (p. 82). Although several churches discourage 'personal directive prophecies', 60% of the respondents encourage these kinds of prophecies supported by written prophecies (p. 80). To one Assembly of God senior minister, however, 'Prophecies should speak of the future, otherwise it's just a word of knowledge' (p. 81). He implies, in other words, that revelations about the unknown future are of more value than

prophecies that are restricted to the everyday affairs of Christians in the here and now.

What is most interesting about Huckle's research is that it indicates that nearly all (95%) of these churches use scripture to judge prophecies. He also observes that 'whilst scripture does give general principles of proper conduct … it does not give explicit, focused guidance for every personal situation of life, for example, who to marry and which job to take' (p. 84). He suggests, therefore, that it is not wise to accept 'without question every word that is uttered in the name of prophecy'. This balance is summed up in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21: 'do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good' (ibid).

It is disturbing, however, that 'Personal judgement of prophecies [only] occurs in over half the fellowships surveyed' by Huckle, whilst Paul wrote that every prophecy is to be tested. More disturbing is the fact that, 'Over a quarter of fellowships surveyed use other prophecies to judge a new prophecy' (Huckle 2009:84). This means that the practice rests on the assumption that other (older) prophecies are 'more right' and elevated to a 'special category of "approved prophecies"'. In other words, older prophecies are 'treated in the same way as the scriptures' when testing prophecies. But, if prophecies are used to contradict prophecies, what are Christians to do about Paul's instruction to Timothy to avoid 'contradictions [Gr. *antitheseis*]' (1 Tim. 6:20; NKJV)?

We can summarise. Research studies indicate that Christians in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions believe that hearing God's voice is normative for them and biblical. Although they hear God's voice in various ways, they often find it difficult to distinguish between a voice, a thought and a feeling or between messages from God's Spirit, another spirit and self-generated messages. Although only Huckle (2009:83) indicates some of the dire consequences a 'misguided word' could have for Christians who depend on personal prophecies to guide their everyday decisions, it is worth noting his words: 'Careers (which may be God -directed and be fulfilling God's purpose for an individual) may be ruined and family life unnecessarily disrupted. People can become disillusioned when so-called prophetic guidance proves false and this can damage a person's faith and walk with God'.

Let us now consider what some leading figures in the Prophetic Movement write about the subject of hearing God's voice.

3.2. What Christians are being taught in the literature on the subject

3.2.1. Hearing God's voice and discernment

When studying what some teachers have to say about hearing God's voice, four things quickly come to mind. Firstly, hearing from God, although possible and to be expected, is complicated and takes effort. According to 'apostle' Peter Wagner (1997:55), when Christians expect to hear God's voice, they 'must be prepared to "hear" Him in various ways'. Joyce Meyer (2003:41) puts it thus: if Christians 'are not used to hearing from God, they will find it difficult to recognize his voice when they really need him'. Mark and Patti Virkler (2014) consider God's voice as a 'spontaneous thought' in their heads. One of them says, 'I didn't define this as the primary way God's voice is heard until I had completed a desperate 10-year search to hear Him clearly'.[4]

Secondly, there are several obstacles preventing Christians from hearing God's voice. Meyer (2003:40–42) lists several of these. Among the 'many voices that speak to our thoughts … our own is one of them'; 'There are many evil spirits ready to whisper lies to a listening ear'; and 'We may hear what we want to hear'. Although Wagner (1997:43) does not indicate how often, he says that 'sometimes the voice of God is a bit vague'. We would do well to ask how his assertion can be reconciled with what we know about God in the Bible.

Thirdly, God speaks in all manner of ways. At the top of the list seems to be 'a still, quiet [or small] voice' that someone hears in his or her spirit (Wagner 1997:43, 45; Jacobs 1995:76–77; Willard 1999:10). According to Wagner (1997:55), 'God has not chosen to limit Himself to verbal communication'. He explains:

> Jack Deere [1996] clarifies this as thoroughly as anyone I know. He explains that God at times uses supernatural means to speak to us, such as what Deere calls the audible voice: the audible voice to you alone, the internal audible voice, and the voice of angels. God also uses natural means such as dreams, visions, trances, sentence fragments, single words, impressions, and human messengers.

Elsewhere, Wagner (1997:43) says that God 'sometimes speaks in parables that may need interpretation' and 'sometimes He gives us a partial response and expects us to be patient before the rest of it'. Meyer (2003:40) also has a list of the ways Christians can hear God's voice; she says it can be through his written Word,[5] through an idea, a prompting or a thought (p. 41), through dreams and visions (p. 45ff.), seeing things in one's spirit, through a prophetic

4 Kessler (2009:6) states some of these points as follows: 'To truly follow Jesus we must recognize His voice. How can we know where Jesus is leading us unless we hear from Him? How do we know whom to marry or what job to take unless Jesus speaks to us? … To be a true follower of Jesus Christ, we must learn to hear His voice'. According to Blackaby and Blackaby (2014:18), 'Do you want to experience God today? Don't seek to hear from God unless you're ready to ask, as Paul did, "What shall I do Lord" (Acts 22:10)'. Although we can appreciate the author's point, neither Acts 22 or Acts 9:1–7 indicates that Paul sought in any way to 'experience God'.

5 Meyer (2003:39) believes that the 'Bible has an answer for every question we might ever have'. She based that assertion on the assumption that God's 'answers … are hidden in the pages of His written Word' (p. 42). So, when a believer reads the Bible a text may be 'illuminated or made alive … as though God just spoke it into our ears' (p. 40).

word, and even through personal appearances of Jesus, like in the case of certain people she is acquainted with (p. 50). Noteworthy is what God told her through a dream she had just before she appeared for the first time on television: 'The Lord said to me, "We are getting ready to go on television in just a few weeks, and I am getting ready to put you on display; but when the people look into your life, I don't want them to find trash"' (p. 47).

Three things deserve mention. In the first place, not all of the ways these teachers list is found in the New Testament as means through which God speaks to Christians. There is not a single example of someone receiving a message from God through sentence fragments, single words or impressions. In the second place, many of the things mentioned by them are very subjective, and are authenticated by their own opinion only, such as, for example, Meyer's own interpretation of her dream. What would she have done if she had shared the dream with someone who interpreted it as being irrelevant to her decision to appear on television? In the third place, one may also wonder since when is God 'getting ready' for anything? We submit that that kind of talk has no foundation in scripture. For, if God is getting himself ready for something, then he is like a human being who can be caught by surprise, which is unthinkable considering his omniscience and omnipotence.

Finally, since there are obstacles preventing Christians from clearly hearing God's voice, there must be several ways through which a Christian can discern God's voice from other voices. According to Meyer (2003:40), we can 'always check to see if we have peace and if what we are doing is wise'. Although the experience of inner peace is important, nowhere in scripture is it given as a test for determining whether or not someone has heard from God. The peace that must rule in our hearts referred to in Colossians 3:15 is a reference to the harmony that should prevail amongst members of the body of Christ, and it has nothing to do with guidance or decision making.

As an afterthought, one wonders whether it is not unwise of Meyer to use the testimonies of other people describing how Jesus appeared unto them, sitting on their beds and having lengthy discussions with them. The problem is how this 'Jesus' is to be distinguished from Satan who appears to believers 'as an angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:14)? Notwithstanding the difficulties involved with the experiencing of subjective inner impression, Meyer advises Christians to test God's voice 'against our inner witness' and 'to trust God to speak to our heart' (Meyer 2003:57). These statements of hers are highly problematic. For one thing, the Bible nowhere indicates that an 'inner witness' is a standard for deciding whether

someone has heard God's voice or not, let alone whether it is the truth. Furthermore, how can one test something by listening to an inner impression when 'the heart is deceitful more than all else' (Jer. 14:14, 17:9). Apart from one's deceitful fleshly desires, the devil is also always ready to whisper a lie into someone's ear!

3.2.2. Prophecy and discernment

'Prophet', and now also 'apostle' in the New Reformation Movement, Cindy Jacobs, appears to be an expert teacher on hearing God's voice.[6] Jacobs (1995:69)[7] first acknowledges that there are many problems with prophecy and discernment in the church:

> [I]t doesn't take much spiritual discernment to realise that deception is running rampant. Even leaders we have looked up to for a long time are falling into serious sin and delusion. This is especially evident in the prophetic movements. Those considered major leaders are saying things that are causing the people in the church to scratch their heads.

Many writers on prophecy concur. In the words of Greg Haslam (2009:19): 'Satan is quite capable of putting alien ideas into our heads – unwanted thoughts, unwelcome imagery, dangerous suggestions, accusations, ideas and directions'. Jacob's reference to 'delusion' is a problem and may explain the rampant deception in the church, even if only in part. The difficulty is that one seeks in vain in the literature on prophecy and discernment for a way a Christian can distinguish between something someone imagined, a false belief (delusion)[8] and someone who is deceiving him or herself by believing something he or she wants to be true when all the evidence points to the contrary (self-deception).[9] Although she acknowledges that 'people may be flowing from divination', for her, 'the benefits of the prophetic gifts far outweigh any problems that are caused' (Jacobs 1995:70, 75–76). One may wonder if her statement can in any way be reconciled with what the Bible teaches on prophecy. It seems that the Bible teaches just the opposite (Deut. 13:1–5, 18:20–22; Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13; Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:19–22).

The most amazing thing about the teachings of this prophet is that she acknowledges that she makes 'blunders' when prophesying. But then adds: 'I just pray that mine will be small instead of big ones' (Jacobs 1995:82). Nothing could be further from what the Bible teaches about prophets and prophecy. Furthermore, exactly how big must a blunder be before someone decides it is too big, and who is to decide? Is an error not an error irrespective of whether it

6 According to Wagner (1997:52), Jacobs 'has been hearing from God since the age of four'.

7 Her book, *The voice of God: how God speaks personally and corporatively to His children today,* has been considered of sufficient importance to have it republished in 2016.

8 The word 'delusion' appears in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 and means 'mental error' as the result of moral and spiritual blindness.

9 It is significant that this is a problem that is currently debated among psychiatrists, psychologists and philosophers and no consensus has yet been reached. For a good background introduction to the problem, see Tim Bayne and Jordi Fernándes (2010).

is 'big' or 'small'? Common sense dictates that small errors can have large consequences.

Is there something that can explain the confusing voice about hearing from God coming from confused teachers, prophets and apostles? We submit that there is: it is the widely accepted assumption that the 'mixed bag' of error and truth coming from them is acceptable and is quite biblical (Jacobs 1995:78; cf. Bickle 2008:52; Grudem 1988:31; Newton 2010:70; Traut 1991:94, 97; Turner 1985:16). We will later show just how erroneous this assumption is. For now, it would be useful to evaluate Jacob's teachings on how a Christian should respond to personal prophecies.

3.2.3. Responding to prophecy

Why is the correct response to a personal word from a prophet so important? According to Jacobs (1995:80), it is because 'you need to interpret the word accurately (i.e., discern what God is trying to say through the prophecy)'. The question that needs to be asked is, since when does God 'try to say' something to someone? It cannot be because he is at loss for words or contemplating what to say. If his words to Moses, the prophets and apostles were pure (Ps 12:6) and tested (Prov 30:5), then it becomes unthinkable that he is a Being who is 'trying' to say something clear and understandable.

To avoid possible misinterpretation and misapplication of the prophetic word, Jacobs (1995:80) suggests that Christians do the following. Firstly, they should tape-record the prophetic word. It is important for two reasons: it helps, as she says, with accountability and it prevents her from being misquoted or the prophecy being quoted out of context. Secondly, the word should be written down and shared with an 'elder' in the Spirit. Because of vague prophecies, it is 'important to let God bring further specific confirmation' (Jacobs 1995:81). Thirdly, the word should not be interpreted 'in the light of your own wants and desires'. And finally, it is important to wait for God's proper time and not to 'run ahead of God'. According to her, when this happens people suffer terrible consequences.

All that appears to be good advice, but there are several problems with her guidelines. It will suffice to point to only two problems we have with her reasoning. The first is in response to her statement that Christians should let God confirm 'vague' personal prophecies. In this regard, she says: '*God never minds confirming His word to us*' (emphasis in the original). She then quotes Matthew 18:16: 'By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established' (Jacobs 1995:83). Most problematic is the fact that neither the text nor the context makes mention of personal

prophecies. It simply says that when your brother sins and he does not listen to you when you reprove him (v. 15), you can take 'one or two more [witnesses] with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed' (v. 16; cf. Deut. 19:15). The testimonies of the witnesses are based on information that they have perceived and gathered through their senses. The second point is simply this: she nowhere offers 1 John 4:1 or Hebrews 5:14 as ways Christians should respond to personal prophecies. This means that her guidelines, in many ways, are inadequate to help Christians to avoid spiritual deception. It means that Christians are left in the dark as to how they can distinguish between a word from the Holy Spirit, their own spirit or a word from an evil spirit.

In the next section we will show that an 'inner witness' is not a biblical criterion by which words of prophecy are to be tested. Neither should Christians accept the fact that personal prophecies may be inaccurate or even contain a mix of truth and error. Because these two issues play such an important role in leading believers astray, they need further discussion. It is to them that we turn to next.

4. The 'Inner Witness' and Personal Prophecies

4.1. The 'inner witness'

Jacobs (1995:77) believes that 'the inner witness of the Spirit' is one way by which Christians can discern 'divination' (i.e., identifying the source of a false word of prophecy). Because it is unacceptable to think that the aim of the Spirit of truth would be to mislead or deceive a Christian, the challenge is, therefore, to understand what those who teach on the hearing of God's voice mean by 'inner witness of the Spirit'. For Jacobs it is 'the precious promise from the Lord in John 10:2–5'.[10] After quoting the text from the Amplified Bible, she elaborates on what she believes it means. In her words: 'When the Lord is speaking to us, an answer from within our hearts will cry, "Yes, that is God speaking to me". We will *resonate* with the word. This is what I mean by a witness in your spirit' (Jacobs 1995:76).

10 For Virkler and Virkler (2014), it is through John 10:27 that God promises his children that they would hear his voice. Kessler (2009:6) quotes the same text and makes the same inferences as Jacobs.

There are several problems with Jacobs' understanding of John 10. To begin with, John records four references to sheep hearing the voice of Jesus (10:3, 4, 16 and 27) and there are at least two keys to unlock an understanding of these texts. The first key is found in verse 6, which states that Jesus used a 'figure of speech' when he spoke to his disciples and the Jews. Jesus refers to shepherds and sheep, and contrasts himself with thieves and robbers in that he is not only 'the door of the sheep' but also their good Shepherd (vv.

7–14). Those who hear his voice are his sheep and they know each other (vv. 14, 16).

The second key is the word 'life'. The greater context of John helps us to understand the meaning of that term. In John 1:4, the apostle introduced Jesus as him in whom 'was life, and the life was the light of men'. In John 10:11, 17–18, Jesus announced that he is 'the good shepherd' laying down 'his life for the sheep'. And in John 14:6, Jesus referred to himself not only as 'the way, and the truth, and the life', but also states very clearly that 'no one comes to the Father, but through Me'. So, what could Jesus's figure of speech about himself as the door and his sheep hearing his voice possibly refer to? In the words of D. A. Carson (1991:385): 'This is a proverbial way of insisting that there is only one means of receiving eternal life'. Thus, those who hear his call to eternal life (cf. John 3:16) or salvation are those who follow him.

It is also interesting that the Jews who listened to Jesus had no trouble in hearing his voice (vv. 25–26). Their trouble was twofold: they refused to believe him, and they were unable to understand what they heard because they were not among his sheep. We therefore conclude that Jacob's terminology cannot be reconciled with that used by Old Testament prophets or any of the apostles in the New Testament. The reader of the Bible will also search in vain to find examples of God speaking 'within hearts' or someone's 'spirit' and the person spoken to then using it as a criterion to test a prophecy. Neither her supporting texts nor their context make any mention of personal prophecies. The danger is that thousands of Christians will believe that what she teaches is the truth, when it is not.

It was earlier noted that teachers on hearing God's voice equate the 'inner witness of the Spirit' and their own spirit with God's 'still small voice'. In addition to those already referred to is Dallas Willard (1999:10). What is astonishing is that it never seems to dawn on Willard that these very words appear in 1 Kings 19:12: 'and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice' (NKJV). It suffices to make two points. Firstly, the earthquake, fire and voice referred to in that text were sense-perceptible things. And secondly, the voice was not an inward impression or thought, contrary to what Willard (1999:114–153) would have us believe. The very next verse, verse 13, states very clearly that it was an audible voice which Elijah heard. It says: 'So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle'.

We conclude that if any person insists that Christians can or should judge prophecies through an inner voice or an impression in

their spirit, then it must be rejected, purely on scriptural grounds. In fact, it is false prophets, as we shall shortly see, who rely on the imaginations of their own hearts and impressions in their spirit.

4.2. The wrongful assumption about New Testament prophecy

For the purposes of this section we will focus on some of the things Wayne Grudem has to say about prophecy, for he is arguably the most theologically sophisticated of those who believe that New Testament prophecy can be a mixture of truth and error (cf. also Bickle 2008:52; Jacobs 1995:78; Newton 2010:70; Traut 1991:94, 97; Turner 1985:16).

To begin with, Grudem (1988:29) defines prophecy as 'telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind'. He expresses the same definition in different words: Christians 'report something God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds' (p. 30). Grudem then writes that 'there is almost uniform testimony from all segments of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted' (p. 31). His evidence for his assertion is someone he quotes as saying: 'Paul says that all our prophecy is imperfect'. He then adds, 'there is nothing wrong with saying, "I think the Lord is putting on my mind that…"' (p. 31). We will now argue that Grudem creates more confusion for the church than what he could possibly resolve. In fact, his definition legitimises errant prophecy, revelations and claims of knowledge.

In the first place, since when is a 'movement' entitled to decide on the nature of prophecy, specifically, that it 'is imperfect and impure'? The problem is that there are no examples in the New Testament of any person referring to prophecy in the way Grudem does. What we do know is that the apostles as a group made certain decisions in Acts 15 about the application of the Old Testament law to believers. But it makes no reference to the nature of prophecy. We also know that the whole church of Corinth was in danger of being deceived by the devil (2 Cor. 11:3). And we know that many of the churches in Galatia were 'bewitched' by those who taught things that were contrary to the gospel of Jesus (Gal. 3:1). But we find no group or movement deciding on the nature of prophecy. Grudem is also quite wrong when he says that Agabus, when he prophesied in Acts 21:10–11 that Paul was about to be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem, 'was only nearly correct'; it was not the Jews but the Gentiles (Romans) who captured Paul (p. 30).

Joel James (2001) made a detailed study of Grudem's assertion.[11] What he found is that the words in Acts 21:11, namely, 'This is

11 See also Compton's (2004:109–117) critique of Grudem's arguments.

what the Holy Spirit says', are virtually synonymous with the words used by Old Testament prophets: 'Thus says the Lord …'. However, the confusion about Agabus' prophecy is resolved when it is compared with the courtroom event recorded in Acts 24, when Paul and his accusers appeared before the Roman governor. This is what Tertulluss reported to Felix: 'And he [i.e., Paul] even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him' (v. 6). It stands to reason that the Jews, and not the Romans/Gentiles, are the ones who saw Paul in the temple 'and laid hands on him' (Acts 21:27). Therefore, that it must have been they who restrained or controlled him in some way before they could drag him out of there (Acts 21:30). It is certainly consistent with Acts 21:33: 'Then the commander came up and took hold of him [i.e., Paul]'.

There is a further problem with what Grudem avers. On the basis of which text in the New Testament should we infer that prophecy is 'imperfect and impure'? It is true, Paul writes that 'we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away' (1 Cor. 13:9–10). But it would be an argument from silence to conclude that it means what Grudem would have us believe. Is it not instead that both knowledge and prophecy are not exhaustive? It is certainly consistent with the words 'in part'. But it is also consistent with common sense: although a piece (part) of a puzzle is not the whole puzzle, it does not imply that it not a true part of the puzzle. Likewise, a child can know something about any thing without having exhaustive knowledge of that thing. And whatever the child knows does not at all imply that it is not true.

There is a third problem that Grudem creates. His terminology is inconsistent with that of the New Testament. For example, where does it say Christians 'report something God has laid on their hearts or brought to their minds' as the meaning of prophecy? Where does it say that God 'may impress on someone's heart in such a way that the person has a sense that it is from God' (pp. 33–34)? Grudem uses his terminology as if it is common knowledge what 'impress' and 'sense' mean. Most astonishingly, he refers to 'revelations' (1 Cor. 14:25) as something Paul would call 'intuition' (p. 34)—without any indication whatsoever about how that term is to be understood. On page 35, Grudem states that even 'churches not open to prophecy can be sensitive to promptings from the Holy Spirit'. Are 'impression', 'sense', 'intuition' and 'prompting' synonymous terms for prophecy? We submit that he commits the error which James Barr (1961:218) referred to as an 'illegitimate totality transfer'. The error arises when a series of 'meanings' of a word are read into a particular case (i.e. prophecy) as its sense and implication. But, we must also ask, how do

Grudem's terms differ from a hunch, an impulse, intimation, presentiment, a compulsion or an urge? The discerning reader would recognise that these are all terms that are, more or less, used as synonyms for subjective feelings. But nowhere in scripture is feeling a legitimate reason to prophesy, much less a criterion by which prophecy is to be judged. The Bible tells us that 'imagining' things (Jer. 23:16) and self-generated 'inspirations' (Ezek. 13:2, 17) are characteristic of false prophets—not of New Testament prophecy.

The final problem is both theological and logical. It captures what seems to be the essence of the problem. Grudem and those who follow him fail to keep in mind that Christians have a command to speak the truth (Eph. 4:15, 25). So, if God, who is the God of truth (Isa. 65:16), expects his children to speak truth, including to follow Paul's injunction to 'be imitators of God' (Eph. 5:1), then it becomes impossible to think that God would tolerate prophecy that is in any way inaccurate or a mixture of truth and error. The logical implications are straightforward: if prophecy, in the words of Grudem, is something God 'lays on the hearts' of Christians, then it must be the truth when uttered. Why? For one thing, it is consistent with God's character. Furthermore, a report, a belief, a proposition, a claim, a statement, an assertion, story or rumour, is either true or false. Thus, if a Christian is giving a report, or is making a claim or an assertion, then that Christian has no alternative but to speak the truth. Yes, Christians are not to 'quench the Spirit'; they are 'not to despise prophetic utterances' but they are to examine them, to hold on to what is good and to 'abstain from every form of evil' (1 Thess. 5:19–22). Two of these evils are uttering falsehood and using the name of the Lord in vain (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). Jesus also sternly warns about uttering 'idle words' (Matt. 12:36).

5. Avoiding Deception: Some Suggestions

If Christian leaders have reason to be concerned about what their followers believe about the hearing of God's voice, then it is appropriate to ask: where did they obtain their idea that hearing God's voice, whether audibly, as a voice in their spirit or through personal prophecy is normative for Christians? Is it through careful exegesis of the relevant biblical texts that are offered in support of claims that God still speaks to us today, or is it from widespread misconceptions which have gone unchallenged for too long? Or, is it something else? We will offer a few suggestions about how to minimise spiritual deception in the area of hearing God's voice.

5.1. Use of precise language

Pay careful attention to the terminology that Christians use to describe their experiences, particularly, in relation to everyday decision making and spiritual direction. Correcting and clarifying claims by using precise language can help weed out many problems and misunderstandings that arise in speaking 'what is on one's heart or mind' or in 'one's spirit'.

5.2. Examine all claims

If a person claims to have received a message, vision, revelation or a 'word from the Lord', examine them. All such claims, including the character of the speaker, must be judged (1 Cor. 14:29–33; 1 Thess. 5:19–21; 1 John 4:1). The danger of being deceived by false prophets and their words stands as a prominent reason for this judgement. Be especially cautious for those who use 'smooth and flattering speech' to 'deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting' (Rom. 16:18).

If some Christians are blessed with the gifts of prophecy, knowledge or wisdom and consistently speak words of accurate revelations, then they must be allowed to use their gift openly. Guard against the idea that such a Christian is 'special' (1 Cor. 12:14–26) and warn the congregation against dependence upon these gifts.

5.3. Confronting an inaccurate speaker

If someone has claimed to provide a revelation but is found to be inaccurate, he or she must be confronted in biblical love (Matt. 18:15–20; Gal. 6:1; James 5:19–20). Claiming to have heard from God when someone has not is a serious issue (Jer. 14:14; Ezek. 22:28). Allowing it to pass unchallenged will result in confusion and may even lead to apostasy. If someone continues to propagate error, he or she must be brought before the congregation and dismissed from fellowship (Matt. 18:17). The purpose is to protect Christians against spiritual deception and to teach them to fear misrepresenting God (1 Cor. 5:1–5, 13; cf. Acts 5:1–5). If the person repents, extreme caution should be exercised in restoring him or her to any type of leadership or teaching position.

Regarding self-appointed 'apostles' and 'prophets', it is wise to bear the following words of Paul in mind: 'keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances [lit. occasions of stumbling] contrary to teaching which you learned, and turn away from them' (Rom. 16:17).

6. Conclusion

Vagueness exists amongst Christians, especially those in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, regarding the hearing of God's voice. The problem is aggravated by how the voice of God is identified, the inability to distinguish between God's voice, a thought or feeling in themselves, and the difficulty of distinguishing between a message from God, a self-generated message and a message from an enemy spirit. A brief look at what some of the experts teach on hearing God's voice and discernment indicates that their teachings are one of the main causes for the widespread misconceptions about everyday decision making and spiritual direction in the church. Some of their teachings are simply unbiblical. It is, therefore, no surprise that claims about divine guidance are being questioned, not only outside the church, but also inside it.

Some of the ways these problems can be addressed have been discussed and some precautions have been suggested: correct and clarify claims by using precise language; examine all claims considering scripture and confront all inaccurate messages, prophecies, words of knowledge and words of wisdom. In the final analysis, all Christians are to imitate their God. And because he is the God of truth, Christians have no alternative but to speak truth.

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The Supreme Importance of Promoting Equity, Kindness, and Humility: A Descriptive and Comparative Analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Dan Lioy

Abstract

This journal article undertakes a descriptive and comparative analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. One incentive for doing so is that both passages clarify in an expansive manner the Lord's command in Leviticus 19:18 for his children to show godly compassion to others. This priority is more fully developed in the major claim of the article, namely, that promoting equity, kindness, and humility is of supreme importance. A second incentive is that deliberating the meaning and significance of these virtues finds its inspirational and theological roots in the Judeo-Christian canon. A third incentive is that exploring and evaluating the intertextual dialogue between these two passages appears to be a major lacuna in the scholarly literature. This deficit in the academic research becomes even more acute when the focus is narrowed to the topic under consideration.

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Christlike Love
Equity
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1 The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

From the earliest days of Paul's evangelistic ministry, he emphasised the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. A case in point is his letter to the Galatians, which many scholars think was one of the earliest of the apostle's epistles recorded in the New Testament.[2] In 5:13–14, Paul drew a contrast between two stark options. The first involved being controlled by one's aberrant desires, while the second alternative prioritized using one's God-given freedom in baptismal union with the Son as an occasion to minister to others with Christlike love.[3]

The Greek verb rendered 'serve' (v. 13) is a strong term often used for slavery.[4] Paul urged the Galatians not to enslave themselves to the Mosaic Law; instead, Jesus freed them to become bondservants of one another. Paul stated that when Christians love and assist others, they fulfil the essence of the Law (v. 14).[5] The apostle quoted from the Septuagint version of Leviticus 19:18[6] to stress that believers are closest to pleasing God and keeping each and every commandment when they sacrificially reach out to others with the Saviour's love.[7]

Paul's citation of Leviticus 19:18 points to a broader truth, namely, that promoting equity, kindness, and humility—which is the primary focus of this essay—finds its inspirational and theological roots in the Hebrew sacred writings. This is evident, for example, in verse 34, where the Lord, through Moses,[8] directed the Israelites to show 'love' to foreigners dwelling in the promised land.[9] Deuteronomy 10:19 incentivises this stance by adding that prior to Israel's exodus, they too were 'foreigners in Egypt'.

Outside the Pentateuch, Isaiah 1:16–17 discloses that the people of Judah were not left directionless concerning how the Lord wanted them to treat others. God commanded them to abandon wickedness and become people of integrity and virtue. This included fostering 'justice', especially by helping the downtrodden, and championing the cause of the destitute.[10] Similarly, Jeremiah 7:5–6 implores the people of God to be humane in their dealings with others, and discontinue exploiting the marginalised members of society. Likewise, Hosea 6:6 reveals that the Creator took immensely more delight in acts characterised by 'mercy' than in innumerable animal sacrifices.[11] In a corresponding manner, Amos 5:23–24 indicates that God more highly valued the presence of 'justice' and 'righteousness' than the clamour produced by singing and stringed instruments.[12]

2 Cf. Brown and Mangum (2012).

3 In Galatians 5:13, Paul used the Greek noun ἀφορμή to refer to a 'pretext', 'opportunity', or 'occasion' in which one either gratified the 'flesh' or humbly reached out to those in need with unmitigated kindness and compassion; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Swanson (1997). In this verse, the noun, σάρξ, which is translated 'flesh', refers to a person's temporal existence that is totally controlled by sin; cf. Mangum (2014); Sand (1990); Spicq (1994).

4 Δουλεύω is the Greek verb Paul used in Galatians 5:13, with an emphasis on ministering to others with an attitude of humility; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

5 Paul used the perfect passive indicative form of the Greek verb πληρόω to indicate that the Mosaic Law was not only fulfilled in the past, but also remained fulfilled in the present; cf. Heiser and Setterholm (2013).

6 Galatians 5:14 is one of 30 times in the letter where Paul quotes from the Old Testament; cf. Brannan and Jackson (2015); Silva (2007:809-10).

7 In Leviticus 19:18, the Hebrew verb, אָהַב, which is rendered 'love', denotes numerous forms of charity and goodwill shown toward a diverse range of individuals, including family members, friends, neighbours, and sojourners; cf. Els (1997a); Wallis (2015a); Jenni (1997).

8 Moses is the presumed author of the Pentateuch, through whom the Lord spoke (cf. Lev. 19:1).

9 The Hebrew noun, גֵּר, which is translated 'foreigner' (Lev. 19:34), refers to individuals whose lineage or ethnicity was non-Israelite; cf. Konel (1997); Mangum (2014); Stigers (1980a).

10 The Hebrew noun, מִשְׁפָּט, which is translated 'justice' (Isa. 1:17), concerns legal disputes and claims that are adjudicated by civil

The preceding emphases on the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility are likewise found in the New Testament. Worthy of mention is Jesus, who as the embodiment of the Torah,[13] stressed the value of the three preceding virtues flourishing among his followers. For instance, in Matthew 5:43–45, the Saviour drew attention to the common dictum of showing compassion to one's neighbours and despising one's enemies.[14] In contrast, Jesus not only commanded his disciples to be charitable toward their adversaries, but also to pray for those who abused them.[15] In turn, such merciful behaviour would demonstrate that Jesus' followers were legitimate children of their heavenly Father.

Consider, as well, an episode recorded in Matthew and Mark that occurred during the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry.[16] An expert in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law attempted to entrap Jesus with an intensely debated question. The query concerned identifying the foremost commandment in the Pentateuch. In response, Jesus gave pride of place to Deuteronomy 6:5, which stressed loving God with all one's being. Next, Jesus cited Leviticus 19:18 to underscore the imperative to love others unstintingly. Along with Galatians 5:14, Paul made a similar point in Romans 13:9–10. He noted that when the Saviour's love ruled in a believer's heart, that person never desired another individual's harm; instead, godly compassion for others leads to a fulfilment of all that the Mosaic legal code demanded.

James 2:8 gives further prominence to Leviticus 19:18 by referring to it as the 'royal law'. The reasoning underpinning this declaration is that the directive articulates the utmost desire of the Suzerain of the universe. Indeed, among all the commandments given by God, this one signifies the heart of whatever is taught and enjoined in Scripture. James 2:8 builds on the preceding theological truth by noting that the 'royal law' would become the guiding principle in the future messianic kingdom. The author observed that believers cannot heed the most important directive in Scripture and discriminate against others at the same time.

To recap what has been stated, the entirety of the Judeo-Christian canon accentuates the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The preceding statement is the major claim of this essay. Galatians 6:10 puts a fine point on this issue by revealing that the Creator has provided strategic opportunities for believers to reach out to others in need. In turn, Jesus' followers should recognise these occasions and eagerly act on them. After all, helping unbelievers is an excellent way to witness, without using words, to God's goodness and grace. For all that, believers should be especially eager to come to the aid of other Christians, since they are part of God's spiritual family.

authorities in an impartial, evenhanded manner according to the prescribed regulatory norms recorded in the Pentateuch; cf. Culver (1980a); Enns (1997); Johnson (2015a).

11 The Hebrew noun, חֶסֶד, which is rendered 'mercy' (Hos. 6:6), denotes personal relationships that are characterized by covenantal loyalty and commitment, along with forbearance and forgiveness; cf. Baer and Gordon (1997); Stoebe (1997b); Zobel (2015).

12 The Hebrew noun, צְדָקָה, which is translated 'righteousness' (Amos 5:24), refers to behaviour that conforms to the highest ethical standards found in the Mosaic Law, including the presence of honesty, rectitude, and trustworthiness; cf. Johnson (2015b); Reimer (1997); Stigers (1980b).

13 Cf. John 1:1, 14, 18. Keener (2010:281) proposes that the fourth Evangelist addressed a 'community of predominantly Jewish Christians' who, due to their 'faith in Jesus', had been 'rejected by most of their non-Christian Jewish communities'. One can imagine the religious élite of the day making the following claims: Judaism is a 'religion of Torah'; and, the 'prophetic, messianic Jesus movement has departed from proper observance of God's Word (particularly from orthodox monotheism)' (364). In turn, the fourth Evangelist responded in his Gospel with these counterclaims: the Messiah is the 'full embodiment of Torah' and completes 'what was partial (but actually present) in Torah'; the Son 'embodies the hope of Judaism' (417); the decision to become a follower of the Saviour 'entails true observance of Torah'; and, because 'Jesus himself is God's Word', no person is able to 'genuinely observe Torah without following Jesus' (364).

14 Cf. Pss 139:19-22; 140:9-11.

15 The Greek verb for 'love' in Matt. 5:43 and 44 is ἀγαπάω. The term is often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew verb אָהַב (cf. fn 7). Ἀγαπάω refers to unselfish compassion and unconditional

Along with the deliberation of relevant Old and New Testament passages undertaken thus far, there is value in exploring more deeply the central thesis of this essay by undertaking a comparative analysis of two representative passages of Scripture, one from the Old Testament and the other from the Christian New Testament. Admittedly, there are numerous worthwhile texts that could be chosen (and possibly made the focus of further research); however, the limitation of space in this journal article necessitates dealing with only two passages, namely, Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The reason for this selection is as follows.

To begin, the aforementioned pair are seminal, well-known, and highly-esteemed texts from each Testament of the Judeo-Christian canon that, in their respective ways, deal with the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The descriptive analysis in the upcoming sections validates this assessment. Further incentive is connected with the realisation that there is a paucity of scholarly research attempting the upcoming endeavour.

On the one hand, each text in isolation receives considerable literary, exegetical, and theological treatment; yet, on the other hand, exploring and evaluating the potential intertextual dialogue between these two passages—particularly in the manner done below—appears to be a major lacuna in the scholarly literature.[17] This deficit in the academic research becomes even more acute when the prism is narrowed to the topic under consideration. There is, then, sufficient warrant for the study appearing in this journal article.

kindness. Such love is prompted as much by will as by emotion. That said, as Ciampa and Rosner (2010:639) elucidate, 'while love is not just a feeling, it is not less than or other than a feeling'. Godly compassion seeks to reach out to others in need, even when the object seems unworthy of being loved; cf. Louw and Nida (1989); Schneider (1990a); Stauffer (1964).

16 Cf. Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31.

17 The assessment is based on a search through EbscoHost, JSTOR, Sabinet, WorldCat, and Google Scholar, which includes print books, e-books, journal articles, theses, and dissertations in libraries worldwide. The endeavour involved culling through each of the databases while attempting to coordinate both passages, doing searches on the individual passages and combing through the results for some reference to the other passage, scanning through subject headings of each passage while looking for some subject that might possibly refer to the content of the other passage, and broadening out the query to include 'love and mercy' as well as '*misphat* and *hesed*'. The endeavour did not surface any studies exploring the potential intertextual dialogue between Mic. 6 and 1 Cor. 13.

2. A Descriptive Analysis of Micah 6:1-16[18]

The politics during the latter part of the eighth century BCE, when Micah prophesied,[19] shaped his message. Both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel had been previously enjoying a time of peace and prosperity; yet, rather than growing closer to God out of gratitude for this wealth, Judah and Israel had slipped into moral bankruptcy. Those who became prosperous during this time ruthlessly exploited the poor. Consequently, Micah foretold the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem.

Of all people, the civil and religious leaders of Judah and Israel should have understood how important maintaining justice was to the social fabric of their respective nations. The magistrates often heard and settled disputes among the people, and the decisions made by the leaders were final. The people living in Judah and

18 The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of Micah 6:1-16: Allen (1983); Andersen and Freedman (2006); Barker (1998); Brueggemann (1997); Caird (1980); Chisholm (1991); Clark and Mundhenk (1982); Dyrness (1977); Feinberg (1979); Ferreiro (2003); Goldingay (2016); Gossai (1993); Hillers (1984); Jacob (1958); Kaiser (2008); Keil (1982); Master (2009); McComiskey (1985); Schreiner (2013); Simundson (1996); Smith (1993); Smith (1984; 1994); Smith-Christopher (2015); Vos (2000); Waltke (1988; 2007); Waltke and Yu (2007); Wolff (1990); Zvi (2000).

19 Cf. Mic. 1:1.

Israel looked to these rulers for equity. Regrettably, though, the princes of the southern and northern kingdoms perverted the administration of the Mosaic Law for their personal gain. The scales of jurisprudence especially favoured the wicked rich. Indeed, if the price was right, the courts would issue verdicts benefiting those offering substantial bribes.

The Hebrew verb rendered 'listen' (Mic. 6:1)[20] marks off the three major literary divisions of the book,[21] and signals that it records the Lord's judgment oracle, as delivered by his authorised spokesperson, Micah. Even so, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure and unity of Micah 6. As Clark and Mundhenk (1982) observe, some specialists think the passage is comprised of 'various paragraphs having little connection with each other'; in contrast, other specialists think the biblical text has a 'coherent flow of thought'.[22]

The second of the two preceding views is affirmed in this essay. In agreement with Andersen and Freedman (2006:501), from a literary perspective, the passage is divided into two main sections, as follows:[23] (1) the Lord's case against his people (vv. 1–8). Despite the nation's protestations and counter-claims, the evidence pointing to guilt was overwhelming and convincing;[24] and, (2) the Lord's verdict against his people (vv. 9–16). The judicial sentence is in keeping with the afflictions foretold in the Mosaic covenant.[25]

The Hebrew verb rendered 'plead your case' (Mic. 6:1) can also be translated 'defend yourself'.[26] It indicates that what follows in this chapter is a lawsuit speech in which the Lord presents the evidence and renders the verdict against his chosen people for violating the Mosaic covenant. The literary form is adapted from that found in international treaties used throughout the ancient Near East (especially among the Hittites) between suzerains and their vassals. In this cosmic courtroom scene, God is depicted as the plaintiff and prosecuting attorney, Micah is his accredited emissary, the mountains are the jury, and the covenant community is the accused.[27]

In verse 2, the same Hebrew noun is rendered 'accusation' and 'case' and has a similar range of meanings to the verb translated 'plead your case' in verse 1.[28] The noun signifies a controversy or complaint between two parties. In this instance, the Lord was bringing his indictment against his chosen people. This emphasis is reinforced by the verb rendered 'lodging a charge', which can also mean 'to dispute' or 'to contend' within a juridical context.[29] The idea is that God was establishing a legal proceeding against the covenant community based on irrefutable evidence.

20 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:1 is שְׁמַע. The lexical emphasis is on paying attention to and heeding what is heard being declared; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Rüterswörden (2015); Schult (1997).

21 Cf. Mic. 1:2; 3:1.

22 For a deliberation of the literary coherence of Mic. 6, cf. Allen (1983:364). The author explains that the 'passage is held together as a unit not only by the overall covenant theme, but also by the interlocking effects of repeated or complimentary terms and ideas.' Also, cf. fn 27 for an overview of the broad structural elements of the covenant lawsuit motif found in Mic. 6.

23 An examination of the academic literature indicates there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure of Mic. 6. The author considers the basic demarcation appearing here to be a reasonable and serviceable approach for the purposes of this study.

24 Cf. Deut. 32; Ps 50; Isa. 1:2-3.

25 Cf. Lev. 26:16, 26; Deut. 28:18, 40, 51.

26 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:1 is רִיב; cf. Isa. 3:13; Jer. 2:9; Hos. 4:1; Bracke (1997); Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Culver (1980b).

27 For a detailed analysis of the covenant lawsuit motif's juridical features, especially within the *Sitz im Leben* (or sociological setting) of the ancient Near East, cf. Davidson (2010); Huffmon (1959); Limburg (1969). When applied to Mic. 6, the broad structural elements are as follows: (1) introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment (preamble), vv. 1-2; (2) list of witnesses (mountains and hills), also vv. 1-2; (3) review of the suzerain's benevolent acts on behalf of the vassal (historical prologue), vv. 3-5; (4) review of the general covenant obligations, vv. 6-8; (5) violation of specific covenant obligations (indictments), vv. 9-12; (6) declaration of guilt (verdict), v. 13; and,

The Creator called upon the 'mountains' (v. 1) and 'hills' to testify on his behalf in a cosmic court of law. Micah personified these inanimate objects as legal witnesses, who agreed with the Lord that his people violated the covenant.[30] In verse 2, the 'mountains' are paralleled by the 'enduring foundations of the earth'. Both were quite ancient and predated the history of Judah and Israel. Accordingly, they were sombre, quiet observers of what God's people had done. Waltke (2007:374) classifies Micah's dual reference to the 'lofty mountains' on land and the deep canyons in the oceans as a 'merism' that encompasses the entire planet. Similarly, Wolff (1990:147) explains that 'as the upper and lower outer limits, the two together point to the whole of the earthly cosmos'.[31]

Micah 6:1–2 reflects an ancient Hebrew conception of the universe in which God's people divided the world into heaven, earth, sea, and the underworld.[32] More specifically, they visualised the earth as being a flat, disk-shaped landmass that was surrounded by water. Pillars supported the ground, while mountains located on the distant horizon upheld the sky. The sky itself was thought to be a solid dome or tent-like structure on which the celestial bodies (namely, the sun, moon, and stars) were engraved and moved in tracks.

In this ancient three-tiered view of the cosmos, rain, hail, and snow (from an immense body of water located above the overarching sky) fell to earth through openings. God's temple was situated in the upper heavens, which in turn rested atop the sky (or lower heavens). The Jerusalem temple was the earthbound counterpart to the divine abode. The realm of the dead was considered a grimy and watery region located beneath the earth and called the underworld (or *Sheol*).

The reference in Micah 6:3 to 'My people'[33] served as a reminder of the covenant relationship between the Lord and the inhabitants of Judah and Israel. The two questions that follow suggest the southern and northern kingdoms accused God of failing to uphold his agreed-upon responsibilities. This mistaken notion is particularly evident in the Hebrew verb rendered 'burdened'.[34] The idea is that in some way the Lord had wearied and exhausted his people with his unreasonable demands.

Understandably, God did not want to leave room for either nation to claim that he—rather than they—was at fault. Neither Judah nor Israel could legitimately argue that the Creator had been unfaithful to his promises. Likewise, neither the southern nor northern kingdoms could rightfully claim that the stipulations of the Mosaic Law were either excessive or perverse. So, with the

(7) pronouncement of covenant curses (sentence), vv. 14-16.

28 The Hebrew noun appearing twice in Mic. 6:2 is רִיב; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Mangum (2014); Swanson (2001).

29 Cf. Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3. The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:2 is יָכַח; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Gilchrist (1980); Hartley (1997).

30 Cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Ps 50:4; Isa. 1:2; 41:1; Jer. 2:12; Beck (2011); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

31 Cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1; Isa. 1:2.

32 Cf. Ps 82:5; Prov. 8:29; Isa. 24:18; Media, Hubbard, Ritzema, Watkins, and Wentz (2012).

33 עַמִּי in the Hebrew text.

34 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:3 is לָאָה; cf. Bowling (1980); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Ringgren (2015a).

statement 'Answer me',[35] God directed his people to confirm their grievances against him (that is, if they really could).[36]

In Micah 6:3, the Lord gave his chosen people an opportunity to substantiate how he had wronged them. The truth is that God had never been unreasonable or burdensome to Judah and Israel. In fact, he had lavished his unfailing love on both the southern and northern kingdoms. Simundson (1996:579) draws attention to the 'play on words' appearing in the Hebrew text of verses 3 and 4. When the hiphil form of the verb rendered 'wearied' (v. 3) is placed next to the hiphil form of the verb translated 'brought up' (v. 4), readers recognize that these terms 'sound very similar' in their pronunciation.[37] The accusation is that the 'great God who delivered' his 'people from Egypt has somehow become burdensome to them'; yet, as Allen (1983:366) portrays the divine response, 'I have not let you down—on the contrary, I brought you up'.

In verses 4 and 5, the Creator recounted at least four separate displays of his mercy toward the Twelve tribes during their infancy as his people. First, God mentioned how he had rescued them from slavery in Egypt.[38] Between the time of Joseph and Moses, the Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt.[39] The Hebrew verb translated 'redeemed' can also mean 'to ransom' and calls attention to all that God did on behalf of the Israelites to deliver them from servitude in Egypt.[40] This cruel taskmaster had forced the Israelites to do construction projects, but God used miracles to compel Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.[41]

Second, God mentioned the leaders he had given the nation. These individuals included Moses, the deliverer,[42] lawgiver,[43] and prophet;[44] Moses' brother, Aaron, the high priest;[45] and Miriam, their sister, a prophetess.[46] With such noteworthy servants of the Lord, the Israelites had exceptional guidance.[47]

Third, God recalled the incident in which he preserved the early Israelites from a threat presented by the Moabites. Balak, the king of Moab, had wanted the soothsayer, Balaam, to curse Israel, but instead God caused Balaam to bless the Israelites.[48] Fourth, God cited the young nation's final journey into the promised land, from Shittim[49] to Gilgal.[50] During that journey, God miraculously parted the Jordan River just as earlier he had divided the Red Sea.[51] By rehearsing these historic episodes, the Lord wanted his people to be certain of his upright acts, including how he had always treated them faithfully and fairly.

Previously, in Micah 6:3, the Lord asked his people what fault they found in him. Now, a new voice spoke in verses 6 and 7. God's envoy posed as an inquiring worshipper[52] at the access point to the Jerusalem temple.[53] As a representative of the entire covenant

35 עָנֵה בִי in the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:3.

36 Cf. Jer. 2:5.

37 The hiphil forms of each verb are הֶלְאֵתִיךָ and הֶעֱלִתִיךָ, respectively.

38 Cf. Exod. 13:3; Deut. 5:6; 6:12; Jer. 34:13.

39 Cf. Exod. 12:40-41.

40 The Hebrew verb in Mic. 6:4 is פָּדָה; cf. Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Mangum (2014); Stamm (1997).

41 Cf. Exod. 1:1-15:21.

42 Cf. Exod. 3:10.

43 Cf. Deut. 4:45.

44 Cf. Deut. 18:15.

45 Cf. Lev. 8.

46 Cf. Exod. 15:20.

47 Cf. Josh. 24:5; 1 Sam. 12:8; Pss 77:20; 105:26.

48 Cf. Num. 22-24.

49 Shittim was a plain in Moab on the east side of the Jordan River; cf. Negev (1990).

50 Gilgal was located on the west side of the Jordan River; cf. Hubbard (2005).

51 Cf. Josh. 3-4.

52 Possibly a priest or other religious official.

53 Allen (1983:369) observes that the discourse in Mic. 6:6-7 is comparable to an 'entrance liturgy' leading to the shrine in Jerusalem; cf. Ps 15:1; 24:3; Isa. 33:14.

community, he responded to God's accusation in a way that reflected the pathetic spiritual state of his chosen people.

The speaker wanted to know what kind of sacrifices the exalted Lord required to appease his anger for Judah's villainy and Israel's misdeeds.[54] The petitioner's suggestions begin with the typical, and quickly go to the extreme. Did almighty God want his people to bow before him with highly prized offerings, especially the choicest yearling calves? Or should they sacrifice to him a canyon filled with countless rams, along with endless torrents of olive oil? Or, in an act of desperation, should they martyr their firstborn children to pay for the trespasses they had committed?[55]

The last item warrants further comment. Child sacrifice, while probably never common, was known in both Judah and Israel. The pagan inhabitants of the surrounding nations carried out child sacrifices,[56] and this practice crept into the southern and northern kingdoms with the veneration of foreign gods and goddesses. For instance, the pagan deity Molech was especially associated with child sacrifice. Idolaters built a sanctuary to Molech called Topheth[57] south of Jerusalem, and there sometimes burnt children.[58] Undoubtedly, it was to Molech that the Judahite kings Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons.[59]

Micah 6:6–7 indicates that God's people were quite mistaken in thinking that he would take delight in their innumerable and extreme sacrifices.[60] Admittedly, the Lord had ordained the sacrificial system for the Israelites, and had even forbidden them to approach him without an offering;[61] yet, in this case, the people were using the system in a vain attempt to buy his favour. To be specific, they tried to carry out rituals in a sacrilegious, hypocritical way, but were not truly obedient when it came to dealing with others in an equitable, kind, and humble manner.

What could humans do to please the Suzerain of the universe? According to Andersen and Freedman (2006:560), that is the foremost 'question' in the heart of every person who approaches the Lord in heartfelt worship. The responses recorded in Micah 6:6–7 were theologically way off the mark, even though they reflected the thinking of pagan humanity living throughout the ancient Near East during the second and first millenniums BCE.

Against the backdrop of God's redemptive acts, he clarified in verse 8 what he really wanted.[62] The transcendent Creator had no need for meaningless religious acts performed by mere 'mortals';[63] instead, he wanted the thoughts, feelings, speech, and behaviour of his people to be characterized by ethical goodness, including the presence of such virtues as integrity, rectitude, and compassion.[64]

54 'Transgression' (Mic. 6:7) renders the Hebrew noun פֶּשַׁע, which denotes intentional, criminal, and treacherous acts, whether against individuals, nations, and/or the Creator, and that are prompted by a rebellious disposition; cf. Carpenter and Grisanti (1997a); Knierim (1997); Seebass (2015). 'Sin' translates the Hebrew noun חַטָּאת, which refers to any conduct, whether deliberate or unintentional, and whether involving thoughts, emotions, or words, that deviates from or falls short of God's perfect moral standard, as expressed in the Mosaic Law; cf. Averbeck (1997); Koch (2015); Livingston (1980).

55 Cf. fn 110 concerning the literary device known as defamiliarization.

56 Cf. Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 3:26-27; 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chron. 28:3; Ps 106:38; Jer 19:4-5.

57 'Topeth' means 'burning place'; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Swanson (2001).

58 Cf. Lev. 18:21; Deut. 18:10; 2 Kings 23:10.

59 Cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6. Nowhere in the Old Testament did God ever condone or sanction child sacrifice. For a detailed consideration of human sacrifice in the Hebrew sacred writings, cf. Andersen and Freedman (2006:532-9).

60 Cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Pss 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-19; Isa. 1:11-15; Jer. 6:19-20; 7:22-23; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Zech. 7:4-10.

61 Cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:20.

62 Cf. Ps 15:2-5; 24:4-5; Isa. 33:15-16.

63 Cf. the NRSV, Lexham, and NIV renderings of Mic. 6:8.

64 'Good' (Mic. 6:8) renders the Hebrew noun טוֹב, which denotes what is suitable and beneficial in any given situation. The term emphasises the presence of moral excellence in all areas of life, both

for individuals and the entire covenant community; cf. Gordan (1997); Mangum (2014); Stoebe (1997c).

65 In Mic. 6:8 two Hebrew verbs are used in synonymous parallelism, with the second building on and extending the thrust of the first. 'Told' renders נָגַד, and signifies a pronouncement that is plainly known to those hearing it; cf. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Mangum (2014); Westermann (1997). 'Require' translates דָּרַשׁ and denotes a legitimate and mandated expectation; cf. Coppes (1980); Denninger (1997); Wagner (2015). Together these verbs indicate that the Lord clearly revealed his will to his people and was on solid legal ground in directing them to behave in a stipulated manner.

66 Cf. fn 10 concerning the Hebrew noun מִשְׁפָּט; Isa. 29:19; Jer. 22:16; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:24; James 1:27.

67 'Love' (Mic. 6:8) translates the Hebrew noun אַהֲבָה, which signifies the presence of virtues that are esteemed and fostered in personal relationships. The Septuagint predominately uses the Greek verb ἀγαπάω to translate אַהֲבָה; cf. fns 7 and 15; Alden (1980); Els (1997b); Wallis (2015b).

68 Cf. fn 11 concerning the Hebrew noun, חֶסֶד, which is rendered 'mercy' (Mic. 6:8).

69 'Humbly' translates the Hebrew verb צָנַע. Contemporary scholarship indicates the term refers to a modest disposition that is demonstrated in mindful, sagacious behaviour, especially with respect to the Creator; cf. Dumbrell (1997); Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000); Ringgren (2015b).

70 Cf. Lev. 26:16, 26; Deut. 28:15, 18, 40, 51; Hos. 4:10; 5:6; 8:7; 9:12, 16; Amos 5:11.

71 In Mic. 6:9, the Hebrew noun קוֹל (literally translated 'voice') is understood to function exegetically as an imperative and thus rendered as 'listen'.

In particular, God decreed[65] that the covenant community make the following three principles a priority in their lives: (1) to promote 'justice', that is, honesty and fairness;[66] (2) to so highly value[67] persistent acts of kindness[68] that these undergirded their dealings with one another; and, (3) to ensure that reverence, prudence, and obedience were the foundation of their relationship with the Lord.[69] These requirements progress from what is external to what is internal and from one's relationship to other people to one's relationship with God. Specifically, to be just toward other people, one must display loyal love. Also, such compassion necessitates a circumspect walk before the Lord that aligns with the expectations delineated in the Mosaic covenant.

Micah 6:9–16 comprise another prophecy in which God listed various crimes committed by his chosen people. These verses also described how the Lord would punish them, in what Hillers (1984:82) labels a succession of 'futility curses'. On the one hand, the 'guilty' engage in a wayward 'course of action'; on the other hand, they 'inevitably' become 'frustrated with it'.[70] The oracle begins with Micah's call for his peers to pay attention to the Lord's words.[71] The 'city' in verse 9 is most likely Jerusalem, which represents the entire covenant community.[72] The 'rod' Jerusalem was to heed was the punishment God would send. The people of Judah (as well as Israel) were far from walking in justice, kindness, and humility before God.

Verses 10 through 12 record a collection of social sins God's people were guilty of committing. For instance, some in Judah had amassed vast sums of wealth through nefarious means. Also, corrupt merchants cheated their customers by using a 'short ephah'.[73] An ephah was a dry measure equal to about three-fifths of a bushel of grain.[74] Evidently, sellers were defrauding buyers by measuring out less than the full amount on a balance scale.

In the ancient Near East, merchants used scales to measure goods and even money, since there was no standardized coinage. Scales consisted of two pans suspended from a crossbar. Vendors would put precisely weighted stones in one pan and place the item(s) for weighing in the other. Even though the Law of Moses forbade the falsification of weights and measures,[75] this fraudulent practice

72 Cf. Smith-Christopher (2015:201-2) concerning the unlikelihood of the reference in Mic. 6:9 being to Samaria.

73 אֵיפַת רָזוֹן in the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:10, in which the unit of measure was shrunken or scant when compared to the agreed-upon standard.

74 Cf. Thames (2016).

75 Cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Ezek. 45:10; Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5

sometimes occurred. One way to obtain an inaccurate measurement was to shorten the length of one of the arms of the crossbar. Another way was to use falsely marked stones. Some merchants even used two sets of weights in their transactions, one for buying and one for selling.

Micah 6:12 reveals that those who wielded power not only brimmed with material wealth, but also overflowed with destructive behaviour.[76] Furthermore, Jerusalem's residents peddled deceit[77] and trafficked in treachery.[78] These charges perhaps indicate that the élite in society were using force to steal property, and that individuals were committing perjury in court to support dishonest business practices. Verse 13 introduces a description of the ways in which God would punish his chosen people for their crimes.[79] According to verses 14 through 16, these consequences included hunger, loss, and futility. For instance, the people who tried to get wealthy by dishonest means would have to do without material goods.

The iniquities the people committed were not all social. Verse 16 indicates that some were religious. Specifically, the Lord condemned the covenant community for following the traditions[80] of Omri and Ahab, who were kings of Israel about 150 years earlier. This wicked father-son dyad engaged in and promoted idolatrous religion.[81] In Micah's lifetime, the people of Judah worshipped in the same ways as their counterparts in Israel. Because of this, God gave both the southern and northern kingdoms over to ruin.[82] Then, when Judah and Israel were overrun, their neighbours would ridicule them for their folly.[83]

3. A Descriptive Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13[84]

Andersen and Freedman (2006:504) identify Micah 6:8 as the literary and thematic centre of the chapter. According to the descriptive analysis articulated in the preceding section, the threefold emphasis is on promoting equity, kindness, and humility. These virtues are also what believers today ought to uphold. Indeed, as the following descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 13 indicates, God still expects his people to treat others with Christlike love and to live in devotion to him.[85] In agreement with Fee (1987:628), from a literary perspective, the passage is divided into three main sections,[86] as follows: (1) the 'necessity of love' (vv. 1–3); (2) the 'character of love' (vv. 4–7); and, (3) the 'permanence of love' (vv. 8–13).

In chapter 12 of the epistle, Paul wrote about the purpose and use of spiritual gifts. Throughout this letter, the Greek noun, χάρισμα,

76 The Hebrew noun, חָמָס, which is translated 'violence' (Mic. 6:12), refers to the exploitation and oppression of the vulnerable and innocent members of society; cf. Hagg (2015); Stoebe (1997a); Swart and Van Dam (1997).

77 The Hebrew text of Mic. 6:12 is literally rendered 'speak lies' (דִּבְּרוּ־שֶׁקֶר), with the emphasis being on unfounded assertions and perversions of truth; cf. Austel (1980); Klopfenstein (1997); Seebass, Beyerle, and Grünwaldt (2015).

78 In Mic. 6:12, 'deceitful' translates the Hebrew noun, רְמִיָּה, in which the presence of duplicity signifies a breach of trust between individuals or groups; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs (2000); Carpenter and Grisanti (1997b); White (1980).

79 Loken (2014) points out a textual discrepancy in Mic. 6:13. The Hebrew, when translated, reads, 'Also I will make you sick by striking you down'. The Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate, when translated, read, 'I have begun to strike you down'.

80 The parallelism in the first half of the Hebrew text of Mic. 6:16 places a threefold emphasis on pagan 'regulations' (חֻקָּה) leading to heathen 'practices' (מַעֲשֶׂה) and 'plans' (מוֹעֵצָה). The divine indictment is that the people's atrocities signified a repeated, longstanding, and complete breach of their covenant with the Creator.

81 Cf. 1 Kings 16:25-26, 30-33.

82 Cf. Lev. 26:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68, which detail the curses of the Mosaic covenant the Lord promised to bring on his people for their disobedience. Tragically, the entire nation was guilty of stubbornly refusing to follow the Lord's will (Dan. 9:11); and because God was just in everything he did (v. 14), he had no other choice but to pour out on his wayward people the judgment solemnly foretold in the Mosaic Law. God had given his people a simple choice: either obey him and be blessed, or disobey him and

suffer terrible curses. Because Israel had chosen the second option, the people were dispersed and Jerusalem fell (Dan. 11:12). These horrible calamities were meant to bring God's people back to him, but they refused to respond (v. 13).

83 Loken (2014) notes that in Mic. 6:16, the Septuagint reads 'nations', rather than 'my people'. In the Hebrew text, the emendation involves the addition of a single letter at the end of the noun, that is, from לְעַמִּי *ammi*, 'my people') to לְעַמִּים *ammim*, 'nations'). Also, the parallelism in the second half of the Hebrew text places a threefold emphasis on the covenant community's experience of 'desolation' (שַׁמָּה) giving way to their pagan neighbour's words of 'derision' (שְׁרֵקָה) and 'reproach' (חֶרְפָּה). The divine decree was that as a result of the chosen people wallowing in a cesspool of depravity, they would be unmercifully taunted by the surrounding heathen nations; cf. Jer. 19:8; 25:9, 18.

84 The following are the representative secondary sources that have influenced the descriptive analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13: Barrett (1968); Beale (2011); Bray (2005); Bruce (1986); Caird (1980); Ciampa and Rosner (2007; 2010); Collins (1999); Ellingworth and Hatton (1993); Erickson (2013); Fee (1987); Fitzmyer (2008); Furnish (2003); Garland (2003); Gill (2002); Godet (1977); Goldingay (2016); Grosheide (1984); Grudem (1994); Guthrie (1981); Hays (1997); Holladay (1991); Kaiser (2008); Keener (1995); Ladd (1997); Lowery (1994); Marshall (2004); Morris (1990; 2001); Ndubuisi (2002); Perkins (2012); Robertson and Plummer (1961); Sampley (2002); Sanders (1966); Schreiner (2013); Thielman (2005); Thiselton (2000); Vang (2014); Verbrugge (2008); Vos (2000); Witherington (1995).

85 Cf. the extended discussion concerning this observation in section 1.0 of the essay.

which is rendered 'gifts', refers to a special ability the Spirit graciously bestows on believers to accomplish God's will.[87] Witherington (1995:264) elucidates that, in chapter 13 the apostle digressed from his main argument. As an example of 'epideictic rhetoric',[88] he temporarily stepped aside from the subject of spiritual gifts to discuss the nature and intent of Christlike 'love'. The latter renders the Greek noun, ἀγάπη (or *agapē*), which generally refers to unselfish and unconditional displays of compassion. Along with the term's verbal counterpart ἀγαπάω,[89] the noun points to affection that is prompted just as much by volition as by feelings.[90]

Garland (2003:603) draws attention to 12:31, which reveals that Christlike love is not a spiritual gift; instead, it establishes the manner in which all Spirit-bestowed endowments should be used. According to Sampley (2002:951), 'love' is a 'way of living' prompted by divine 'grace' and produced by the Spirit. Perhaps for this reason, in Galatians 5:22, godly compassion appears first in the ensemble of 'fruit' produced by the Spirit. Fee (1987:625) clarifies that Paul's objective in 1 Corinthians 13 was to set the issue of these special abilities within an ethical 'framework'. Evidently, he discerned the Corinthians were too enthralled by their spiritual gifts—particularly speaking in tongues—[91] and had lost sight of a more basic concern, namely, demonstrating *agapē*.[92]

'Tongues' in 12:10, 28, and 30 could be a reference to human languages or dialects unknown to the person speaking them.[93] A

86 As with Mic. 6, so too an examination of the academic literature indicates there is no scholarly consensus regarding the literary structure of 1 Cor. 13. The author considers the basic demarcation appearing here to be a reasonable and serviceable approach for the purposes of this study. It is also possible to include 12:31 and 14:1 as transitional verses leading into and out of (respectively) Paul's excursus on Christlike love. Also, cf. fn 97 regarding chap. 13 being categorised as an encomium in its literary composition.

87 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:4; Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

88 Keener (1995:107) explains that 'epideictic rhetoric' was an oratorical style involving the use of 'praise or blame'. One subcategory entailed the use of 'encomium', that is, 'praise of a person or subject' or even a specific 'virtue'; cf. fn 97.

89 Cf. fn 15. Thiselton (2000:1035) assesses that *agapē* signifies a 'stance or attitude' that is demonstrated in 'acts of will' prompted by a 'regard, respect, and concern for the welfare' of others. *Agapē* is exemplified at Calvary, where the Messiah sacrificially died to atone for the sins of humankind.

90 Cf. Mangum (2014); Schneider (1990); Stauffer (1964).

91 The Greek noun γλῶσσα, which is rendered 'tongues', appears 19 times in 1 Cor. 12-14, of which 15 are in chapter 14 cf. Silva (2014).

92 Cf. 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:10, 28; 14:1-40.

93 Cf. Acts 2:1-12; Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Swanson (1997).

second option, based on a consideration of 13:1, is that 'tongues' denotes some form of enraptured utterance or celestial dialogue voiced in worship, whether corporate or private.[94] A third alternative is that Paul was speaking in exaggerated terms to include every conceivable type of speech. In any case, it seems these forms of communication are unintelligible to both the speaker and the hearers, that is, unless they have the gift of interpretation and are directed to God as prayer or praise.[95]

Robertson and Plummer (1961:285) articulate a longstanding view that chapter 13 is a 'psalm in praise of love'. Ndubuisi (2002:134) echoes this sentiment by referring to the passage as a 'poetic rhapsody'.[96] Barrett (1968:299) adds that the passage has a 'rhythmical' quality, making it according to Godet (1977:662) 'lyrical' in 'tone' and powerful in content.[97] Fee (1987:626), however, issues a useful corrective by asserting that only the first three verses 'fit a poetic mold'. He regards the majority of the chapter to be an example of 'ethical instruction' having an exhortative or 'parenetic thrust' (627). *Agapē*, then, is not a sentimental abstraction; rather, as epitomized in the Messiah at Calvary,[98] *agapē* incarnates and actualizes the *charismata*.[99]

Because chapter 13 stands well on its own, one view is that an unidentified early Christian writer (or team of writers) composed it, and Paul later inserted it in this letter. Adherents think the apostle used transitional clauses in 12:31 and 14:1 to help chapter 13 better fit into its present context. In contrast, a second more likely option is that Paul composed this passage at the same time he wrote the rest of the letter. Advocates maintain that the composition fits too closely with what appears before and after to be a work created at an earlier time.

In verse 1, Paul named certain representative gifts and actions, and then indicated how they are worthless unless undergirded by and utilized in love. The first item, as noted above, was the special endowment of tongues-speaking, which his readers most highly prized. Despite this, as the apostle declared in reference to himself, if he was completely devoid of Christlike compassion, his speech would have been a useless, infuriating noise, like that produced in a chaotic, heathen ritual or theatrical performance from a deafening 'gong' or a rattling 'cymbal'.[100]

Paul next referred to three other representative spiritual gifts: 'prophecy' (v. 2), 'knowledge,' and 'faith'.[101] 'Prophecy' refers to the proclamation of revelations from God, including predictions of future events.[102] One possibility is that 'knowledge' denotes information received through supernatural means in order to fathom the profound mysteries of the Christian faith.[103] A second

94 Cf. Pss 103:20; 148:2; T. Job 48:3; 49:2; 50:2; 4Q400; 4Q401; 4Q403; Dautzenberg (1990) points out that, 'on the basis of the phrase λαλεῖν γλώσσῃ, this spiritual gift is called '*glossolalia*'. Behm (1964) clarifies that this Greek term is not used in the New Testament.

95 Cf. 1 Cor. 14:2, 14–16.

96 Gill (2002:167) draws attention to the irony that Paul's soliloquy on 'love' was addressed to residents of a 'city whose patron deity' was 'Aphrodite, the goddess of love'. The deity's shrine was located on the 'Acrocorinth', which due to its strategic, elevated location offered a panoramic view of the city (103).

97 Sampley (2002:951) considers the genre of 1 Cor. 13 to be an 'encomium' or a paean to *agapē* (cf. fn 88). Admittedly, as Garland (2003:606) stresses, this is not a consensus view among specialists. For instance, Lund (1931:276) maintains the chapter is a 'chiasmus' in its 'disposition'. Regardless, if Paul used the Greco-Roman 'rhetorical device' (Sampley 2002:951) known as 'encomium' to sequence his eulogy, the following are possibly its main elements:
(1) a 'prologue' (vv. 1-3);
(2) a 'reference to actions as a clue to character' (i.e. *ethos*; vv. 4–7);
(3) a 'comparison and contrast with other virtues' (vv. 8–12); and,
(4) an epilogue containing an 'appeal for emulation' (v. 13). For a detailed analysis of this chapter as an example of encomium, cf. Sigountos (1994); Smit (1991).

98 Cf. John 3:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:7–12.

99 Cf. Holladay (1991:98) for a consideration of Paul's use of 'self-referential language' and its Greco-Roman 'parenetic function' in 1 Cor. 13. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:624) equivocate that, in advancing a crucicentric perspective, the apostle was 'not speaking of his actual actions, gifts, or attributes, but of what his condition would be under such hypothetical conditions'. Collins (1999:479), however, indicates that Paul 'enjoyed' such *charismata* as 'tongues' (12:10), 'prophecy',

option is that 'knowledge' points to the effective application of biblical teaching in people's lives.[104] While all Christians have saving 'faith', the reference here is to the display of amazing trust in God regardless of the circumstances.[105]

Paul envisioned being able to deliver spectacular messages from God. A second possibility involved the apostle having insight into all sorts of divine secrets and enigmatic truths. A third scenario involved him manifesting such strong belief that he could dislodge 'mountains' (v. 2) from their foundations.[106] Admittedly, from a human standpoint, these remarkable abilities would be impressive; yet, Paul argued that in the absence of Christlike love, he was 'nothing'.[107] From the Creator's standpoint, the apostle would be a metaphysical cipher. After all, if no equity, kindness, and humility were present, there likewise would be no efficacy to the gifted individual's prodigious actions.

In verse 3, Paul referred to two pious initiatives he might undertake. The first of these involved giving whatever he owned to the indigent. Scripture is replete with admonitions to help those who lack what they need materially. The manuscript evidence is divided concerning the second action Paul listed. Brannon (2014) summarizes the two prevailing options as follows: (1) 'in order that I will be burned';[108] and, (2) 'in order that I may boast'.[109] Presumably, the first reading denotes martyrdom by exposure to flames; yet, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, this form of execution was hardly known for either Jews or Christians. Accordingly, there is some doubt about whether this is the original biblical text and meaning.

Concerning the second reading, Paul's intended meaning is less obvious. One option is that he was referring to delivering up his body to slavery or death and boasting in the Lord for doing so. Another option is that he was talking about serving others without regard for his own welfare and receiving acclaim for such an altruistic deed. In either case, the apostle's point remains the same. He taught that regardless of the nature of the pious acts, if he did not have Christlike love, he would be spiritually bankrupt. Expressed differently, he would not gain anything through what he sacrificed, no matter how laudable the offering. The absence of

'knowledge' (v. 8), and 'faith' (v. 9). Holladay (1991:91) advances the discourse by arguing that Paul's intentional 'choice of language' throughout the passage 'shows how thoroughly' his 'apostolic understanding has been transformed by his theology of the cross'. Consequently, *agapē*, not hubris, is the 'primal impulse motivating his apostolic behaviour' (92).

100 Devotees of Cybele (the mother of the gods) and Dionysius (the god of wine) used huge brass cymbals in their pagan rituals; cf. Aniol (2016); Porter (2000); Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998).

101 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10.

102 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is προφητεία; cf. Friedrich (1964); Schnider (1990); Silva (2014).

103 'Mysteries' (1 Cor. 13:2) renders the Greek noun μυστήριον. It generally denotes what is hidden or secret. For Paul, a 'mystery' was a deep theological truth that previously was concealed but had now been revealed through the Messiah; cf. Dan. 2:19-23, 28; 4:9; 1 En. 41:1; 52:2; 61:5; 63:3; 68:5; 71:4; Bornkamm (1964); Krämer (1990); Mangum (2014).

104 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is γνῶσις; cf. Bultmann (1964c); Louw and Nida (1989); Schmithals (1990).

105 The Greek noun used in 1 Cor. 13:2 is πίστις; cf. Barth (1990); Danker (2000); Spicq (1994).

106 Cf. Isa. 54:10; Matt. 17:19-20; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 17:6.

107 In 1 Corinthians 13:2, Paul used the Greek adjective οὐθείς, which is translated 'nothing'; cf. Louw and Nida (1989); Müller (1990); Swanson (1997).

108 The Greek verb in this textual reading of 1 Cor. 13:3 is καυθησομαι; cf. KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV; GNT; CEV.

109 The Greek verb in this textual reading of 1 Cor. 13:3 is καυχήσωμαι; cf. NRSV, NET, NIV, CSB, NLT. The change between καυθησομαι and καυχήσωμαι involves only two letters, namely, θ to χ and ο to ω; cf. Metzger (2005:497-8).

equity, kindness, and humility would rob such Christian service of its eternal value.[110]

In verses 1–3, Paul spoke autobiographically about his own ministry experience; next, as Ciampa and Rosner (2010:640) note, in verses 4–7, the apostle personified *agapē* for his readers. Collins (1999:473) surmises that, from a literary perspective, this section is the 'theological core' of the chapter. Fitzmyer (2008:495) clarifies that Paul's intent was to demonstrate that 'love is not a mere feeling'; just as importantly, *agapē* 'evokes a mode of action'. Paul advanced his argument by using both positive and negative terms to describe godly compassion. Most likely, the apostle chose his words carefully to implicitly censure errors committed by the Corinthians.

Paul began with the Greek verb rendered 'patient', which denotes a forbearing spirit,[111] whereas the verb translated 'kind' points to acts of benevolence.[112] In a manner of speaking, believers are to have a long fuse to their temper. Similarly, they must not retaliate when wronged; instead, they are to remain steadfast in spirit, consistently responding to others in a gracious and considerate manner.

After describing godly compassion using two positive terms, Paul next listed a series of expressions to indicate what love is not and does not do. The apostle led off with the Greek verb rendered 'envy', which signifies being enflamed with jealousy.[113] Christians are not to resent what others are or have, nor wish to seize those things for themselves. The verb translated 'boast' refers to those who brag about themselves, especially by using flashy rhetorical skills.[114] Believers should never gloat over their own achievements. The verb rendered 'proud' literally means 'to puff up'.[115] The idea is that Jesus' followers must not be inflated with arrogance.

The Greek verb translated 'rude' (v. 5) means to act in a despicable or disgraceful manner toward others, including, as Vang (2014:182) proposes, 'sexually lewd behavior'.[116] Christians were prohibited from being churlish, regardless of the social setting. The reference to 'self-seeking' points to an egotistical mindset that borders on narcissism.[117] Believers were not to be exclusively concerned with getting their own way or demanding what was best for them.

The verb rendered 'easily incensed' denotes an irritable disposition that becomes livid at the slightest inconvenience.[118] Jesus' followers were to resist the temptation of being provoked to rage by what others said or did. The verb translated 'resentful' brings to mind individuals who scrupulously maintained an inventory of

110 Thiselton (2000:1043) draws attention to the 'concept or device' known as 'defamiliarization'. It involves 'rereading what had appeared familiar or ordinary' within an anomalous frame of reference, namely, one that seems peculiar or abnormal. The intent is to 'shock' readers into reassessing an idea or practice. Arguably, both Micah 6:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:3 function 'in this way' by proposing what is outlandish (e.g. offering one's firstborn and sacrificing one's body, respectively). One rhetorical outcome is that equity, kindness, and humility receive greater prominence and serious consideration as worthwhile, alternative options. For a detailed consideration of defamiliarization, cf. Thiselton (1992:117-20).

111 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is μακροθυμέω; cf. Hollander (1990); Horst (1964); Silva (2014).

112 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is χρηστεύομαι; cf. Danker (2000); Spicq (1994); Weiss (1964).

113 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is ζηλόω; cf. Louw and Nida 1989); Popkes (1990); Stumpff (1964).

114 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is περπερεύομαι; cf. Braun (1964); Danker (2000); Swanson (2001).

115 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:4 is φυσιόω; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Mangum (2014).

116 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is ἀσχημονέω; cf. 5:1-2; 7:36; Fiedler (1990); Silva (2014); Swanson (2001).

117 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:5 is ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς; cf. Danker (2000); Greeven (1964); Larson (1990).

118 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is παροξύνω; cf. Louw and Nida 1989); Seeseman (1964); Swanson (2001).

how others allegedly harmed them.[119] God's children should not obsess over offences (whether real or perceived) and keep a scorecard of how many times others hurt them.

'Rejoice in unrighteous' (v. 6) could also be translated 'be glad about injustice'.[120] Believers were never to luxuriate in the cesspool of iniquity; instead, promoting equity, kindness, and humility necessitated taking pleasure in God's 'truth', especially as it was revealed in the Gospel.[121] Accordingly, Christians were to be filled with joy when others advocated for what was ethical and equitable in God's eyes. Some people seemed to take a perverse delight in evil. They were elated when someone succeeded in lying, cheating, or stealing; yet, that was not to be the way of cross-bearing discipleship. Jesus' followers were neither to promote sin nor encourage its practitioners; rather, God's children were to cheer on goodness, justice, and veracity.[122]

Verse 7 closes Paul's paragraph with four examples of what godly compassion always did. In this way, as Collins (1999:482) observes, the apostle delineated the essence of 'authentic Christian existence'. Together, these illustrations indicated that, when planted in the soil of equity, kindness, and humility, believers had the God-given strength to face whatever trials came their way. For instance, the statement that love 'bears all things' refers to Jesus' followers braving troubles and maltreatment for the sake of the Gospel.[123] A less likely rendering is that love 'always protects', suggesting that Christians should strive to keep others from evil.[124]

The translation '[love] believes all things' is preferred over 'always trusts'.[125] This does not imply, as Morris (2001:182) points out, the notion of being 'gullible';[126] rather, the idea is that Jesus' followers should have such faith that they search for what is finest in people and commend what is best about them. Love 'hopes all things' indicates there does not have to be any limit to the believers' confidence in God's promises or certitude in his ability to fulfil them.[127] 'Endures all things' signifies that when tragedy strikes, godly compassion refuses to collapse or quit; instead, it has the

119 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:5 is λογίζομαι; cf. Bartsch (1990); Heidland (1964); Silva (2014).

120 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:6 is χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ. The verb χαίρω emphasizes taking delight in something; cf. Berger (1990); Conzelmann (1964); Mangum (2014). In this verse, the prohibition is against raving about malfeasance, as pointed out by the usage of the noun ἀδικίᾳ; cf. Danker (2000); Limbeck (1990); Schrenk (1964).

121 The Greek noun in 1 Cor. 13:6 is ἀλήθεια; cf. Bultmann (1964a); Hübner (1990a); Spicq (1994). Köstenberger (2009:437-8) explains that in the first century AD, there were differing perspectives on the nature of 'truth'. To illustrate, in 'Greek philosophy', the notion of 'truth' was linked to a precise way of making sense of 'reality'. Likewise, the Romans associated 'truth' with a 'factual' depiction of phenomenon in nature and activity among people. In the Hebrew literature—both the Old Testament and the writings of Second Temple Judaism—'truth' was equated with 'God's faithfulness to his covenant'. The Gospels carry the concept further, in which Jesus of Nazareth is declared to be truth incarnate. Put differently, Jesus does not just bear witness to the truth, but is the truth in his very person. Moreover, Jesus' life, ministry, and atoning sacrifice are the superlative manifestations of God's commitment to fulfil His redemptive promises. 'Truth', then, is more than factually accurate, propositional statements. 'Truth' is a 'personal', 'relational', and ontological / existential reality that has its source, movement, and culmination in the Messiah; cf. John 1:14-18; 8:31-32; 14:6; 17:3.

122 Collins (1999:481) indicates that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 12:6 makes the 'biblical notion of justice' implicit in the meaning of the Greek noun, *agapē*. Hence, the term connotes both 'right relationships with God and other people'.

123 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:7 rendered 'bears' is στέγω; cf. Kasch (1964); Louw and Nida (1989);

124 Cf. the NIV. The CEV reads, 'love is always supportive'. In contrast, the GNT and NLT both read, 'Love never gives up'.

125 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα πιστεύει; cf. fn 82.

126 Ciampa and Rosner (2010:650) indicates that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 12:7 'has nothing to do with a naïve optimism'. Similarly, Hays (1997:228) remarks that 'love does not make its adherents into foolish Pollyannas'.

127 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα ἐλπίζει; cf. Bultmann (1964b); Mayer (1990); Silva (2014).

fortitude to persist through whatever hardships it encounters in life.[128] Put differently, the Spirit enables God's children to remain strong to the end of the ordeal.

Next, Paul revealed that unlike spiritual gifts, Christlike 'love' (v. 8) would never at any time[129] come to an end.[130] While one day even the most spectacular abilities would become defunct, the opposite was true of godly compassion. Expressed differently, even though special endowments would pass from the scene, such *agapē* -inspired virtues as promoting equity, kindness, and humility would remain valid and essential. In keeping with Old Testament revelation,[131] the apostle declared that 'prophecies' would be discontinued; similarly, 'tongues' would terminate; likewise, 'knowledge' would be set aside.[132]

Paul was contrasting two eschatological eras of human existence—an earlier one in which the spiritual gifts were needed and a later one when the need for them would expire. That said, interpreters differ over the time scheme the apostle had in mind. One view is that the first period extended between Pentecost and the completion of the New Testament (or the close of the apostolic age and the maturation of the church), with the second period occurring after that. Another more exegetically viable option is that the first period is the time between Jesus' first and second comings (or the interval between when individual believers live and die), with the second period commencing thereafter.[133]

In verses 9 and 10, Paul explained that the difference between the first and second eras of redemptive history is like the distinction between the partial and the complete, or between the imperfect and the perfect. For instance, the spiritual gifts of knowledge and prophecy put believers in touch with God only in a fragmentary and limited way; yet, in the later eschatological period, Christians would eternally exist in full and perfect fellowship with the Creator.[134]

Next, in verse 11, Paul illustrated his meaning by drawing an analogy involving childhood and adulthood. He said, in reference to

128 The Greek phrase in 1 Cor. 13:7 is πάντα ὑπομένει; cf. Danker (2000); Hauck (1964); Radl (1990).

129 In 1 Cor. 13:8, Paul used the strong temporal adverb οὐδέποτε.

130 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:8 is πίπτω, which literally means to 'stumble', 'falter', or 'fall down' and conveys the ideas of total collapse, defeat, or failure; cf. Michaels (1964); Palzkill (1990); Silva (2014). The sense of οὐδέποτε πίπτει is expressed in differing ways by various translations, as follows: 'never ends' (ESV, NET, CSB); 'never fails' (NKJV, NASB, NIV, CEV); 'last forever' (NLT); and, 'is eternal' (GNT).

131 Cf. Isa. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Zech. 13:3-6.

132 In 1 Cor. 13:8, the Greek verb καταργέω is used in reference to 'prophecies' and 'knowledge', which are the first and third terms in the triad. The second of the three, 'tongues', is paired with the verb παύω. Most likely, Paul used this rhetorical approach to draw particular attention to tongues-speaking, especially since the Corinthians had excessively stressed its perceived value. In brief, even what they so highly prized would cease to be uttered. For καταργέω, there is the dual sense of being not only inoperative, but also invalidated; cf. Delling (1964a); Hübner (1990b); Silva (2014). For παύω, the nuance is a bit stronger, namely, that of being terminated; cf. Danker (2000); Louw and Nida (1989); Schneider (1990b).

133 For an objective analysis and refutation of the cessationist polemic against the miraculous *charismata*, cf. Grudem (1994:1031-46). He deduces that all the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues and prophesying, 'continue to exist' and are 'useful for the church, throughout the church age, including today, and right up to the day when Christ returns'.

134 As in 1 Cor. 13:8, the special endowments of knowledge and prophecy are paired in verse 9 through the use of the Greek noun μέρος. The term refers to a smaller portion or share in relationship to a larger whole; cf. Nebe (1990); Schnider (1964); Swanson (2001). Intriguingly, tongues-speaking does not appear either here or in verse 10. Once more μέρος is mentioned, but this time as the antithesis of the adjective τέλειος. The term denotes what is mature, complete, and perfect; cf. Delling (1964b); Hübner (1990d); Silva (2014). Its arrival results in the dissolution of what is immature, incomplete, and imperfect. As in verse 8, the Greek verb καταργέω is used in verse 10 with respect to the spiritual endowments of prophesying and knowing.

himself, that when he was a 'child',[135] he 'talked',[136] 'thought',[137] and 'reasoned'[138] as a child;[139] yet, now that the apostle was an adult, he had put that immature state behind him.[140] Childhood is like the first period, and childlike ways are comparable to spiritual gifts. Just as naïve and juvenile behaviour is prototypical for a young person, so spiritual gifts are paradigmatic for believers in the first period; but then (to follow the analogy further), adulthood is like the second period of redemptive history. At that time, Jesus' followers would set aside their special abilities, since these would no longer be suitable and necessary.

In verse 12, Paul used an analogy involving a 'mirror'.[141] In his day, this would have been a flat piece of highly-polished silver or bronze attached to a handle. As Robertson and Plummer (1961:298) point out, the image this metal disc reflected would be quite inferior to the mirrors in use today. In a spiritual sense, the glimpse of God that believers received in the first eschatological period, as he was made known through the exercise of their Spirit-given endowments, was comparable to the imprecise and obscure image produced by a mirror;[142] however, in the second period of redemptive history, the Christians' vision of God would not be mediated by their *charismata*, for their encounter with the Creator would be 'face to face'. This phrase signifies it would be direct, intimate, and pristine in nature.[144]

Specialists disagree over Paul's exact meaning in verse 12. For instance, was he saying that the vision obtained using a mirror was either blurry or reflected? More to the point, do the believers' special abilities give them a flawed impression of who God is, or do these endowments leave Christians with an indirect sense? Either way, the contrast between the believers' vision of God (involving their spiritual gifts) in the first eschatological period and their vision of him (apart from their *charismata*) in the later era of redemptive history still stands.

Next, Paul switched from the language of sight to that of knowledge. He explained that he (like all believers in the first

135 The Green noun in 1 Cor. 13:11 is νήπιος, which denotes a young person around 3 or 4 years of age; cf. Bertram (1964a); Légasse (1990); Louw and Nida (1989).

136 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is λαλέω, which is a general term denoting all types of human utterance; cf. Hübner (1990c); Mangum (2014); Swanson (2001).

137 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is φρονέω, which refers to a mental attitude or cognitive disposition; cf. Bertram (1964b); Paulsen (1990); Silva (2014).

138 The Greek verb in 1 Cor. 13:11 is λογίζομαι (cf. v. 5; fn 119). In v. 11, the term denotes making inferences, categorizing information, and considering alternative options; cf. Bartsch (1990); Heidland (1964); Silva (2014).

139 In 1 Cor. 13:11, the activities of speaking, formulating ideas, and making decisions seem roughly analogous to the three Spirit-given special abilities mentioned in verse 8.

140 The believers in Corinth had misunderstood the place and purpose of speaking in tongues. So, in 1 Cor. 14:20, Paul told them to no longer be infantile in their outlook and reasoning; instead, they needed a more mature understanding of spiritual gifts and especially of *glossolalia*. The apostle stated that when it came to depravity and malice, childlike ignorance was desirable. The situation was far different, though, concerning spiritual gifts. For this reason, he urged his readers to be discerning, not myopic, about the *charismata*. In brief, they were to be Christocentric, not egocentric, in their mindset.

141 The Greek noun in 1 Cor. 13:12 is ἔσοπτρον; cf. Danker (2000); Kittel (1964b); Spicq (1994).

142 The Greek noun αἴνιγμα is expressed in differing ways by various translations, as follows: 'darkly' (KJV); 'dimly' (NKJV, NASB, ESV); 'indirectly' (NET, Lexham); 'only a reflection' (NIV, CSB); 'imperfectly' (NLT); 'like a cloudy picture' (CEV); and, 'like a dim image' (GNT). The term refers to what is seemingly inscrutable or enigmatic; cf. Kittel (1964a); Louw and Nida (1989); Silva (2014).

143 In 1 Cor. 13:12, the Greek phrase is πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον. Ciampa and Rosner (2007:739; cf. 2010:658-10) see an allusion here to Numbers 12:6-8. On the one hand, 'other prophets receive revelation through visions and dreams' (cf. Joel 2:28); on the other hand, Moses encounters the Creator in an unfiltered and unrestricted manner (cf. Deut. 34:10; Isa. 40:5; Lev Rab 1:14).

144 As Fitzmyer (2008:500) observes, this face-to-face encounter with the Creator is sometimes referred as the 'beatific vision' or in Latin *visio beatifica*; cf. Gen. 32:30; Num. 12:8; 1 John 3:2.

eschatological period) was aware of God only partially and incompletely.[145] Even so, the apostle looked forward to the upcoming era of redemptive history when he would recognize God fully and completely.[146] To be sure, as Beale (2011:932) clarifies, Paul was not suggesting that human beings would ever have knowledge equalling that of the Creator. After all, he is not limited, as believers are, by the conditions of the first era. Indeed, the Lord already knew Paul (and all other believers) with infinite perfection.

Finally, Paul revealed that the trio of 'faith, hope, and love' (v. 13) eternally abided for the benefit of God's children.[147] In this regard, the threesome sharply contrasted with the triad of *charismata* listed in verse 8. Specifically, the first triplet would endure throughout the endless ages to come, while the second triplet would expire at the terminus of the present era. Moreover, the three virtues listed in verse 13 summed up the Christian life. 'Faith' denoted trust in the Saviour and commitment to his teachings.[148] 'Hope' signified an unshakable confidence that the Son would ultimately fulfil the Father's promises.[149] Paul's preceding explanation articulated what 'love' entailed. Of all the godly virtues, 14:1 reveals that 'love' was the *summum bonum*,[150] which, as 16:14 discloses, undergirded every human endeavour.

An alternative view is that Paul included 'faith' and 'hope' in 13:13 to remind his readers that Christlike 'love' was for now, just as were the other two virtues; yet, when the apostle went on to say that the 'greatest of these is love', he signalled that godly compassion—which promoted equity, kindness, and humility—was superior to faith and hope, especially since *agapē* lasted forever. In contrast, faith and hope (like the spiritual gifts) were transitory, being only for the present era.[151] According to this view, faith was superfluous in eternity because then believers would dwell in God's immediate presence. Likewise, hope was unnecessary in the upcoming eschatological age, for then the Creator's redemptive promises would be fulfilled.

4. A Comparative Analysis of Micah 6:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Section 1 of this essay maintains that promoting equity, kindness, and humility are a major emphasis in both the Old and New Testaments. In this regard, Leviticus 19:18 is comparable to a hinge around which other portions of the Hebrew sacred writings (or Tanakh) and the Christian New Testament pivoted. A brief consideration of selected passages from the Pentateuch, prophetic

145 In 1 Cor. 13:12, 'know' renders the Greek verb γινώσκω, which denotes experiential perception and understanding (i.e. involving the use of one's senses, such as seeing, hearing, and so on); cf. fn 104; Bultmann (1964c); Louw and Nida (1989); Schmithals (1990).

146 In 1 Cor. 13:12, 'know fully' translates the Greek verb ἐπιγινώσκω. Here the term has an intensive force and refers to cognition that is distinguished by phenomenal acuity; cf. Luke 24:16, 31; Acts 12:14; Rom. 1:32; 2 Cor. 6:9; Hackenberg (1990); Mangum (2014); Silva (2014).

147 For examples of the triad being used elsewhere in the New Testament, cf. Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:3-8; Heb. 6:10-12.

148 Cf. fn 105.

149 Cf. fn 126.

150 Latin for the 'the highest goal' or 'greatest good'; cf. fn 62. Furnish (2003:99) affirms the 'necessity of love' by pointing out how 'essential' it is 'for human flourishing', as well as being 'definitive for human existence'. This explains why Godet (1977:691) described 'charity' as the 'way *par excellence*', and why Hays (1997:221) designates 'love' as the '*sine qua non* of the Christian life'.

151 Cf. Rom. 8:24; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1.

writings, Gospels, and apostolic letters confirms this observation. Such interrelated activities as championing the cause of the indigent, serving others in a deferential and sacrificial manner, and endeavouring to be people of integrity are aptly encapsulated in the directive to show godly compassion to others, regardless of whether they are friend or foe.

Sections 2 and 3 respectively, provide a descriptive analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The reason for doing so is that these two seminal texts, in their distinctive ways, showcase the supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility. The latter is the major claim of the essay. This emphasis is further developed in the present section by engaging in a comparative analysis of these two passages. The envisioned intertextual dialogue involves deliberating and articulating the highlights arising from the preceding examination of Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13.

To begin, both passages were shaped by the distinctive historical contexts in which they were written. For instance, Micah lived at a time when God's people championed iniquity. One especially atrocious outrage involved the wicked rich taking advantage of the destitute. In Paul's day, self-promotion among the believers at Corinth was lauded as a virtue rather than labelled a vice. One noteworthy transgression entailed an elitist group touting the more dramatic *charismata*, while at the same time either ignoring or demeaning other believers whom the Spirit gifted in different, less overt ways.

Both Micah and Paul witnessed how narcissistic tendencies among their peers were shredding the social fabric of their respective faith communities. God wanted his children to treat each other in a charitable way; yet, an objective analysis of the contexts involving the prophet and the apostle indicates that groups of people were routinely handled in an inhumane manner. The evidence in each case revealed that the fundamental directive recorded in Leviticus 19:18 was being transgressed.

The presence of inequity, selfishness, and hubris ran counter to the ways in which the Creator had blessed his people throughout redemptive history. His unmerited favour included rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, as well as gifting them with capable civil and religious leaders to guide them successfully in their journey to the promised land. Centuries later, the premier display of the Lord's mercy involved the incarnation of the Son, whose sacrificial death at Calvary made it possible for believing sinners to receive the divine gift of salvation.[152]

152 Cf. Rom. 5:8; 8:37; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2.

Regardless of whether it was the faith community in the time of Micah or Paul, the members of each had descended to a pathetic spiritual state. In each instance, it would be absurd for the Lord's children to imagine that they could rehabilitate their respective situations. Neither extreme displays of sacrifice nor lofty demonstrations of acclaimed abilities were sufficient. Only the Creator could empower the members of his covenant community to live in a way that was characterized by godly compassion.

The preceding truth is exemplified in both Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13. For instance, Micah 6:8 draws attention to the importance of God's children being characterized by justice, lovingkindness, and modesty. These virtues are the same ones that believers today ought to cultivate. Indeed, as 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 indicates, God still expects is people to treat others with Christlike love and to live in devotion to him. On the one hand, there is never any place for covetousness, egotism, demeaning others, belligerency, and degeneracy; on the other hand, there is abundant room for equity, kindness, and humility to take root and thrive in the soil of the Creator's vineyard.

Admittedly, during the interim between Jesus' first and second advents, Christians fall short of displaying a forbearing spirit, responding in a charitable manner to antagonists, and spreading the joy of the gospel to others in word and deed. Even so, the priority of cross-bearing discipleship necessitates such a countercultural response. In truth, Christlike love is the catalyst for doing so. When Micah 6 and 1 Corinthians 13 are objectively considered, the irrefutable deduction is that adversity can never extinguish godly compassion, for it always remains supportive, hopeful, and loyal. It is the premier virtue that enables equity, kindness, and humility to thrive in the present and endure throughout eternity in the glorious presence of the everlasting Creator.

5. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a descriptive and comparative analysis of Micah 6:1–16 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility is the major claim linked to this endeavour. It is conceded that the respective historical contexts and faith communities for each passage are different; nonetheless, the concerns and emphases are correspondent. In each case, the Creator rejects external forms of religiosity and affirms the supreme importance of demonstrating godly compassion.

Concerning Micah 6, the Lord disputed with his people over whether he had somehow wronged them. In reality, it was they who had aggrieved him by violating the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. This included their disregard for the many ways God had blessed them, along with their contemptuous treatment of one another. The solution was for them to jettison the preceding vices and replace them with rectitude, faithfulness, and meekness. There was no offering people could make that would serve as an adequate or acceptable substitute.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's readers had succumbed to a comparable misunderstanding. They deluded themselves into thinking that the Creator would extol their ability to speak with rhetorical flare, probe the deepest conundrums of the universe, and flame out as a sacrifice to God; yet, none of these antics mattered to the Lord, especially when Christlike love was missing. Conversely, when believers treated others in a humane, considerate, and deferential manner, they fulfilled the essence of the Mosaic covenant, as expressed in Leviticus 19:18.

The supreme importance of promoting equity, kindness, and humility is seen in Jesus' reiterating their value to the hypocritical religious leaders of his day.[153] Accordingly, behaving in a just manner calls for believers doing God's will. This entails adoring him with every aspect of their being and caring for their neighbours as much as they do for themselves. Also, Christians are resolved, with God's help, to advance the cause of justice. This includes revering him, honouring their commitments to him and others, and defending the rights of the innocent.

153 Cf. Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42.

To prize mercy involves more than treating others in a detached, neutral way. It signifies unfailing compassion, which is a key attribute of God, who abounds in love.[154] Moreover, the Lord's type of mercy shows empathy to the undeserving, offers spiritual resources to those who are less fortunate, donates to charitable causes, and actively shares with others in need. Relating to God in a humble way means recognizing that his children have sinned and are only saved by his grace. Finally, submission to the Creator involves fellowship, namely, spending time with him and devoting one's motives, goals, and integrity to fulfil his will and thereby glorify his name.

154 Cf. Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps 103:8; 1 John 4:8.

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Eschatology in Philemon: An Analysis of 'ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν' for a Southern African Context

Batanayi I. Manyika and Kevin G. Smith

Abstract

First-century hospitality customs can provide a window through which ancient social identity is observed. When these symbols are analysed against the backdrop of implied eschatology in Philemon, there emerges a composite picture that interweaves theological discourse with first-century cultural norms. Using social-scientific criticism, this paper remaps Philemon's socio-cultural world, centred on the theme of hospitality. Paul's rhetorical use of this cultural norm in relation to implied eschatology in the apostolic Parousia, is explicated within Philemon's and Onesimus' identity struggles. The implicit change of status for Onesimus, and the honour garnered, forms a departure point for Southern Africa as implications of what was exclusively reserved for social equals are appropriated in a context gripped by chronic social disparity. In this appropriation, unjust legacies are evaluated with an aim of reimagining a context built on equity and justice.

Keywords
Hospitality
Social-scientific Criticism
Masters and Slaves
Patronage and Clientism

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1. Introduction

Southern Africa,[2] like the ancient Mediterranean world, is a heavily stratified society with realties that trace anchorage back to imperial and colonial enterprises. It is, therefore, a central claim of this essay that a correlative reading of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in *Philemon*, can provide socially attentive theological answers to a context engulfed by polyvalent social dislocation. Using Philemon's and Onesimus's identity transformation, this correlative reading aims to underscore the function of hospitality in both the ancient household and the typical Southern African home. Through an investigation of the *apostolic parousia,* matters of social identity, social identity complexity, and the potential for upward social mobility are underscored and described, using an overarching social-scientific hermeneutic. From this methodological framework, a fraction of *Philemon's*[3] nuance is appropriated in a context currently asking ancient and contemporary questions from a text rich in themes of transformation, redemption, and reconciliation.

2 The term *Southern Africa* is preferred because (a) the authors are nationals of two Southern African countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa, respectively; (b) the issues that this paper will address, are not exclusive to a single country in the region. Rather, they affect the region with variable weighting; and; (c) the region is, arguably, a bloc populous with an economy that relies on shared socio-cultural phenomena. Examples of such phenomena include, labour, borders, languages, and people groups.

3 We distinguish the person of Philemon from the epistle, by italicising the latter.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. A brief definition of social-scientific criticism

Social-scientific criticism is a hermeneutical approach that presupposes texts as units of meaningful discourse (Van Eck 2009:5). Elliot (1993:7) defines it as 'that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and the cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilizations of the perspectives, theory models, and research of the social sciences.' While social-scientific criticism is situated within the broad universe of hermeneutics and is characterised by an investigation of the world behind the text, it remains an exegetical approach rooted in the social-sciences and cultural anthropology. It employs a 'thick description', a method made popular by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz,[4] in its socially attentive exegesis of the biblical text (Barton 1993:894; Taylor 1995:128). This approach stands in contrast to *social history*, which does not consider social interpretive models credible tools for the study of the first-century Mediterranean world. Where *social-scientific criticism* traces its definition from models advanced by Malina (1993), Neyrey (1990), and Elliot (1993), *social history* launches from the correlative approaches stemming from Meeks (1983) and Theissen (1982). 'Social historians' regard models to be anachronistic, an imposition on first-century texts, and too general in composition to account for the variegated contexts and customs from whence the Bible emerges. Wright (2015: 239–240) comments: 'the systematization

4 Geertz, C.,1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*; New York: Basic Books. See chapter 1, which is entitled 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.' Perhaps the following statement is axiomatic and quintessentially definitive of Geertz's central theory, 'Whatever the ultimate sources of faith of a man or group of men may or may not be, it is indisputable that it is sustained in this world by symbolic forms and social arrangements.' It is from Geertz's 1973 publication that Wayne Meeks' (1983) monumental *The First Urban Christians* drew some of its insights, heralding the rise in socially attentive interpretations of the Bible.

of such analogies into 'models' is always in danger of squeezing out the possibility of radical innovation. And all the signs indicate that the first Christians were, in some respects at least, radical innovators.'

In response to this indictment, Esler (1995:4) has long upheld that, '[m]odels are heuristic tools, not ontological statements. … they are either useful or not, and it is meaningless to ask whether they are "true" or "false."' He continues, 'we all use models in our work; the only question is whether or not we acknowledge them and bring them out into the open for critical scrutiny.' With such binary between social interpretations of the Bible and social historical exegesis, 'social historians' such as Horrell (2009) have gone as far as dismissing the continued usefulness of social-scientific criticism, because they consider it difficult to delineate. This is based on a perception that the method has been extensively assimilated into the 'mainstream' of biblical studies. Horrell (2009:17) posits:

> Since the kinds of questions and approaches introduced by the pioneers of social-scientific criticism have spread into the mainstream of the discipline, it is impossible to draw any boundary between what does and does not count as social-scientific work—just as it is impossible to say, for example, where history gives way to historical sociology or historical geography.

Horrell's argument is formidable. However, it neither considers nor accounts for the continued usefulness of social-scientific criticism in the Global South, the new locus, and arguably, emerging hub of theology and Christian thought. While our body of literature is fixed, it remains a body of literature read by interpreters originating *from* and functioning *in* different cultural contexts; contexts demanding unique and variegated answers from the New Testament corpus. How then can social-scientific criticism remain useful and relevant in Southern Africa?

Firstly, Elliot (1993:58) comments,

> Social-scientific criticism is concerned not only with the original meanings of the biblical documents but also with the aggregations of meanings down through the centuries. It also asks how and under what conditions the Bible continues to be meaningful for modern readers. As an operation of exegesis and theological understanding, it seeks to link present Bible readers with distant but sacred heritage of the past and to explore as precisely as possible where different horizons of perception, experience, meaning might eventually merge.

Contrary to the 'curtain call' signalled by many a social-historical stage manager, this approach remains useful to Southern African

interpreters because of its correlative benefits, as somewhat alluded to by Elliot. The non-cumbersome correlations between separate yet dialogical non-Western contexts (the world of the text and the world of the writers), facilitated by an appropriate application of models, provide enormous potential in retaining the *kerygmatic meaning* of the text while demanding responsible appropriation in contexts non-Occidental. As Wright (2015:241) says (while borrowing from Meeks), 'the hermeneutical circle is not completed until the text finds a fitting social embodiment.' Perhaps Esler's (1995: 4) view rings clearest, when he states:

> Although New Testament critics may be able to unveil the nature of the original connection between text and context and even advocate, at a general level ... how such connections might be brought into dialogue with contemporary experience, the contextualization of the kerygma can only be achieved by a community.

Secondly, since social-scientific criticism uses a thick description in its interrogation of biblical texts, this renders it a credible candidate for hybridization. This is enriching for interpreters across the board, since balanced dialogue would potentially ensue from such an enterprise. Contemporary Southern Africa is in desperate need of interdisciplinary theological research presupposed by an integrated approach (Smith 2013). Arguably such a method is stringently attentive to the world of the Early Christian, the history of Christian communities across the ages, and the modern world. It is therefore a subsidiary thesis of this essay, that the chosen hermeneutical approach is the most appropriate methodology for the task at hand, and by extension, this is an encore to what has been deemed obsolete by some.

2.2. A Sociology of knowledge

As a sub-category of social-scientific criticism, a sociology of knowledge is specific to worldviews as they relate to the fabric and stratification of a society. Rhoads (1994:139) says, 'The first aspect of this approach is to reconstruct the worldview, the everyday assumptions, of a given culture or group. The second aspect is to see how this worldview gave legitimacy to and maintained the particular social order of the group from which it emerged.' In a general description of the approach, Coser (1968:428) offers the following definition, 'The sociology of knowledge may be broadly defined as that branch of sociology which studies the relation between thought and society. It is concerned with the social or existential conditions of knowledge.' Although both Coser and Rhoads underscore similar aspects in relation to a sociology of knowledge, this description is problematic. For instance,

Rohrbaugh (1987:104–105) underscores latent shortcomings, in the approach, by saying:

> Phenomenologists … complain that the conventional sociology of knowledge is too intellectualized, treating only the articulate, usually literary, beliefs of a small segment of society while leaving out the everyday, often vague, but nonetheless critical knowledge *everyone* requires in order to function in the world.

Concerning this difficulty, Rohrbaugh (1987:109) cites Berger and Luckmann (2011), who view a sociology of knowledge from the premise of a broader categorization that is inclusive of common sense, morals, and beliefs. Arguably, such diversification in the 'location' of knowledge is inclusive of the custodians and non-custodians of power. It is in view of such inclusivity and complication that this paper will form a departure point that employs a nuanced form of a sociology of knowledge to trace the role of hospitality in the first-century Mediterranean world as seen unfolding between Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon, via a contextual analysis of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, *Philemon* 22a.

2.3. Social identity and social identity complexity

Like a Sociology of Knowledge, Social Identity Theory (henceforth, SIT) can be considered an offshoot of social-scientific inquiry. This sub-category traces its origins to Henri Tajfel (1979:61–63) who defines it as follows: 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.'

Although SIT has been beneficial to the reconstruction of identities in biblical scholarship, it remains linear and flat in its espousal of ancient identities, especially when matters of multiple group membership are considered. Antithetically, Kok (2014:2) advances Social Identity Complexity (henceforth SIC), which unlike SIT, underscores the fact that ancient group identity, for any given individual, was not limited to a single assembly, but could be nested, hybridized, or even be communal and competitive depending on context or value ascribed to each identity. Drawing from the work of Roccas and Brewer (2002), Kok (2014) identifies four stations in social identity make up. Firstly, he notes *intersectionality*; a basic 'in-group' and 'out-group' dichotomy, which defines all other identities held, through a primary social identity. He comments (Kok, 2014:2), 'Such people would rather tend to be exclusive and less likely to transcend social boundaries.' Next, Kok (2014:3) identifies *dominance* and says, 'Another strategy of dealing or coping with different (competing) social

identities is to make one of the identities the dominant one, and construct all others in a subordinate relationship to the dominant social category.' Third, he notes *compartmentalisation* and states, 'a person would activate multiple identities and express those identities *contextually* in a process of isolation and differentiation … Consequently, the context determines which identity will be the primary basis for social identity.'

Finally, Kok (2014:3–4) identifies the *merger* station, and describes it as being highest in SIC measure. This station aims to integrate competing, and divergent social identities, thus facilitating the transcendence of social boundaries. Commenting on sub-groups in 1 Corinthians, Barentsen (2011:12) shares Kok's view. He regards Paul's treatment as motivating 'nested social identities in an overarching Christian social identity with its focal point in Christ crucified.' Thus, when Paul, Philemon and Onesimus's relationships are treated through the SIC matrix, it becomes apparent that the simplistic (and static) 'master-slave', 'apostle-convert' designations are limited in their description of the three. Here, the flattening of multiple identities into the transactional relationships between Paul, the *paterfamilias,* and a δοῦλος, becomes incompatible with the complex nested identities presented throughout the epistle. We therefore posit an analysis of *Philemon* 22a informed by such complexity, operating from the broad premise that hospitality involves identities interacting within a given social setting.

3. A Social-scientific Analysis of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν

3.1. The rhetorical significance of Philemon 22a

The final instruction that Paul gives Philemon within the peroration[5] is ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν (Phlm. 22). At a surface level, the meaning of the verse is clear enough, being conveyed idiomatically by the NIV: *And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.* While the meaning of the words may be clear, their rhetorical role in the argument might be interpreted as either a simple travelogue or as a Pauline *parousia*.

If the argument of the letter concludes in verse 21, then verse 22 should be understood as a conventional *travelogue*. If this is the case, then his motivation for telling Philemon to prepare for his planned visit would be entirely pragmatic. However, if verse 22 is

5 Koester (2001:554) says, '"Peroration" is the term for the conclusion of a speech, according to the canons of classical rhetoric … the peroration gave the speaker a final opportunity to influence the listeners by reviewing key arguments and appealing to the emotions.'

itself the climax of Paul's argument, then the force of the instruction is more psychological than practical. In this case, Paul's announced coming is intended to put psychological pressure on Philemon—Paul is coming to see if Philemon has complied with his directives regarding Onesimus.

The evidence favours interpreting verse 22 as an *apostolic parousia*. The main objection to this reading is that that would be contradictory to verse 21 and unethical on the part of the apostle to resort to seemingly coercive tactics. However, the rhetorical strategies that the apostle employs throughout the letter dispel both objections. Paul consistently juxtaposes confidence that Philemon will freely choose to do what is right (σοι τὸ ἀνῆκον, v. 8; τὸ ἀγαθόν σου, v. 14) with social and theological pressure to do what is right.[6] Therefore, we contend that taking ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν as a warning that Paul is coming to inspect Philemon's obedience is not only a plausible interpretation of the phrase's role in the epistle; it is also the preferred interpretation.

6 τὸ ἀνῆκον denotes less what is right in legal or ethical principle than what is fitting, proper, or appropriate in a social or relational setting. We might even speak of what is honourable. Although Paul has no doubts about *what is required* in the situation, it is a counter-cultural implication of the gospel that he cannot presume will be immediately apparent to his brother and partner, Philemon.

3.2. The social-scientific significance of *Philemon* 22a

Since *Philemon* 22a is considered an *apostolic parousia* akin to Paul's injunction in 2 Corinthians 13:1–10, when this verse is considered from a social-scientific perspective, the force of the rhetorical strategy underscores a few fundamental factors.

Firstly, the futuristic presence harkens a 'quasi-inaugurated eschatological' judgment motif, somewhat analogous to the second coming of the Christ. Through this motif, the person of Philemon is 'put on trial', perpetually, by Paul's intended visit during which the apostle will assess Onesimus's standing in the household, subsequent to penning the letter. Furthermore, καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ (Phlm. 2) functions as the public court of reputation (henceforth PCR) in the intermediary period between the delivery of the letter and Paul's intended visit.

Secondly, how Philemon responds to Paul's request regarding Onesimus becomes a platform for honour preserved or an avenue towards shame for the *paterfamilias*. When read in relation to *Philemo*n 8–9, Peterson (1985:301) underscores the somewhat perplexing contradiction through which *Philemon* 22 is delivered. Here, he demonstrates 'the paradox that to defend the equality of the brothers Paul had to exercise his superiority among them,' a clear shift in the way non-authoritarian familial language is employed throughout the letter, up until this point.[7] By using relational rather than authoritarian language, Paul confers honour upon Philemon.

7 *Philemon* 1, 8-10, 14, 16, 20a.

Thirdly, when the ξενίαν is considered as both a space for meting out hospitality and an uninhabited symbol preserved for Paul's arrival, a graphic tempering and transformation of Philemon's behaviour towards Onesimus is underlined. Here, the empty room brings to consciousness the authority Paul clearly withholds in the penning of the letter. Both the ξενίαν and the PCR then function as watchdogs, ready to blow the whistle on any misdeeds suffered by Onesimus, at the appearing of the apostle.

Fourthly, when *Philemon* 22a is read alongside εἰ οὖν με ἔχεις κοινωνόν, προσλαβοῦ αὐτὸν ὡς ἐμέ (Phlm. 17), it becomes conceivable that some measure of hospitality could have been awarded Onesimus by Philemon, upon Onesimus's return. When a social-scientific hermeneutic is applied to this possibility, a few factors become apparent. Onesimus gains honour through a conversion experience, an experience alluded to by παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς, Ὀνήσιμον (Phlm. 10). Also, Onesimus's identity, vis-à-vis Philemon, is translated beyond the linear and flattened designation of slave-to-master. Instead, Onesimus garners more honour by being a member of the ἐκκλησία that meets in Philemon's home, and assumes a nested social identity, where being a slave exists in social tension with being ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (Phlm. 16). Dunn (1996:328) corroborates one of the poles of this tension by commenting on the prevalence of Onesimus's name; the name Onesimus was generally associated with people of abased social status. Furthermore, the anaphoric play on words, in verse 11, regarding the slave's former uselessness (ἄχρηστον), and newfound usefulness (εὔχρηστον) suggests Christ's involvement in Onesimus's conversion, especially when these words are juxtaposed with γεννάω in the preceding verse. Tucker (2016:420–421) here emphasises the duality of Onesimus's identity, who, although now a member of ἐκκλησία, based on Paul's ministration, remains a slave, albeit a slave with honour enough to be received as Paul was (Phlm. 17). Onesimus's is a hybridized identity, slave and dear brother, coexisting in fluid tension, demanding skilled navigation of the social terrain. Arguably, this duality affords Onesimus access to honour, and the shedding of shame in a nuanced manner, making him an eligible participant in honour transactions, in social strata previously inaccessible. Simultaneously, he remains a slave locked in a social categorization predetermined and policed by Empire.

Fifthly, when Philemon's home is correlated with Paul's residence (i.e. prison), something of transformative hospitality could be identified. In Philemon's household, the slave Onesimus neither experiences upward social mobility nor does he experience identity

transformation, save that which brought him into servile relationship with his master.[8] Philemon's household with all its social privilege is purposefully presented as a non-conducive environment for social identity transformation as far as Onesimus is concerned. Rather, the prisoner Paul identifies with Onesimus in the very opening of the letter, Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Phlm. 1),[9] and extends identity transformative hospitality from a place of shame, thus rendering Onesimus not merely a slave, but a dear brother. The NIV's *no longer as a slave, but better than a slave* fails to capture the subtle nuance. Paul's point is not that he is no longer a slave (οὐκέτι δοῦλον); it is that he is no longer *merely* a slave (οὐκέτι ὡς δοῦλον). He remains a slave, but he is simultaneously much more than just another slave. He has become *a beloved brother* (ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν).

Based on these counts, Onesimus's social location and social identity undergo radical upheaval in hybridity, with great implications on hospitality in Philemon's home. Perhaps then, the more pressing question is not whether Onesimus's honour status changed, but rather, 'to what degree did Onesimus remain a slave within Philemon's household?' considering the implicit honour conferred upon him by the implied conversion experience.

4. Appropriating ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν into Southern Africa

Historically, South African households, could trace their location, composition, and interaction to the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950. This Act relegated non-Whites from affluent and better developed residential and business areas, thus creating a socially dislocated, and socially stratified society whose effects still linger in post-apartheid South Africa. In reading *Philemon* from a Southern African context, correlation between stratified first-century Asia-Minor and the world of the reader could be brought into discursive theological dialogue centred on matters such as social stratification, the social identities of contemporary domestic workers, and the social cohesion enhanced or diminished by hospitality proffered or withheld, respectively.

4.1. *Philemon* 22a, social inequality, and social stratification

Regarding social-stratification, Friesen (2004:341) and later Longenecker (2009:44) uses a seven-point socio-economic profile of the ancient world and places the number of imperial, regional or provincial, and municipal elites at 3% of the entire Greco-Roman population. Longenecker (2009:44) calls this group ES1-ES3.[10]

8 Presuming that a traumatic experience such as war, kidnapping, or debt, brought Onesimus into Philemon's household, as was common in the first century. If, however, Onesimus was born into slavery, in Philemon's home, the lack of a kinship memory prior to slavery could itself be regarded as a historically traumatic experience reducing Onesimus's identity to a transactional one.

9 This is the only letter in which the designation δέσμιος (*prisoner*) occurs. Paul designates himself ἀπόστολος (Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1 Tim. 1:1, 2 Tim. 1:1, Titus 1:1) and δοῦλος (Rom. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Titus 1:1); no designation is used in 1-2 Thess.

10 According to Longenecker (2009:44); the ES4 group comprised merchants, some traders, some free persons, and some military veterans and was 17% of the Greco-Roman population. The ES5+ comprised traders, regular earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, and some families it was 25% of the population. The ES6-ES7 groups made up 55% of the entire population (30% and 25% respectively), and they comprised small farm families, labourers, artisans, wage earners, most merchants, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, the disabled, unskilled labourers, and prisoners.

Gorman (2004: 5), however, provides an alternate representation of the strata, based on Lenski's (1966:284), *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification.* Unlike Friesen (2004) and Longenecker (2009), Gorman (2004:4–5) numbers the elites at no more than 5% of the entire population. Added to this difference, is the numbering of slaves within the statistical mapping of the Greco-Roman population; a stark difference in approach. Nevertheless, both sets of figures bring the range of socio-economic disparity and social stratification, into sharp focus, while statistically giving a basis for each rung's disposition towards upward mobility.

Although the idea of a middle-class was non-existent in the ancient world, common to both *Philemon's* historical context and the contemporary Southern African reality is the fact that chronic social stratification was born of imperial dominance. In South Africa, this stratification can be measured socio-economically by the observance of the Gini coefficient. According to this coefficient South Africa's socio-economic polarity fluctuates between 0.63 and 0.7 (Oxfam International 2014:38). The Palma ratio, an alternative to the Gini coefficient, approaches inequality in a more refined manner. Barr (2017) describes it as:

> [a] ratio takes the richest 10% of the population's share of gross national income (GNI) and divides it by the poorest 40% of the population's share. This measure has become popular as more income inequality research focuses on the growing divide between the richest and poorest in society.

Under both measuring systems, South Africa features as one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, together with Namibia (another Southern African country with a volatile colonial narrative) and Haiti. Like the polarized social reality in *Philemon*, appropriating ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in Southern Africa brings into sharp focus a deeply stratified and polarized society on both micro and macro levels. Paul's world and Southern Africa here converge providing opportunity for the embodiment of meaning in a new horizon.

4.2. *Philemon* 22a and social identity complexity

Regarding the social identities of contemporary Southern African domestic workers, another point of possible correlation emerges. Onesimus's nested social identity is at the fore of the triadic reordering of honour, in Philemon's household. Gorman (2004:460-461) underlines at least four identities belonging to Onesimus, post his conversion. He sees Onesimus as Paul's son fathered in chains; Onesimus as Paul's fellow worker; Onesimus as Paul's very heart,

making him a dual proxy for both Philemon and Paul; Onesimus as son of God; and Onesimus as a fully-fledged member of the ἐκκλησία in Philemon's household.

Like Onesimus, domestic workers' social identity was forged by a historic colonial experience similar in scope to empire,[11] and like Onesimus, they barely earn a living wage[12] to fuel upward mobility, thus creating a highly unequal and sharply stratified society. According to Oxfam (2014:49), this stratification is the bedrock of social incoherence. Southern African domestic workers are custodians of complex hybridized identities that include 'immigrant-worker',[13] 'woman-household head/ bread winner-servant', 'spiritual formator and disciplinarian', and 'slave-confidant-proxy.' When these facts are correlated with ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν, it becomes apparent that although not every aspect of first-century slavery and Southern African domestic work can be paralleled, what does fit the correlation is how social stratification prompts and exacerbates social identity complexity (SIC) for those at the bottom rungs of society. Onesimus is a nested -hybridized social identity, and so is the Southern African domestic worker, thanks to, or no thanks to Empire.

11 It must be noted that this correlation is not fully analogous of the two groups. Ancient domestic slavery was not formal employment as known in the contemporary world. Therefore, although the correlation departs from social stratification and social polarity, it remains limited regarding the injustices faced. Nevertheless, the causes of slavery and Southern African domestic work are rooted in an imperial injustice common to both epochs.

12 The minimum wage in South Africa was adjusted to R 3500 per month, yet domestic workers on average earn less than R 2500 per month. A living wage is, however, pitched at R 5000. See www.mywage.co.za/main/salary/minimum-wages (accessed 21st February 2018), and National Minimum Wage Panel (2016:9).

13 The geo-political realities of the region have brought 'low skilled' workers into South Africa from neighbouring countries, so much so that it is not uncommon to hear of Malawian domestic gardeners and Zimbabwean cleaners being the most coveted type of worker.

4.3. *Philemon* 22a, eschatology and hospitality

Regarding hospitality in *Philemon's* context, Dunn (1996:345–346) comments:

> [I]n the ancient world hospitality played a much larger role in traveling than today; inns were generally places to be avoided if at all possible, so that householders would generally expect to provide hospitality for their compatriots … That Philemon had 'a guest room' … not '*the* guest room,' confirms that he was a man of means with a house capable of hosting more than one visitor at the same time (ἑτοίμαζε implies that the guest room is within Philemon's control).

When these facts are correlated with the contemporary Southern African reality, universal parallels are again impossible. However, this difficulty must not devolve into a zero-sum game, since parallels in hospitality do exist between *Philemon's* world and that of the authors. The universal extension of hospitality to a member of the ἐκκλησία with limited honour in *Philemon* can be seen to converge with the need to do the same within Southern Africa, especially between domestic workers and employers belonging to the same faith community. Arguably, such a contextual correlation is consistent with Esler (1995:4), who says:

> Although New Testament critics may be able to unveil the nature of the original connection between text and context and

> even advocate, at a general level … how such connections might be brought into dialogue with contemporary experience, *the contextualization of the kerygma can only be achieved by a community*.[14]

14 Italics are our addition.

Therefore, the ἐκκλησία in *Philemon* provides a *kerygmatic injunction* to faith communities across interpretive epochs on matters of hospitality, social cohesion, and transformation. This means that faith communities whose hospitality is restricted and selective stand against the grain of the Pauline ethic seen in the rhetorical flow of the epistle. Such faith communities stand in expectation of future rebuke, as would have been the case had Philemon not adhered to Paul's recommendation. Thus, a reading of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν in Southern Africa views hospitality as an instrument for social cohesion, transformation, and healing based on the contextualized power of the *kerygma*. It, however, provides another dimension in interpretation: the reality of future judgment witnessed by the PCR, as was the case with Philemon.

5. Conclusion

This paper read *Philemon* 22a using a social-scientific hermeneutic hybridized with SIC. The continued effectiveness of the former, within a majority world context was motivated, together with the hybridized methodologies of SIC. Using a discursive approach, the meaning of ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἑτοίμαζέ μοι ξενίαν as an *apostolic parousia* loaded with relational and warning motifs was seen as a regulating force on Philemon's possible deviant behaviour. From these findings, social disparity born of the historic injustices was challenged from the premise that hospitality and eschatology function as sentinels of transformation, policing and regulating behaviour in the full understanding of a future reckoning.

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A Biblical, Psychological and Moral Analysis of the Rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13: A Pastoral Response

Noel Woodbridge and Callie Joubert

Abstract

Violence in any form, including rape, has a corrosive effect on the psychological, moral, spiritual and social lives of people. The high incidence of rape in South Africa has led to its being dubbed the 'Rape Capital' of the world, and violence against women has become the new 'normal'. To help understand, explain and prevent this phenomenon, this paper presents a biblical analysis of the narrative of the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, and identifies the contributing factors that led to rape. It then offers a biblical analysis of human passions, with special reference to sexual lust, to help us to understand a person's character. A contemporary psychological and moral profile of Amnon, the rapist, is then presented. Finally, a six-fold pastoral response to a contemporary rape situation is proposed, based on the biblical, psychological and moral analysis of the rape of Tamar by Amnon.

Keywords
Lust
Pastoral Theology
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Sexual Abuse
Tamar

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1 The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

Violence in whatever form, including rape, should never be tolerated by any nation of the world. The insidious presence of rape, understood as the sexual assault of another person, has nothing less than a corrosive effect on the psychological, moral, spiritual and social lives of all people. Although rape is not something new, there is something new about rape in South Africa.

The truth is that rape in South Africa has increased in epidemic proportions, especially against women, since the 1980s. According to official statistics (Vogelman 1990:96), rape occurred 16 000 times annually during the 1980s. By 1988, the official annual figure of rape rose to 19 368. Unofficially, based on the assumption that only 5% '(one in twenty) rapes is reported', the figure was estimated to be about 380 000 a year. This means that 1 000 women could be expected to be raped a day or close to one woman every minute or so. But, according to Professor Julie Claassens from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, new estimates indicate that 'a woman is [now] raped every 17 seconds in this country' (Basson 2016). This brings the total number of rapes to almost 900 000 per year, which is an increase of close to 240%. It has led to South Africa being dubbed the 'Rape Capital' of the world. In a 'rape culture', such as ours, rape against women has become the new 'normal' (Basson 2016), meaning that it is now accepted as part of our everyday lives.

The question is, therefore, how should the phenomenon of rape be understood and explained, and how can it be prevented? What is the essence of rape and what are the causes of reasons for its persistence? How can these questions be answered?

2. Two Dominant Theoretical Perspectives of Rape

There are two dominant theoretical perspectives for understanding and explaining rape. The first is the social constructionist view. In this view, 'human conduct is largely socially constructed' (Vogelman 1990:100), meaning that what is right or wrong and good or bad is whatever society decides it is. Although proponents of this view correctly identify the causes of reasons for rape in, for example, sexist ideologies, pornography and prostitution that help encourage rape, they are often unable to tell us what it is that makes rape wrong in itself. For instance, if our society were to vote tomorrow and the majority decide rape is acceptable, it would still be wrong. In this regard, the dominant view is that rape is 'primarily an act of power' and 'the rapist's

desire to assert his power' (ibid, p. 101). That is, however, what rape involves, but it is not the essence of rape. Rape, just as the killing of innocent people is first and foremost an offence against God who created human beings in His image and with a dignity that needs to be respected (cf. Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9).

Over against the social constructionist understanding and explanation of rape is biological reductionism. In this view, rape is understood and explained in terms of faulty biological development and 'dysfunction' of the brain, understood as a 'chemical imbalance' or 'faulty circuits' in the brain (Insel 2010; Insel and Cuthbert 2015). The problem with this view is that it is based on highly contentious scientific evidence and the presuppositions of a worldview known as biomedical materialism in psychiatry and neuroscience, or physicalism in philosophy (Joubert 2015:188–190; Zachar 2000:21ff). More problematic is the underlying logic of this view: If the 'circuits' in the brain of a rape victim function properly, then the person would not experience posttrauma memories, flashbacks, sleepless nights, fear reactions, and so forth. There would be no post-traumatic experiences if 'brain circuits' of rape victims do not malfunction, even though the victim underwent a rape experience.

The authors believe that there is an alternative way to understand and explain rape. This belief has led to the launch of the Tamar Campaign in Kenya in 2005, which focuses on sexual and domestic violence in African societies. Its point of departure is the scriptures and the Church because of its moral authority and capacity to minister to those who have been abused, as well as deal with offenders (Nyabera and Montgomery 2007:6).

It is to this end that this paper wishes to make a pastoral contribution. To help understand, explain and prevent sexual assault, the paper will begin with a biblical analysis of the narrative of the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. The critical factors that contributed towards the rape will then be identified. To gain a deeper understanding of a person's character, a biblical analysis of human passions, with special reference to sexual lust, will be conducted, followed by a contemporary psychological and moral profile of Amnon. Finally, the insights gleaned from the preceding analyses will be used to propose six key pastoral responses to rape.

3. A Biblical Analysis of the Narrative of the Rape of Tamar

3.1. Three phases of 2 Samuel 13

The tragedy in 2 Samuel 13:1–29 can be divided into three phases: the phase antecedent to the rape, the rape itself and the phase after the rape. Each phase will be dealt with in turn.

3.1.1. Phase 1: The phase before the rape (vv. 1-7)

In verse 1, the writer (Samuel) does two things. First, he says, 'Now it was after this'.[2] With these words, he makes his reader aware that what will be narrated next is in some way connected with events recorded in the previous chapters. Among other things, King David's adultery with Bathsheba, his plan to have her husband killed, and the prophet Nathan confronting David about his transgressions. He then introduces three persons; two half-brothers, Absalom and Amnon, as both sons of David, and Absalom's beautiful sister, Tamar. We are told that Amnon 'loved her', but as we shall see, we have reason to believe that he confused his 'love' with sexual desire or lust. But Amnon faces a serious problem (v. 2). There were at least three obstacles that frustrate his desire to have her and his ability to act at will to satisfy that desire: (1) she was a virgin, meaning she is unmarried; (2) because she was a virgin, she was most probably never alone, since it was the custom among the Israelites to keep young unmarried women protected; and (3) the Law of Moses which forbids incest (cf. Lev. 18:6–18; 20:11–14, 17). These obstacles frustrated him to the point that 'he made himself ill'. That 'illness', referred to in verse 4 as depression, was something Jonadab, Amnon's shrewd friend, could observe 'morning after morning' in Amnon's demeanour and behaviour—he refused to eat. However, Jonadab uses his intelligence and knowledge of deception to suggest a plan to Amnon, how he could get Tamar alone to satisfy his sexual appetite: he must 'pretend to be ill'[3] and request permission from King David that Tamar prepare his food (vv. 5–6). As it happens, the king paid Amnon a visit and wanting to make his son happy, grants Amnon his request and unknowingly hands his daughter into the devious hands of a rapist (v. 7).

2 All references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) unless otherwise indicated.

3 The fact that Jonadab suggested to Amnon to 'pretend to be ill' (v. 5) and that Amnon then 'pretend[s] to be ill' (v. 6) makes it impossible to believe that he was 'really ill'. Logically speaking, it is only a healthy person that can pretend to be ill. By contrast, an ill person is ill, therefore, and can only pretend not to be ill.

3.1.2. Phase 2: The rape (vv. 8-14)

Most obediently, Tamar goes to Amnon's house and prepares cakes for him while under his close observation. But Amnon refuses to eat with other people around (vv. 8–9). Being alone, Tamar enters his bedroom to feed him only to find that 'he took hold of her' and demanded that she lay with him (vv. 10–11). Tamar's emphatic answer is no, and she provides him with three reasons why his

intended actions would be wrong: personal and public shame for her, he would be considered a fool by all of Israel, and if he requested her hand in marriage, the king would probably grant him his request. Despite her protestations and attempts to reason with him, he uses his superior physical strength and violates her (vv. 12–14).

3.1.3. Phase 3: After the rape (vv. 15-29)

After committing his detestable act and crime, Amnon is immediately overcome with hate for Tamar and kicks her out of his room and house, again despite her protestations (vv. 15–17). Tamar seeks consolation from her brother, Absalom, and finds refuge in his home, the safest place she could think of immediately after the crime, and she dresses in clothes of mourning. Absalom comforts her, but he tells her not to speak about what happened (vv. 18–20). When King David hears what happened, he gets 'very angry' (v. 21), but without taking any action whatsoever. Yet Absalom now hates Amnon. Two years later, Absalom decides that it is time to take revenge. Amnon is killed by the command of Absalom, at a sheep-shearing festival (vv. 22–28).

By way of summary, the narrative of the rape of Tamar can be described as follows (Montgomery 2014):

> A selfish brother, blinded by lust, horrifyingly violates his sister; a wicked friend helps plot the incestuous transgression; a father passively lets a crime done to his daughter go unpunished; a brother takes justice into his own hands committing murder on behalf of his sister; and a girl, once beautiful and pure, is now scarred and scorned for the rest of her life.

3.2. Analysis of the critical factors in the rape of Tamar

3.2.1. The use and abuse of power and authority

People in positions of power and authority often think they have rights that they can exercise without considering the rights of others. In other words, they seem to think that someone else is not allowed to say no to them. It is probable that Amnon, as David's first-born son and heir to the throne, took some lessons from his father on how to deal with women. He could have thought that, just as David used his power and authority to satisfy his sexual desires with Bathsheba, he could do the same with Tamar, and consequently thought that it would be morally right and good, or even that he could get away with it. This being the case, it is easy to see why Jonadab asked Amnon, 'O son of the king, why are you so depressed morning after morning?' (v. 4). To paraphrase Jonadab's words: 'What is up with you Amnon? Do you not realise

your authority and rights as a prince? Enough of this!'. This kind of thinking is also found elsewhere in scripture. 1 Kings 21 documents that King Ahab desired to have Naboth's vineyard. Unable to obtain it on his terms (vv. 1–3), he got 'sullen and vexed' (depressed), laid down on his bed, and just as Amnon, he refused to eat (v. 4). What did Jezebel say to him? 'Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful. I will get you the vineyard of Naboth' (v. 7). The most amazing thing is, when the king heard that Naboth was dead, he immediately got up from his 'sickbed' and took possession of what he desired. It thus appears that people have the tendency to become 'ill' when their desires are frustrated or when their wills are crossed.

3.2.2. A father's bad example and lack of moral and spiritual leadership

The parallel between David and Amnon should be obvious. David had set a bad example when he yielded to his lustful appetite for Bathsheba and plotted ways to cover up his sins. Amnon repeated this same act of self-gratification and thought, as David did, that since no one said anything about it, he could get away with it (cf. Eccl. 8:11). But King David also demonstrated in another way his lack of responsible fatherhood. Although he got 'very angry' (v. 21) when he heard what had happened to Tamar, which clearly indicates that he understood the nature of Amnon's act, he did nothing about it. He neither provided Tamar with protection, either before or after her violation, nor confronted Amnon with the nature and the consequences of his act. The fact that God, through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 11:27–12:15), confronted David about his wrongs done to Bathsheba and her husband, and showed him that no sins 'go unpunished', should have been a lesson to David: 'he should not have allowed the rape to go unpunished, no matter how much he loved Amnon. Had he acted against Amnon', he would have demonstrated his love for Tamar and the important role of a father in the life of a daughter (Montgomery 2014).

3.2.3. Most rapes are not spontaneous, but planned; the rapist is deceptive and is often known to the victim

Contrary to popular opinion, rape is not always a spontaneous act; most rapes are planned and premeditated. Furthermore, in most rapes, the victim is acquainted with the perpetrator, and rape happens in all families (Vogelman 1990:106). Amnon, with the help of his evil friend decided to deceive Tamar into thinking that Amnon needed her special care, only to discover that, as in all instances of deception, the deceiver is far from what he appears to be, albeit too late. There are at least two factors that make

deception an evil act. On the one hand, it is impossible to plan to deceive another person without knowing what one is doing. It implies that a plea of ignorance can never be accepted. On the other hand, the deceiver causes the victim to believe something false. Amnon knew that he sexually desired a virgin, and Tamar believed that her brother was a sincere person who was 'really ill'.

3.2.4. Rape happens in all families

How could she have known that her violator would be her own brother, the royal prince who would succeed King David on the throne? How could the beautiful royal princess Tamar foresee that she would be an abused victim? And who would have thought that sexual abuse happens in a royal family?

Research has shown that sexual abuse happens in all families, among all races, and sadly, churches. In fact, sexual abuse does not just happen in non-Christian families (Tracy 2006:2). Although it is to be expected that rape occurs in familiar places, such as the victim's or rapist's house, it also happens in open spaces such as in the veld or parks (Vogelman 1990:109). The challenge for the rapist is to be alone with the victim and not to be interrupted (Newheiser 2016). Amnon clearly manipulated circumstances so that Tamar could be alone with him in his house.

3.2.5. Uncontrolled and sinful passions

The love Amnon felt for Tamar was not the love of a brother for a sister. The text shows that his 'love' for Tamar can more accurately be described in terms of a selfish, consuming lust for her. Instead of exercising self-control or self-restraint, he gave vent to his sinful appetite and desire. After sexually abusing Tamar, Amnon's 'heart was filled with a great hatred for her' (v. 15), and 'true to fashion, the rapist is now done with his prey and no longer wants his victim to be in front of him' (Montgomery 2014).

By way of summary, rape has nothing to do with love or affection; it is about uncontrolled sinful passions and self-satisfaction. Because it is not always clearly understood, in the next section an attempt will be made to clarify what is meant by appetites, their connection with the passions, desires and moral character.

4. A Biblical Analysis of Human Passions with Special Reference to Sexual Lust

Studying what the Bible teaches about human passions quickly leads to an all-important question: Are your passions a problem for you, others and for God? There are several reasons why they are so, among other things, because they reveal a person's character,

namely, what a person cares for, and what a person regards as important or not important to him or her.

4.1. The ability to experience feelings

Among the multitude of abilities or powers that human beings possess, is the ability to experience feelings. These are conceptually connected to perceptions (i.e., the use of our sense organs), sensations and passions. Sensations, in the sense of bodily feelings can be divided into those that can be physically localised in the body, and those of overall bodily condition. They are characterised by degrees of intensity (waxing and waning over time, intolerable, mildly irritating, severe, unbearable or only slight). It is their felt features that are typically characterised as burning (Job 30:30), stinging (Prov. 23:32; Rev. 9:10), stabbing and sensations of pressure, release or relief (Job 5:18; Ps 4:1). Examples of overall bodily conditions include feeling well or sick, fit or weak, sleepy or wide awake, exhausted or weary (2 Sam. 17:2; 21:15; Judg. 4:21; 8:4–5, 15).

4.2. An appetite is a mix or combination of sensation and desire

An appetite[4] is a mix or combination of sensation and desire, and we can distinguish between natural appetites (hunger, thirst and – with certain qualifications—those of a sexual nature) that are innate or inborn, and non-natural appetites such as addictions (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–3). The concept of appetite belongs to the following word-group: coveting,[5] desire,[6] longing for,[7] lust[8] and passions.[9] The appetites are logically connected to human needs, and consequently involve the wants, pleasures, beliefs, knowledge and the character of people. Sensations characteristic of the appetites that have a bodily location (hunger in one's belly) are forms of unease and dispose a person to action to satisfy his or her desire. They are typically caused by bodily needs; some are recurrent in the sense that their satisfaction leads only to temporary satiation and the disappearance of the appetitive sensation (Prov. 16:26; Eccl. 6:7).

4.3. A desire is a felt inclination

A desire can be defined as a felt inclination to do, have, avoid or experience certain things, and it is either conscious or such that it can be made conscious through, for example, touch, looking at or talking about certain things, reflection on what one has seen or heard and experienced in the past.[10] A desire is not a motive; it furnishes a person with a motive to do something.[11] For example, shame is bound up with the desire to conceal, hide oneself or to

4 'Appetite' (n. *koilia*) has the basic meaning of 'body-cavity', meaning something to be filled. In Num. 11:4 ('the rabble … had greedy desires', lit. 'desired a desire'; see also vv. 5, 8, 12, 20); 11:6, 34 (the place was named 'Kibroth-hattaavah', meaning 'the graves of greediness'); Rom. 16:18 ('slaves … of their own appetites' [lit. belly]); Phil. 3:19. 'Belly' (*gastēr*') is used in Titus 1:12 as figure of speech to denote gluttons (cf. Deut. 21:20-21; Matt. 11:19).

5 'Covet' means to fix one's desire upon something or someone (*epi*, upon, and *thymos*, passion). It is used in a good sense (1 Cor. 12:13 [v. *zēloō*]; 14:39) or bad sense (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; Rom. 7:7-8; 13:9; 1 Cor. 10:6 [n. *plonexia*, from *pleon*, more, and *echō*, to have]; 1 Tim. 6:10 [v. *oregō*]). 'Coveting' in Mark 7:22 is 'covetings' in the original, meaning various ways of coveting. In Rom. 1:29 the word is 'greed' (cf. Luke 12:15; Eph. 4:19; 5:3; 1 Thess. 2:5; 2 Pet. 2:3, 14) which is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). The adjective, *pleonektēs*, literally means eager to have more, to have what belongs to others or greedy (1 Cor. 5: 10-11; 6:10; Eph. 5:5). See *philarguros* (lit. money-loving) in Luke 16:14 and 2 Tim. 3:2.

6 The noun (*epithymia*) is the more comprehensive term of the word group; it includes all manner of lusts and desires. *Epithymia* 'is based on the root word *thymos*' meaning 'an urge or passion'. See Mounce (2006:172). It is used of hunger (Luke 15:16), in a good sense of intense longing (Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:17) and wrong sensual and sexual desires/lusts (Rom. 1:24).

7 1 Tim. 6:10

8 'Lust' (*epithymia*, denotes strong desire of any kind) in a good sense (Luke 22:15, Phil. 1:23, 1 Thess. 2:17) and mostly in a bad sense (Rom. 6:12; 13:14; Gal. 5:16, 24; Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:5; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Titus 2:11; 3:3; James 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:4; 2:11; 4:2; 2 Pet. 2:18; 3:3; 1 John 2:16-17; Jude 16, 18; Rev. 18:14; 1 Cor. 10:6 (*epithymētēs*, 'a luster after');

escape from the scrutiny of those who disapprove of oneself (cf. Gen. 3:7–13).

4.4. The combination of sensations and desires has a hedonic character

The combination of sensations and desires also has a hedonic character.[12] Pleasures are typically things we desire to prolong (if enjoyable) and unpleasant things we want to cease or go away (if they cause suffering). Pleasure is not a sensation, but the quality of an experience a person undergoes, for instance, when in pain or at the sight of certain things. The felt quality or character of experiences can be described as agreeable, awesome, boring, charming, delightful, detestable, disgusting, dreadful, enjoyable, fascinating, horrible, interesting, overwhelming, pleasant, repulsive, revolting, terrifying or wonderful. These descriptions may also be the expression of an attitude, since an attitude is bound up with what a person likes and dislikes, approval and disapproval of experiences, and what pleases and displeases a person.

4.5. Passions are qualities of character

The passions referred to as affections are also qualities of character; we describe someone as boisterous, courageous, a coward, glutton, hot-tempered, humble, irascible, kind, sensible, lazy, timid or trustworthy.[13] A sensible person has an affective sensitivity or responsiveness to people, objects, situations and reasons.[14] A person who overreacts may lack judgement, and one who indulges in his or her agitations, desires and passions lacks self-control (cf. Esth. 5:9–10; Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23). Among the reasons why a person feels a certain way about something are facts (his friend lied to him), values (friendship), norms (it is wrong to lie) and obligations (it is our duty to speak the truth; Eph. 4:25; James 3:9–10). This suggests that witnessing a moral wrong and recognising it as such is one thing, and quite another to be outraged or do something about it (cf. David in 2 Sam. 13:21). To simply notice moral wrongness without experiencing, for example, moral indignation indicates that there was a failure of understanding the moral importance of the act, let alone what morality requires.[15] Such explanations allow us to judge the person, his or her actions and character.

4.6. Self-regarding feelings presuppose self-consciousness, consciousness of one's own character qualities

Self-regarding feelings presuppose self-consciousness, consciousness of one's own character qualities, virtues, vices and

Rom. 1:27 (*orexis*, 'a reaching or stretching after'). In Gal. 5:17 and Luke 22:15, 'lust' can be predicated neither of the Spirit nor of Jesus. Is best translated as desire, since it is also predicated of angels (1 Pet. 1:12) and of good things and people (Matt. 13:7; 1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 6:11; Luke 15:16; 16:21; 17:22; Rev. 9:6).

9 'Passion' or 'urge' (*thymos*) can refer to an evil feeling (*pathos*), desire or pleasure. Cf. Num. 5:14; Prov. 6:34; 14:30 (it suggests that a passion can be detrimental to one's health); Rom. 1:26; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:5; in Rom. 7:5 and Gal. 5:24 passion is associated with the 'flesh' (sinful nature). See Vine (1984:28-30).

10 A good example, are the Israelites in the OT (Num. 11:1-35; 15:39; Ps 78:17-18, 29-31; 1 Cor. 10:1-6, 11); cf. Judg. 14:1-3; 2 Sam. 11:2.

11 Cf. 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures' (James 4:3).

12 Pleasure (*hēdonē*) is linked with natural or sinful desires; cf. Luke 8:14; Titus 3:3; James 4:1, 3; 'good pleasure' (*eudokia*) in Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:11; Heb. 11:25; *philēdonos* in 2 Tim. 3:4 ('lovers of pleasure'); 1 Tim. 5:6; James 5:5.

13 Num. 12:3; Judg. 9:4; 11:3; 19:22; 20:13; Prov. 9:13; 29:22; Matt. 8:26; 2 Tim. 1:6; Rev. 21:8.

14 Titus 1:8; an alternative meaning of 'reasonable' in James 4:17 may be 'willing to yield'.

15 The context of Jer. 6:15 and 8:12 makes it sufficiently clear.

follies, and the ability to reflect on them.[16] A person may suddenly, or over time, realise with dismay that what he or she has said or done was wrong (2 Sam. 24:1–10). If someone is aware of his or her feelings either regarding him or herself, others or about something, then the person is conscious of how he or she feels—angry, cheerful, envious, frustrated, in love, irritated, jealous, joyful, sad, and so on. Self-regarding feelings involve moral standards, moral conduct and pangs of conscience (Rom. 2:14–15; 1 Tim. 1:19). Although these feelings, for example, shame, guilt and remorse may overlap, their features show that they are experienced because of something that is wrong, that needs to be attended to and made right. What ashamed people are ashamed of is themselves (i.e., character) and what causes shame is the disapproval of other persons. To feel guilty is to recognise and acknowledge that one's actions were wrong and what a remorseful person deeply regrets are the badness of his or her actions and the harm they inflicted on others (Matt. 27:3–5). It implies that feelings of moral self-appraisal are rational; people experience them for a reason. The reason is straightforward: self-conscious feelings presuppose a person's capacity for self-awareness, including the ability to evaluate themselves, their actions as right or wrong and their effects on other people, whether good or bad.

16 2 Sam. 24:10; Titus 3:3. For a list of excellences, see Phil. 4:8, Gal. 5:22-23 and 2 Pet. 1:5-10.

4.7. A comparative analysis of sexual lust

To summarise, as indicated earlier, an appetite is a combination of sensation and desire, and desire has been defined as a felt inclination to do, have or experience certain things. A different way of saying the same thing is to say that felt desires range from appetites and cravings to urges and obsessive preoccupations with the lack of something. Firstly, this allows one to draw a few important distinctions between needs and wants, such as thirst and hunger, on the one hand, and lust, on the other hand.

4.7.1. Distinctions between needs/wants and lust

Firstly, a person can have a reason for wanting something or to do something but not a reason for needing something, although a need may be the reason for wanting something. Secondly, a person needs water and food, as opposed to sex, to survive. And thirdly, a person has reasons for wanting sex, which may be good or bad, but cannot have reasons for being thirsty or hungry (these are caused). These differences explain why what a person wants or wants to do, reflects on his or her character. From a biblical perspective, there is no such thing as a commitment to oneself without commitment to others (Matt. 7:12; 22:36–39). It suffices to say, if the rapist allows his selfish sexual desires to override his power of self-restraint, the probability that he will rape someone is extremely

high. It seems, therefore, that it would be a mistake to conclude that the rapist, just as the glutton or deceiver, rejects self-control. It would be more accurate to say that he is indifferent to self-control.[17] This connects to the next important point: the idea that 'rape is all about power' (Vogelman 1990:101, 105ff.) is no longer tenable. Researchers have shown that rape can be explained in multiple ways, but what cannot be doubted is that the rapist rapes because he wants sex; hence, that it is an act of self-gratification (Pieter-James 2018; Shpancer 2016). It is as true today as it was in the days of Amnon.

17 Although the context is different, Samson is a paradigm case of someone who was indifferent to self-control (Judg. 16:4-21).

Secondly, it is important to point out the key differences between love and lust.

4.7.2. Difference between love and lust

'The story of Amnon in the Old Testament is an example of lustful selfish desire. After he raped his half-sister, his "love" turned to hate. Although he had claimed to be in love, he was … overcome by lust. You can read about the characteristics of real love in 1 Corinthians 13:1–13' (Tagactac 2011).

A comparison of love and lust reveals a few core differences:

- Love, as opposed to lust, has no bodily location. This implies that love is an attribute of the whole person and not just present in the parts of oneself.
- Love requires patience—it takes time - but sinful lust requires immediate gratification or relief.
- Love, as opposed to lust, cannot enslave a person (Rom. 6:6, 12; Titus 3:3).
- The nature of love is serving and giving (John 3:16; 15:13; Gal. 5:13; 1 John 4:10); sinful lust demands to be served and takes. Put differently, love involves selflessness and self-denial, but sinful lust insists on its own way.
- To love another person is not a sin, but to lust after another is (Matt. 5:28; 1 Pet. 2:11).

Bearing in mind the biblical analysis of human passions, especially sexual lust, a contemporary psychological and moral profile of Amnon will now be discussed.

5. A Contemporary Psychological and Moral Profile of Amnon

The psychological and moral profile of Amnon is still very contemporary. A first reading of 2 Samuel 13 might lead one to

believe that Amnon was a psychopath, a disorder that is nowadays referred to in the DSM-5 (*Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*; APA 2013) as an 'antisocial personality disorder' (Dziegielewski 2015:477). Although that is precisely how Amnon would be diagnosed today, there is also another possibility.

According to the DSM-5, an individual must have just three of the seven characteristics of the antisocial personality disorder (Dziegielewski 2015:476–478). The person, (1) repeatedly has difficulties with the law and engages in risky behaviours without regard for the legal consequences; (2) has little regard to the feelings or rights of others and often puts his/her wishes first, conning others into doing what he or she wants, regardless of the benefit to other individuals; (3) is impulsive and often acts before any thought is given to the consequences that result; (4) wants his or her own way and thinks little of hurting others, resulting in fights or assaultive behaviour to secure what he or she wants from others; (5) has a wanton disregard for the safety or security of others; (6) is consistently self-rewarding and often maintains financial or occupational responsibilities; and (7) has a clear lack of remorse and often rationalises his or her behaviour as necessary to obtain what is needed. It is obvious that Amnon clearly fits this profile.

There is another possible profile for Amnon to consider: narcissistic personality disorder. According to the DSM-5, an individual must have a minimum of five of the nine characteristic symptoms to fit the profile: (1) exhibits a pompous sense of worth, for instance, expecting to be viewed as exceptional without commensurate accomplishments; (2) is preoccupied with notions of great success, power, genius, physical attractiveness and love; (3) believes that one should associate with prominent people (or institutions) because of being special and exceptional; (4) insists on disproportionate admiration; (5) exhibits a feeling of entitlement (e.g., overinflated expectations of positive treatment or reflexive compliance with personal expectations); (6) exploits others to accomplish own ends; (7) lacks the ability to empathise with others; (8) exhibits envy of others and believes others are envious of him or her; and (9) demonstrates arrogant, conceited behaviours or viewpoints (Dziegielewski 2015:480–481).

It is interesting that more and more professional people increasingly realise that the DSM medicalised people's vices and personal and interpersonal problems (Joubert 2014; Moncrieff 2014a, 2014b; Moncrieff and Middleton 2015), and that the so-called 'personality disorders' are actually character disorders (Charland 2005, 2010; Martin 2006; Seeskin 2008). The latter is at

least compatible with what the Bible (NASB) teaches about hedonists or egoists:

- 'But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and lie against the truth … For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing' (James 3:14, 16).
- 'What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures … [Y]ou lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel' (James 4:1–2; see also 2 Tim. 3:1–5).
- 'For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another' (Titus 3:3).

These texts suggest that we should first seek for the reasons for personal and interpersonal problems in the human heart (Mark 7:21–23) as opposed to environment or society. To care about something is to value it; not to care is to be indifferent to it. Human beings who are deficient in emotional responses are deemed to be cold, heartless, detached, aloof or stony. This is a fault of character, for it indicates that one is not caring about what one should care about. Whichever profile we prefer to label Amnon with, 2 Samuel 13 shows us a person who gave way to his sensual desires, got entangled in perpetual frustration to the point of making himself ill, and as someone who showed no signs of any emotion of moral self-appraisal; neither shame or humiliation nor guilt or remorse. Thus, if emotions are indicators of what a person cares or does not care about, of what is important and not important and what matters or does not matter to the person, then Amnon only cared about how he felt and what he desired. Sinful appetites and passions, we conclude, destroy the soul of those they hold in their grip.

6. A Pastoral Response to Rape

A six-fold pastoral response to a contemporary rape situation is presented, based on the biblical, psychological and moral analysis of the rape of Tamar by Amnon.

6.1. Treat rape as a sin against the image of God

Amnon did not want to hear or see his victim, so he had her removed from his house like a disposable item rather than a woman created in the image of God (vv. 16–17). God intended

humankind to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:28), spreading divine image-bearers throughout his good world. The essence of rape is, therefore, first and foremost, 'a sin against God because it violates His most sacred creation—human beings made in his image'. It is also an assault against God not only 'because the blessing of sexuality is used to destroy instead of build intimacy, but also because it is an attack against His image in his image-bearers' (Holcomb 2013).

6.2. Treat rape as a sin against all people

Amnon violated the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 18:11 reads: 'Do not have sexual relations with your stepsister …' (NLT). It is evident in 'the Bible that sexual assault is also a sin against another person, involving a physical, psychological and emotionally violation'. But it also affects the whole community. Marie Fortune describes sexual assault in four different ways (Holcomb 2013):

- 'It is a bodily sin. Sexual assault is a violation of bodily boundaries and distorts one's sense of body image'.
- 'It is a sin against relationship in the sense that it destroys and violates the command to love one's neighbour as oneself'.
- 'The consequence of this sin is that it can create barriers of distrust between victims in their future relationships'.
- 'It is a sin not only against the victims but the community surrounding that victim'.

6.3. Young people should 'cry out'

Tamar refused strongly, saying 'No my brother. Do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel' (v. 12). Although Tamar lived in a man's world, she refused to cover up Amnon's sin. She tears her fancy clothes that signified that she was a virgin and puts ashes on her head (vv. 18–19). This sign of mourning is a sign that her innocence has cruelly been taken from her (Jones 2008:64). 'Because sexual predators are masters of manipulation, girls need to be prepared at a very young age to know exactly what to do if someone tries to take advantage of them. Unfortunately, many victims are naïve and vulnerable' (Newheiser 2016).

6.4. Refuse to cover up sexual sins

After Tamar was raped by Amnon, her father, King David, was very angry but did nothing about it (v. 21). Her brother, Absalom said to her, 'But now, keep silent, my sister; he is your brother' (v. 20). 'Many victims are told to keep silent to avoid disrupting the family or the church community. But Scripture teaches that we should reflect on God's special care for the weak and the

oppressed.' If a Christian becomes aware of a rape, he or she should respond immediately by reporting the matter to the legal authorities, otherwise the pattern of evil will continue (Newheiser 2016).

6.5. Victims need help to deal with the past biblically

How should sexual victims respond? They might want to seek revenge. They may harbour feelings of bitterness toward all people of the same sex as their abuser. They may refuse to forgive, or they may begin to abuse others sexually. Like Tamar, they need to understand that they have 'been sinned against by a person who abused his position of power' and authority (Newheiser 2016). And pastors need to utilise the Word of God with people who have been abused. Through biblical counselling and prayer, pastors can help the abused depend on God's grace and power to enable them to forgive their abusers. This is essential for people to be ultimately freed from the emotional and spiritual pain of abuse. The power of the Holy Spirit can heal the soul, mind and feelings of a person who has been abused (Palm 2017).

6.6. Rape victims should study the appetites and passions of their abusers to understand their emotional history and personal character

Rape victims should be encouraged to reflect on the appetites and passions of their abusers, since it helps us to understand something about their personal character. We are purposive, self-conscious and goals-seeking creatures. We get frustrated, therefore, when our goals are thwarted; we respond affectively to what happens to us or those we care for or to the loss of what we value. We are, therefore, subject to anger, grief, sorrow, and so on. The short of it all is that human beings are either masters of their passions and emotions or in bondage to them. But more important than reflecting on human passions in general, is to pay attention to the emotional history of the rapist. Such histories are narratives involving all kinds of things, from reactions, thoughts, intentions, goals and actions to what keeps a person awake at night and is torturing or tormenting his or her soul. Such information tells one much about a person's character.

7. Conclusion

South Africa, as a nation, should be ashamed of itself for having a rape culture. This paper presented a biblical, psychological and moral analysis of the rape of Tamar. To help understand, explain and prevent sexual assault, the paper began with a biblical

analysis of the narrative of the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. The critical factors that contributed towards the rape were then identified. To gain a deeper understanding of a person's character, a biblical analysis of human passions, with special reference to sexual lust, was conducted. The analysis of human passions revealed the following key aspects about a person's character: sinful appetites and passions destroy the soul of those they hold in their grip. This was followed by a contemporary psychological and moral profile of Amnon, the rapist. It showed that the information gleaned about rapists is still very contemporary. For example, it revealed that the rapist has no regard for his victim but is preoccupied with his sensual desires and shows no signs of the emotions typical of moral self-appraisal. Finally, the insights gleaned from the preceding analyses were used to propose six key pastoral responses to rape; it is the hope of the authors that the following six pastoral responses will be used to help fellow South Africans to break out of the spiral of sexual violence: (1) to treat rape as sin against the image of God, and (2) as a sin against all people; (3) to encourage victims to cry out; (4) not to cover up sexual sins; (5) to deal with the past in a biblical way; and (6) to study the appetites and passions of their abusers to learn more about their emotional history and personal character.

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A Comparative Book Review of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began*

Robert Falconer

Rutledge F 2015. *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Wright NT 2016. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion.* New York: HarperOne.

1. Personal Profiles

1.1. Fleming Rutledge

Fleming Rutledge is an Episcopal priest, being one of the first women to be ordained to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church in 1977, and is recognized in North America and Britain as a preacher, lecturer, and teacher of other preachers. She attended the General Theological Seminary and received her Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York. Rutledge was assistant and later senior associate at Grace Church in New York City for 14 years, and served as interim rector of St. John's Church in Salisbury, Connecticut. Furthermore, she has twice been a resident Fellow at the Centre of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, a resident at Wycliffe College in the University of

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1 The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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Toronto School of Theology, and was also a visiting scholar at the American Academy in Rome (Amazon 2017:online).

1.2. N.T. Wright

N.T. Wright was the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, and is noted not only as a prolific writer, but also as a leading Bible scholar. Currently, he serves as the Chair of New Testament and Early Christianity at the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. Previously, he taught New Testament studies at Cambridge, McGill and Oxford Universities. Apart from his many popular books, which include, *How God Became King* (2012), *Simply Jesus* (2011), *After You Believe* (2010), *Surprised by Hope* (2008), *Simply Christian* (2006), *Scripture and the Authority of God* (2005), Wright has also authored the scholarly *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series, these include, The *New Testament and the People of God* (1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003), and *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013).

2. Introduction

A comparison of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began,* makes for an interesting study. There are similarities and differences; (1) Both books were published almost a year apart, (2) Rutledge is an American Episcopal priest, and Wright, a British theologian, and formally an Anglican bishop, thus both write from a similar church tradition with pastoral sentiments. (3) Rutledge and Wright both make mention of the atonement in the light of apartheid, Desmond Tutu's work in reconciliation, Martin Luther King, Jr, and the 2015 Charleston church shooting, in South Carolina. (4) it appears that Rutledge understands Paul's writings from the viewpoint of the Apocalyptic Paul, whereas Wright is a serious advocate of the New Pauline Perspective.[2] (5) The style of each book is, however, different. Rutledge's book is scholarly, but accessible to laity. Wright's book, on the other hand, was written at a popular level, and yet is challenging and deeply theological.

This comparative book review would be too lengthy if all the important issues from both books were addressed. It is expedient rather to offer a brief summary and evaluation of each book, and then to compare three common and significant themes, namely; (1) Sin, (2) Penal Substitutionary Atonement and (3) Justification.

2 The Apocalyptic Paul is a recent theological trend among Pauline scholars, and while the New Pauline Perspective (NPP) is not very recent, it has been popularized by Wright and is often considered controversial in many circles, especially among Reformed theologians. A helpful sketch of the four main views in Pauline theology can be found in Michael Bird's lecture, *A Story of Paul's Theology Between Messianic Event and Salvation History,* accessed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=12_VLaZmsc4

3. Brief Summary and Evaluation

3.1. Rutledge

Rutledge's volume, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the death of Jesus Christ,* won *Christianity Today's* 2017 *Beautiful Orthodoxy Book* of the Year. While the book is suitable for scholars, it offers something for congregants as well. The question is often asked, 'Why did Jesus have to die?'. Rutledge believes that the correct question to ask is, 'Why was Jesus crucified?'. The focus ought to be on the manner of Jesus' death, not merely on the death itself. This emphasis is highlighted throughout the book. She explores the horrific crucifixion of Jesus as the link between justice and righteousness, which other modes of execution would not offer. Hence, God in this way chose to demonstrate his love for his human creatures. Crucifixion emphasized 'the dehumanisation of the victim; declaring another person less than human' (Rutledge 2015:80). The book argues that if the cross of Christ were not at the very centre of the Christian proclamation, the narrative of Jesus' life would be just another story about a charismatic spiritual preacher. However, she explains that 'it is the crucifixion that marks out Christianity as something definitively different in the history of religion. It is in the crucifixion that the nature of God is truly revealed' (p. 44). Jesus' death is therefore uniquely different from that of the martyrs, having unique significance. Various atonement themes are articulated in detail, but it is argued in the book that one should not favour one theme over against another. Rutledge attempts to find the 'creative balance between doctrine and artistry, responding not only to the problems put by the biblical text (but) also to its narrative structure, poetry, and language' (p. 9). With much praise, the Roman Catholic Bishop, Robert Barron, highlighted the strangeness of the cross in the book, reflecting on how Rutledge defamiliarized and de-domesticated the cross (2016:online). At one point in the book she makes a comment reminiscent of Wright's work, that if it were not for the cross of Christ, we would still be Greeks and Jews with nothing *revolutionary* to offer the world.

Despite the book's disapproval of *penal* in penal substitution, Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion,* is a masterpiece, which offers all Christians a profound theology on the atonement, which is rooted in both Scripture and historical theology.

3.2. Wright

Not surprisingly, Wright continues to offer provocative and stimulating ideas. Although *The Day The Revolution Began* is repetitive in parts, Wright's understanding of the atonement in its

context ought not to be ignored. Some, like John MacArthur (2017:online) have discredited Wright's book,[3] presumably without having read it; and others have embraced it, as is evident in the reviews on the back cover. Either way, the book is to be taken seriously and is to be evaluated against scripture and its historical setting. With that said, I take Wright's book as ground- breaking in atonement theology; despite criticism from others, he continues to shape his theology by Scripture, albeit creatively.

Although Wright does not engage with Rutledge and her work, he asks the same question, 'Why the cross rather than anything else?' (2016:9), and then focuses the rest of his writing on Jesus' death as the event that radically changed the world; Jesus' death had launched a revolution. He argues that the revolution the early Christians spoke about was *more* than Jesus saving us from our sin so that we can go to heaven. Rather, he died for our sin so that we could be put right and become a part of God's plan to put his world right. Wright believes that much atonement theology has been scaled down, domesticated and distorted, and he wishes to set this right and put the cross of Christ in the historical context of Israel.[4] Like Rutledge, and my own work,[5] Wright argues for a combination of two motifs, the substitutionary and *Christus Victor* motifs, joined with a third, the sacrificial imagery. He demonstrates, I think successfully, that atonement grows out of the stories we already have of Jesus' life, evident in the four Gospels. So as much as we should consult Paul's letters for atonement theology, Wright argues that we should *also* consult the Gospels. He proclaims, 'Jesus, by taking upon himself the weight of Israel's sins and thereby of the world's sins, dies under the accumulated force of evil, *so that now at last the kingdom can come in its fullness'* (p. 217).

While one might not necessarily agree with everything Wright says, his theology is challenging, and if he is right, it ought to change the way we view the cross of Christ in such a way that draws us all into the divine revolution.

3 In his sermon, MacArthur emphatically states, 'Wright propagates a false gospel, he is a happy ambiguous heretic'. He warns that 'many young men are influenced by Wright to believe the wrong things and have absolutely no fear and terror… void of the Holy Spirit who convicts', and then proceeds to ask, 'Where are the terrified people, where is the dread' (talking of God's wrath). MacArthur made it clear that he fails to understand what Wright believes, but knows exactly what Wright does not believe (2017:online). Accordingly, MacArthur's failure to understand Wright's work, which he acknowledges himself, was made quite clear in his evaluation of the book. That 'many young men' are able to understand Wright (although with much patience) and a seasoned senior pastor and theologian is unable to grasp Wright's *complex* theology is concerning.

4 Cf. A fascinating and charitable discussion between N.T. Wright and the Reformed New Testament Scholar, Tom Schreiner, which explores some of these issues in more depth from both perspectives can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loat_y8SQBo

5 Cf. Falconer 2015.

4. Sin

4.1. Rutledge

Considering Pauline theology on sin, Rutledge understands Romans 7:11 as 'Sin using the Law as an instrument to deal Death to humanity' (2015:101). God, she believes, did not condemn Jesus to death, but rather Jesus was condemned by the curse of the Law, because Jesus gave himself over to the Enemy, to Sin[6] and to its ally, the Law. Hence, the wages of sin *is* death (Rom. 6:23 and 7:8–

6 Rutledge capitalizes the 'Sin' when referring to Sin as a power.

11). The book argues that this was Christ's warfare, and is probably the most important reason that Christ was crucified, for '*no other mode of execution would have been commensurate with the extremity of humanity's condition under Sin'* (p. 102). As his body suffered and died under torture and execution, so 'his human nature absorbed the curse of the Law, the sentence that deals death to the human being' (p. 103; Rom. 7:11). And yet, redemption of the world was outworked through the condemnation of Jesus Christ, as the redemptive purpose in God's condemnation of the sin of his people in one man. Rutledge acknowledges individual sins, but if we are to take Scripture seriously, she says, it is more important for us to understand sin as Sin in the singular, both Sin and Death are powers, 'Sin is not so much a collection of individual misdeeds as it is an active, malevolent agency bent upon despoiling, imprisonment, and death—the utter undoing of God's purpose', proclaims Rutledge (p. 175). Sin is our cosmic enemy. And yet, it is not enough for us to simply say that we are held bondage to Sin, for the result is that we are *active, conscripted agents* of Sin (p. 179), and without God, the Christian concept of Sin has no meaning.

Sin has two aspects, Rutledge believes, (1) The crucifixion was a sacrifice for sin, and this 'Sin is a responsible guilt for which atonement must be made'; (2) All mankind is enslaved by the power of Sin (Rom. 3:9; John 8:34), Sin is an 'alien power' that must be destroyed, and one can only be liberated by a greater power. In this way Christ is said to be the Victor over Sin and Death. Sin is more than wrongdoing or grievous actions, it is an infectious illness that enslaves us in its grip, and so sin is not necessarily something we commit, but rather something that we *are in.* And yet there is no escape from these Powers, she argues, apart from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

4.2. Wright

The concept of sin is dealt with somewhat differently by Wright. For Wright, Scripture highlights God's plan to deal with sin by breaking the power of idols and so bring in the new creation into this world, the focus of which is on the people of Israel. The human problem is not just the traditional idea of sin, but for Wright it is idolatry and the corruption of vocation.[7] As one would expect from an advocate of the New Pauline Perspective, Wright moves away from the theology of 'Jesus takes our sin, and we take his "righteous[ness]"', and argues instead that, 'Jesus's reconciling death sets people free to take up their true vocation. The Messiah's death gives to him, and by extension to all who follow Jesus, the

7 In an interview with Tom Schreiner, Wright explains that 'worshiping that which is not God is the primary sin' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

vocation to be part of the ongoing divine plan, the covenant purpose for the whole world' (2016:82).

As with Rutledge, he argues from Paul, that sin is not simply breaking moral codes, although it is that too, but it is 'missing the mark' of being truly human, by worshipping idols instead of the one true God. As Wright illustrates, this plays out all too clearly in Israel's rebellion against God that eventually leads them into exile. This is true of gentiles too. The result is slavery for both mankind and creation.[8] By turning away from worshipping God to worshipping idols, they have rejected the vocation for which they were designed, and have thus been led into slavery to sin. Therefore, when human beings fail in their image-bearing vocation, the issue for Wright is not that they primarily face punishment, but that the Powers take control and God's plan for his people and his creation is thwarted. In this way Death is the intrinsic consequence of sin.

8 Cf. Rom. 8.

So, we ought to see sin, Wright believes, in the context of human vocation bearing the image of God and reflecting his wise authority to the world in praise to God. In such a milieu sin becomes the refusal to be a part of God's purposes for his creation. Sin is thus more a vocational failure than it is a moral failure.[9] I doubt that Wright wishes to exclude moral failure, but rather that he sees a larger more significant picture of sin in which moral failure is a part of the larger problem. Further, he argues that,

> Any suggestion that "sin" does not make God angry (a frequent idea in modern thought as a reaction against the caricatures of an ill-tempered deity) needs to be treated with distain. When God looks at sin, what he sees is what a violin maker would see if the player were to use his lovely creation as a tennis racquet.[10] (Wright 2016:132).

9 In the radio interview, Schreiner disagrees explicitly with Wright at this point, saying that, 'Sin is fundamentally about relationship rather than vocational' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

We see this clearly in Israel's sins which were responsible for the exile, and therefore the atoning work of Christ and the 'forgiveness of sins' deal with the sins that caused the exile in the first place, and by extension, Wright argues, deal with all sins that alienate us from God. The 'forgiveness of sin' enables people to become human beings who fully bear the image of God as the divine vocation, now, and then completely in the coming age.

10 This was a concern of Schreiner regarding Wright's book. He feels that the wrath of God is viewed negatively, in other words, Wright does not take God's wrath very seriously. However, Wright responds in the interview by saying that God is indeed wrathful against sin, but that he should not be viewed as an 'angry bullying God' (Wright and Schreiner 2017:online).

5. Penal Substitutionary Atonement

5.1. Rutledge

It is one thing to reject the caricature of Penal Substitution, as Wright does in his book, but it's quite another thing to reject it

altogether. I found this most surprising in Rutledge's work, especially when she promotes Anselm's satisfaction theory. Nevertheless, she does argue for a vicarious atonement for sin, *together* with the decisive victory over Sin and Death. She argues that 'any concept of *hilasterion* in the sense of placating, appeasing, deflecting the anger of, or satisfying the wrath of' is a misconception and is inadmissible (Rutledge 2015:280). The understanding of propitiation is rejected because it sees God as the object, when in Scripture, God himself is the acting subject, says she. Further, Rutledge is concerned that if one maintains the law court motif, 'the presentation of the gospel is likely to drift into a moralistic frame of reference' (p. 320). Like Wright, she bemoans that many Christians think that Paul gives witness to an elaborate doctrine of penal substitution that is neatly worked out. Rutledge believes that this exists nowhere in Paul's thought, but affirms that his theology is that Jesus sacrificed himself as a substitute, that is 'in our place' and 'on our behalf'. The book also argues that the motif of substitution is present in Anselm, and goes as far back as the Greek and Latin Patristics.[11]

11 Cf. Falconer 2015.

Rutledge proclaims that substitution took a different turn after Calvin in Late Reformed Scholasticism and became *penal* substitution, a keynote in later Reformed Theology. She feels that 'preachers and teachers of penal substitution' have 'forced the biblical tapestry of motifs into a narrowly defined, schematic, rationalistic—and highly individualistic – version of the substitution motif derived in part from Anselm' (2015:488). The book discusses fourteen detailed objections to the penal substitution model; they are as follows: (1) it is 'crude', (2) it keeps bad company, (3) it is culturally conditioned, (4) it views the death as detached from the resurrection, (5), it is incoherent: an innocent person cannot take on the guilt of another, (6) it glorifies suffering and encourages masochistic behaviour, (7) it is too 'theoretical', too scholastic and abstract, (8) it depicts a vindictive God, (9) it is essentially violent, (10) it is morally objectionable, (11) it does not develop Christian character, (12) it is too individualistic,[12] (13) it is controlled by an emphasis on punishment, and (14) forensic imagery excludes the New Testament apocalyptic viewpoint.

12 Yet, Rutledge also writes, 'We have already stressed the communal nature of God's redeemed people over against a *hyperindividualistic* interpretation of the cross, but we must not lose sight of the individual and the summons to the conversion and discipleship of individuals. One of the most striking characteristics of Jesus as he went about his ministry was his personal address to individual men and women - calling them by name, speaking to the intimate circumstances of their lives, addressing each one in his or her singularity. Of all the motifs, it is substitution that most directly addresses the individual's involvement' (2015:529).

However, substitution, she argues, is an exchange, Christ exchanged his glory for the form of a slave, riches for poverty, his righteousness for our unrighteousness. This she believes was the way in which Christ had won the victory.

5.2. Wright

Wright is known as an ardent critic of the traditional penal substitutionary theory of atonement, especially after the

publication of *Pierced for our Transgressions: Rediscovering the glory of Penal Substitution,* by Jeffery, Ovey and Sach (2007). Yet, contrary to popular belief, Wright affirms the *penal* in penal substitutionary atonement,[13] albeit, in a fresh perspective, but one that I believe has merit.

To begin with, Wright locates penal substitution, Jesus bearing punishment in the place of his people, in biblical narrative and Patristic theology. But he argues that the Reformers gave it a 'new spin' in a way of rejecting the Roman Catholic theology of purgatory. Penal substitution thus became a major 'part of the polemic against the doctrine of purgatory which lacked biblical support and had the tendency towards corruption and abuse. Further, 'the Reformers objected strongly to the idea that the priest at the altar was sacrificing Jesus all over again, thus making the benefit of his atoning death available for all those who witnessed the event', says Wright (2016:31). Penal substitution offered the Reformers a strong polemic against the Mass. He (2016:32) explains that,

> The Reformers and their successors were thus *trying to give biblical answers to medieval questions*. They were wrestling with the questions of how the angry God of the late medieval period might be pacified, both here (through the Mass?) and hereafter (in purgatory?).

Later, in nineteenth-century Protestantism where the Mass and the doctrine of purgatory were no longer issues to contend with, penal substitution, according to Wright, found a new home in Western piety where the focus was 'on *my* sin, *my* heavenly (that is, nonworldly) salvation, and of course *my* Saviour' rather than on 'God's kingdom coming on earth as in heaven' (Wright 2016:35).

Wright puts penal substitution primarily in the historical context of exile and to a lesser degree, the Exodus. He understands Galatians 3:13 as proclaiming 'that the "exile" is over - because the "curse" has fallen on the Messiah himself, the single representative of Israel, and has thereby been exhausted'. He argues that one cannot get more 'penal' than that, especially in light of the Deuteronomic curse. In this way, Jesus' 'accursed death means that others are no longer under the curse' (2016:240). The book explains that Galatians focuses on the cross in undoing the Deuteronomic 'curse of exile', whereby Jesus, Israel's Messiah and representative, acts as the substitute and thus solves the problem of 'exile'. Wright (2016:254) explains that the,

> Passover-like victory over the powers is the end-of-exile dealing with sin; and the way sin is dealt with is by the appropriate *substitution* of the one who alone is the true *representative*. The

13 MacArthur is quick to accuse Wright of rejecting substitutionary atonement, saying, 'he (Wright) rejects the idea that Jesus is the sacrifice that God chose to die for our sins' (2017:online). However, as Wright says, his question has everything to do with, 'How does one put penal substitution together?'. The question is not its negation. His book, *the Day the Revolution Began,* affirms penal substitution (which is more than we see in Rutledge!). Schreiner, nevertheless, proclaims tongue-in-cheek that Wright ought to 'write a second more balanced book' whereby penal substitution comes through even stronger, to which Wright chuckles and seems to welcome the idea (Wright 2017:online). I think Schreiner has a point.

> one bore the sin of the many. The innocent died in the place of the guilty. This only makes sense within the narrative of love, of new Exodus, of end of exile—of Jesus.

While providing exposition on relevant sections in Romans, contrary to Rutledge, Wright considers Romans 8:1–4 an explicit reference to penal substitutionary atonement. However, he believes that this does not fall under the narrative of an angry God determined to punish, as in the 'works contract', but rather, as part of 'God's vocational covenant with Israel and through Israel, the vocation that focused on the Messiah himself and then opened out at last into a genuinely human existence' (Wright 2016:286). Instead of the typical idea of God punishing Jesus, he uses Romans 8:1-11 to show that 'God punished *Sin in the flesh* of Jesus' (p. 287). This offers a challenge to mainstream Christian thought.

6. Justification

6.1. Rutledge

The theology of Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* informs Rutledge's understanding of justification. On the one hand, she advocates the concept of 'one person being accountable for many', and on the other hand, she argues that a just resolution of a great offence should equal or exceed its enormity, evident in the offering of Jesus Christ as a 'supreme order of magnitude' (2015:128). She goes on to explain that because of a perfect justice being 'wrought in the self-offering of the Son', no one is able to claim 'exemption from judgement on one's own merits, but only on the merits of the Son' (p. 132).

Of interest is Rutledge's use of 'rectification'[14] as a synonym for 'justification', which she argues is a better English word because it covers all aspects. To 'rectify' or 'to make right', she argues is closer to the English word 'righteousness' than is the word 'justify'. She understands the word 'judge' as part of the same word-group as 'righteousness', and that this judgement is not for destruction, but rather for purifying and removing Sin and evil. The idea parallels with her argument that 'righteousness' does not refer merely to human virtue and correct behaviour, but instead to God's action in restoring righteousness and justice to Israel. Her premise is that 'in our world, something is terribly wrong and must be put right'. Therefore, 'the righteousness of God,[15] also means the justice of God, and most importantly, it means the action of God in making conditions and relationships right', and this she believes offers a dynamic perspective of both the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rutledge 2015:144). However, Rutledge does not negate

14 Bird explains that the term 'rectification' comes from the Apocalyptic Paul which he believes is faddish and takes the idea of justification as rectification too far (2016:online).

15 In her sermon she says that, 'Righteousness and justification mean exactly the same thing in Greek. The righteousness of God is the power of God for justification' (2015:online).

punishment, for she clearly states that if there is to be moral order and justice, certain things cannot go unpunished, but that this justice is seen in the crucifixion of Christ, it is God's response to the injustices of the world. Justification (or rectification, as she likes to call it) is ultimately eschatological, according to Rutledge. She writes,

> Pronouncing righteous (justifying/rectifying) is 'an eschatological act of the Judge at the last day which takes place proleptically in the present.' This explains how we are able to say that a person is 'made righteous' even though we can see that it isn't so. But it is so; it is eschatologically true. The verdict of 'righteous' that God pronounces at the last day is already made a fact in the present (2015:336).[16]

Rutledge, with a high regard for Wright and his work, is particularly disappointed that he remains antagonistic toward apocalyptic theology[17] (of which Rutledge seems to be an advocate), and that he 'continues to emphasize forgiveness without entertaining the larger concept of rectification' (Rutledge 2015:356). She bemoans how Wright, by re-contextualizing Jesus in the context of Second Temple Judaism, also 'de-radicalizes Paul by excluding the narrative of the captivity of the entire created order under the rule of Sin and Death'. Therefore, because he is unsympathetic to Paul's apocalyptic theology, he is unable to give 'a vastly expanded understanding of the cosmic vision of Paul which is evident in works of apocalyptic theologians (p. 367). In light of this I now turn to Wright's thoughts on justification in his book.

6.2. Wright

Wright, an advocate of the New Pauline Perspective,[18] has a very different view of justification compared to the traditional view. He takes, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21), as a mistranslation in many Bible translations. He believes that this 'double imputation', that is, that our sins are 'imputed' to Jesus and his righteousness is 'imputed' to us[19] is erroneous. This is not what Paul means, Wright argues. For Wright, justification is more about God's faithfulness to the covenant, not merely with Abraham, but ultimately through Israel and then to the whole world. It is the 'covenant declaration' which establishes in one family all who share the messianic faith*, and 'e*qually, on the other hand, justification means that this believing family is declared to be *in the right'* (Wright 2016:322). Justification therefore redefines people.[20] According to Wright, Abraham was chosen to reverse Adam's sin, and then gave Israel the vocation of bringing light to

16 Likewise, in the same sermon she proclaims, 'The righteousness of God is the essential gift of the age to come which awaits those who watch for Christ' (2015:online).

17 Bird explains the Apocalyptic view of Paul as follows, 'Paul preached an evasive moment of grace that interrupts Israel's story and puts an end to religion. The problem was the cosmic tyranny of Sin, that death and religion simply cannot fix. The solution was the faithfulness of Christ, not the works of the law, the faithfulness of Christ in his death and resurrection. This is what defeats death and the powers of the present evil age' (2015:online).

18 Here, Bird also offers a definition as follows, 'What Paul preached was the grace of the gospel against the ethnocentrism of Judaism. And there the problem is that salvation is limited to the Jewish people to the exclusion of the gentiles. The solution removing the boundaries between the Jews and gentiles so that the gentiles could be saved alongside Jews and the boundary markers were pushed away' (2015:online).

19 Similarly, Wrights laments, 'in Romans 3, the usual reading is that through this "propitiation" those who trust in what Jesus did on the cross can be declared to be "in the right." This event of "reckoning of righteousness" is called "justification" (confusingly, the English words "righteous" and "just" translate the same Greek root, *dikaios*). The present passage is normally seen as central to this doctrine. In this usual narrative of "justification," humans start off with no moral credit, nothing to qualify them to escape hell and go to heaven; but God's action in Christ gives them the credit, the "righteousness," they need. They are therefore, "justified"' (2016:300).

20 For a full and detailed look at Wright's theology on the New Pauline Perspective and justification, see his *magnus opus,* titled, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013).

the world. Both the covenant promise and the covenant purpose were meant to deal with sin. God would not remain faithful to the covenant as long as it did not deal with sin. Due to Israel's failure, Jesus became Israel's representative, the Messiah, and fulfilled God's covenant purpose. Despite Jesus being sent to his death for a crime not committed, his resurrection declared him to be 'in the right'. God declares this same verdict to those who are 'in the Messiah', 'they are freely declared to be in the right, to be members of the covenant, through the redemption which is found in the Messiah, Jesus'. Justification then takes place 'in the Messiah' (p. 323). Wright argues that this is a legal verdict with two meanings, it is covenantal *and* forensic. It is not the resurrection that causes justification, but rather it is the sign that justification took place at Calvary. Justification anticipates this verdict that would be announced on the final day, says Wright. He continues, to explain that this has been affected through Jesus, Israel's Messiah, because he had taken upon himself the vocation to which Israel had been unfaithful. Jesus' faithfulness to this vocation 'results in the covenantal declaration of "justification," in the present time, for all who believe' (p. 324).

7. Conclusion

This comparative book review offered brief summaries and evaluations of Fleming Rutledge's, *The Crucifixion* and N.T. Wright's, *The Day the Revolution Began*; after which I compared the following three significant themes which were common between both books, (1) Sin, (2) Penal Substitutionary Atonement and (3) Justification. Both Rutledge and Wright have written magnificent works, and will certainly make a significant contribution to scholarship. And while both are highly stimulating books, both are equally provocative and challenging.

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