

A RESPONSE TO CLARK PINNOCK'S HOPE FOR THE
UNEVANGELIZED AS SEEN IN A *WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY*

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INTRODUCTION

The destiny of the “unevangelized”¹ is part of an ongoing theological debate. The term unevangelized will be used throughout this paper to describe modern persons who have not heard of Jesus. Inclusivists, exclusivists, and pluralists argue for different solutions concerning the ultimate demise of those who never hear of Jesus. Inclusivists argue that Jesus is the Savior but one does not have to believe this to be saved.² Exclusivists maintain that Jesus is the Savior and knowledge and confession of him is essential to one’s salvation.³ Pluralists hold that Jesus is not the only Savior rather many paths lead to God. The key issue regarding the unevangelized for many is one of fairness. It does not seem fair that God would expect all humans to place faith in Jesus of Nazareth, a first century Jew, in order to be saved. This issue ushers in a theological problem of evil. Daniel Strange calls this the “soteriological problem of evil.”⁴ Many question God’s justice since equal opportunity for salvation seems absent. In *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, Clark H. Pinnock aims to answer the skeptics and pessimists with great hope and optimism. In chapter five, entitled “Hope for the Unevangelized,” Pinnock provides his case for those who never hear. Pinnock believes that God’s activity extends beyond the church to the utmost parts of the world. Here Pinnock establishes what he calls the “faith principle.” Pinnock states, “In my

¹ They are also referred to as the invincibly ignorant, the unreached, the heathen, and the pagan. Daniel Strange notes these terms in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized*, 32-33.

² Key inclusivists in this debate include: Clark H. Pinnock (*A Wideness in God’s Mercy*), John Sanders (*No Other Name*), Terrance Tiessen (*Who Can Be Saved?*), and Neal Punt (*A Theology of Inclusivism*).

³ Key exclusivists in this debate are: Ronald Nash (*Is Jesus the Only Savior?*), D.A. Carson (*The Gagging of God*), Daniel Strange (*The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized*) and Millard Erickson (*How Shall They Be Saved?*).

⁴ Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 22.

judgment, the faith principle is the basis of universal accessibility.”⁵ Through the faith principle, Pinnock argues that God looks at one’s faith not knowledge in order to save. Whether one receives special revelation or general revelation, Pinnock contends that God will judge based upon one’s response to the given light. Pinnock’s faith principle removes the necessity of Christian knowledge to be saved and emphasizes general faith.

Pinnock, as an inclusivist, has a high Christology yet does not agree that one must personally know Christ to be saved. Pinnock argues that a general view of God is epistemologically sufficient to save, in all ages. He provides five biblical proofs to support the faith principle. Each of these proofs, Pinnock believes, proves that one can be saved without special revelation. First, Pinnock argues that general revelation is sufficient to save based upon Hebrews 11:6. Second, he uses the example of the “holy pagans.” Pinnock considers the Gentile believers of the Old Testament to be holy pagans saved outside of God’s covenant with Israel. Third, Pinnock argues that pre-messianic Jews were saved without knowledge of Christ. Fourth, he uses Matthew 25:40 to argue that good works reveal saving faith. Last, Pinnock uses those who die as infants, who almost none consider damned, as saved without knowledge of Christ.⁶ The diagram below illustrates each of these examples.

⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 157.

⁶ Pinnock, 157-168.

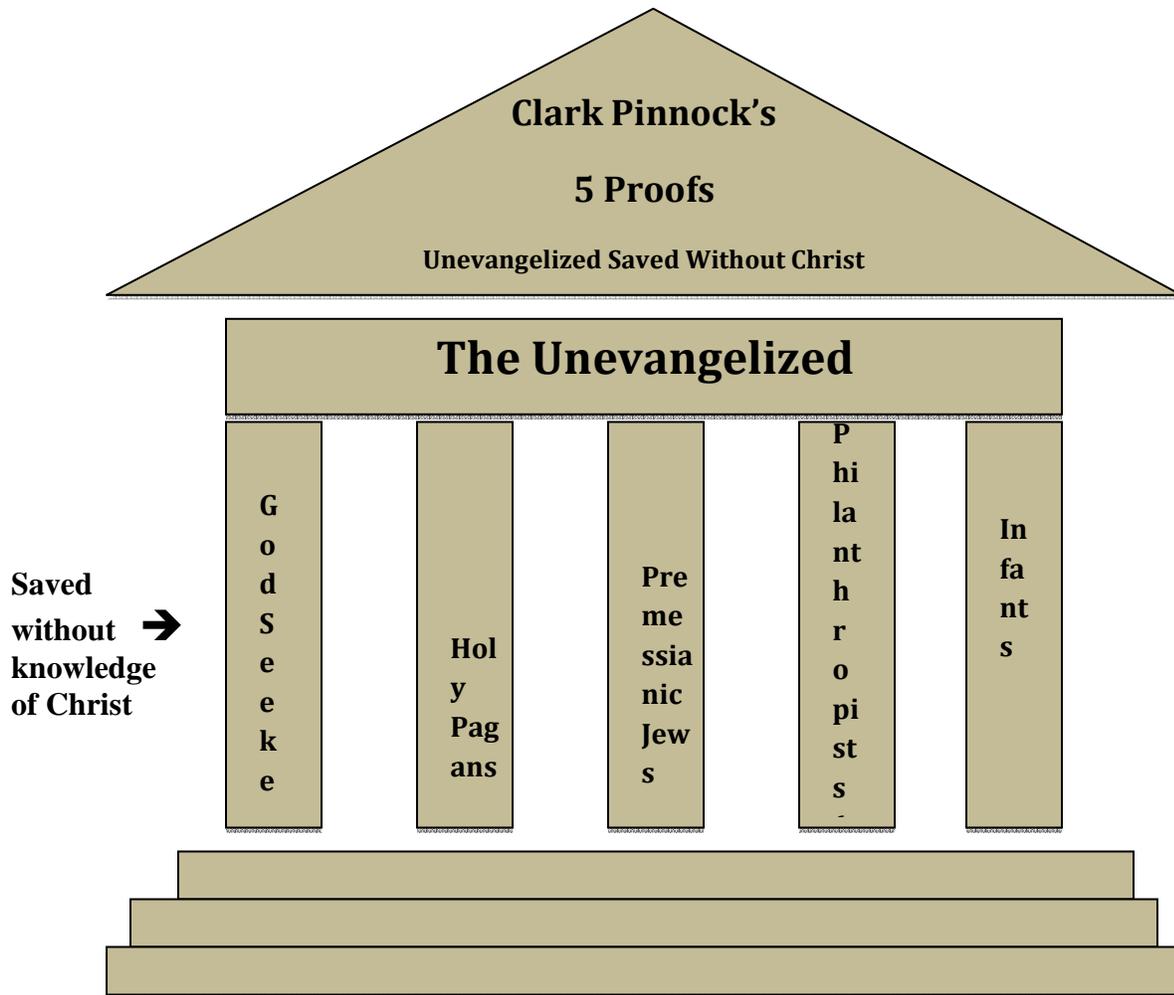


Figure 1. This diagram illustrates Pinnock's five proofs to provide hope for the unevangelized.

Pinnock argues that each of these proofs establish that God will save individuals on the basis of faith. He even uses infants who do not possess faith. These examples, Pinnock believes, prove that the unevangelized are not required to know Jesus since each example contains unevangelized persons who are saved. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze Pinnock's wider hope arguments and to reveal the theological and hermeneutical mistakes within these arguments, which renders his conclusion unwarranted.

CHAPTER ONE

God Seekers: Clark Pinnock's Proof from Hebrews 11:6

Pinnock begins his wider hope argument for the unevangelized by defining faith. He uses Hebrews 11:6 as his proof text. Here Pinnock develops what he calls the "faith principle." He argues that this principle is enshrined in Hebrews 11:6.⁷ Hebrews 11:6 states, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Pinnock defines this principle:

By faith, one receives the prevenient grace of God on the basis of an honest search for God and obedience to God's word as heard in heart and conscience... There is no time or space where he [Spirit] is not free to move or where a person cannot call on God's mercy.⁸

There are two criteria present for the faith principle: the cognitive (fearing God) and the ethical (doing what is right).⁹ Pinnock's argument here for the faith principle is most significant to his wider hope argument for the unevangelized. The faith principle emphasizes fearing God and obeying him. Special revelation is not necessary. Hebrews 11:6 is the lynchpin that holds Pinnock's other arguments in place. The rest of his proofs will assume the faith definition Pinnock provides here. Pinnock establishes what he believes to be "saving faith." The debate revolves around the question, "What is saving faith?" Pinnock, and other inclusivists, argue that faith in general revelation acts not only to condemn but also to save. The exclusivists claim that explicit faith in Christ must be expressed in order to gain salvation with no exceptions. This is the major dividing point between inclusivists and exclusivists. Pinnock focuses on Hebrews 11:6 to define the inclusivist notion of saving faith that excludes Christ as the object. Inclusivists

⁷ Pinnock, 160.

⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in eds. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, *More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 117. Quoted by Daniel Strange in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized*.

⁹ Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelized*, 108.

utilize this verse to define saving faith more than any other verse. The following will provide a brief summary of Pinnock's argument for his faith principle.

The Argument

Pinnock argues that the unevangelized can attain saving faith without knowledge of Christ. According to Pinnock, knowledge is important but God is more concerned with man's heart. Pinnock believes the unevangelized will not be condemned since they were not privy to Christian doctrine that never came to them. Pinnock states, "Hebrews indicates that people are saved by faith, not primarily by knowledge."¹⁰ Here Pinnock finds his view concerning the role of faith. He elaborates even further:

God looks primarily for faith in persons. God is very generous in doing so, and keeps the window of accessibility to salvation wide open. The fact that the information possessed by the unevangelized is slight does not disqualify them from entering into a right relationship with God through faith.¹¹

Pinnock concludes that Hebrews brings a message of hope to those who have not heard about Christ. According to Pinnock, the unevangelized will not be condemned because they lacked knowledge. They will be judged based upon the faith they did or did not have in God's revelation to them. Pinnock expands beyond 11:6 to strengthen his argument. Hebrews 11 contains the great heroes of faith.¹² The heroes of faith establish the context of Hebrews 11:6. They are listed as examples of individuals saved through faith. Pinnock holds that general faith in God is the emphasis of Hebrews 11 with no mention of special knowledge. Pinnock says it was not knowledge that brought the heroes of faith to God rather it was faith in God. Pinnock does not claim that faith by itself saves. Pinnock as an inclusivist believes that Christ alone is the Savior.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The heroes of faith include Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joshua.

John Sanders describes it this way: “They hold that the work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation (no one would be saved without it) but not epistemologically necessary (one need not be aware of the work in order to benefit from it).”¹³ Pinnock argues that Hebrews 11:6 proves that the unevangelized do not need knowledge of Christ. As an inclusivist, he does not believe that the recipients must personally know the Savior is Jesus. The vehicle to God is faith the revelation God has provided. This may or may not include knowledge of Christ. Faith is the key component. Pinnock establishes that the nature of faith in Hebrews 11:6 does not have Christ as its object. He argues that the antediluvian believers and the Old Testament believers after Noah were all saved without knowledge of Christ.

Pinnock focuses on the antediluvian believers Abel, Enoch, and Noah. According to Pinnock, they were saved through faith not primarily knowledge. Pinnock argues that Abraham, who came after Noah, also came to God by general faith. Abraham is not made righteous through knowledge but faith. Pinnock argues that Abraham had minimal knowledge yet was received by God due to his faith. Pinnock states, “God accepted Abraham because he believed he would be given a son and heir. How little by way of knowledge God required of him! What God was looking for in Abraham was faith, not a certain quotient of knowledge.”¹⁴ Pinnock ties this truth about Abraham to the unevangelized. The unevangelized, like Abraham, are deficient in their knowledge of Christ.¹⁵ Hebrews 11 establishes that God desires humans to possess faith. If these Old Testament believers were considered righteous due to faith in God then the unevangelized may also be considered righteous through faith in God. Abraham’s righteousness was declared by God because he believed what God had revealed along with Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Pinnock

¹³ John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 215.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Later the point will be made concerning Abraham’s potential knowledge of a Messiah.

argues that God would not require individuals to confess Christ without having access to this information. Condemnation will not come to those who did not have access. This would make God unfair - a charge Pinnock has vowed to avoid as an Inclusivist.

Pinnock names Job as the “pagan believer.” Pinnock explores the content of Job’s faith and compares him to a modern day unevangelized person who has faith in God. Pinnock believes there to be no difference between the two. Job responded to God in faith. Pinnock argues that an unevangelized person can also respond with the same capacity of faith with no knowledge of Christ and be saved. Pinnock believes that if Job was born thousands of years later most would say he would be saved. The point that Pinnock makes is that Job was considered righteous thousands of years ago and if he lived post-resurrection without knowledge of Christ he would still be considered righteous. Pinnock also adds a criticism here against middle knowledge theology. Middle knowledge is the view that God knows what anybody would do in any situation and based upon that knowledge he is justified in judging one upon those known actions.¹⁶

Analysis of Argument

Pinnock’s interpretation of Hebrews 11:6 contains hermeneutical mistakes which are fatal to his argument. He can be applauded for his sincere attempt to create a safe haven for those epistemologically deficient. If there exist such a haven it cannot be found in Hebrews 11. One of the most basic mistakes Pinnock makes is inserting his own philosophical presuppositions into Hebrews 11:6 when there is little contextual evidence that such a

¹⁶ In *Four Views on Salvation*, Pinnock says of middle knowledge, “I do not find it philosophically sound, and therefore I do not make use of it. I ask myself how God could possibly know what truly free agents would choose in hypothetical situations. But putting my beliefs aside, if the reader is able to accept middle knowledge, they can escape soteriological restrictivism, and I consider that a positive thing” (144). Here Pinnock shows his strong distaste for restrictivism in that he would applaud one for accepting middle knowledge if a rejection of restrictivism followed.

presupposition belongs. Pinnock strives to keep the Christian God a fair one.¹⁷ Inclusivists err in placing God's justice as the highest priority of their theology. For them, God cannot commit an act that appears unfair or unlovely. Paul House states, "Rather than defining this concept through contextual exegesis, they shift to a philosophical assertion: a loving God will not give some persons opportunities to hear the gospel that others will not have."¹⁸ By this strategy, Pinnock strays from the text and forces onto it his presuppositions. Faith is a vital component in conversion. The significance of faith cannot be overly stressed. Hebrews 11:6 teaches that, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Hebrews 11:6 strongly suggest that explicit knowledge is required for saving faith. The purpose here is to reveal Pinnock's hermeneutical mistakes while providing an accurate interpretation of Hebrews 11:6. The focus of this chapter will be upon the context and meaning of Hebrews 11:6 which disproves Pinnock's conclusion.

Purpose of Hebrews

Pinnock's unwarranted philosophical presupposition led him to another mistake. Pinnock misconstrues the specific purpose of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews was written with a specific purpose for a specific audience. The author's goal for Hebrews makes Pinnock's argument highly unlikely. The author of Hebrews addresses specific problems that relate to his audience. Donald Hagner writes, "One's understanding of the purpose of Hebrews depends to a considerable extent on one's conclusion concerning the original readers."¹⁹ Scot McKnight,

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem makes a strong argument here comparing angels with mankind. Grudem says, "God created two groups of intelligent, moral creatures. Among the angels, many sinned, but God decided to redeem none of them. This was perfectly just for God to do, and no angel can ever complain that he has been treated unfairly by God" (*Systematic Theology* 403). If God is justified in condemning all fallen angels then surely he is justified in condemning all fallen humans.

¹⁸ Paul R. House, "Biblical Theology and the Inclusivist Challenge," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 02:2 (Summer 1998): 3.

¹⁹ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew. 14-28* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 25.

focusing on a different doctrinal point, stresses the importance saying, “Probably no issue is more crucial to the exegesis of Hebrews and its impact on soteriology than a clear determination of the audience to whom the author writes.”²⁰ Scholars often include the purpose of Hebrews and the recipients within the same discussion. Many maintain that the original readers were Jewish Christians.²¹ This was the view of the early church and has remained undisputed until recently.²² Another view is that the readers were Gentile Christians.²³ A key argument for this view comes from 3:12. Here the author urges the readers not to turn away from “the living God.” Paganism would be closer to turning from the living God than Judaism.

The title Πρὸς Ἑβραίους was not an original title attached to the letter but was added based upon knowledge of the book’s contents. Those who take this to say, “Against the Hebrews”²⁴ argue that the original scribe used the title to point to the inferiority of Judaism.²⁵ This view is difficult to accept with the lack of external evidence. It is more likely that the title is simply, “To the Hebrews.” The recipients’ identity is evident in how they are addressed throughout the book:

3:1 τὸν πῶστολον καὶ ἄρχιερα “Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our
τῶς μολογᾶς ἡμῶν confession”

²⁰ Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: a Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (1992): 45.

²¹ The following authors hold this view: F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* 3-9), Philip Hughes (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 10-15), Leon Morris (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 4-5), Donald Hagner (*Hebrews*, 1-7), Peter O’Brian (*The Letter to the Hebrews*) John Wesley (*The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, 12-14). George Guthrie argues for Jews and proselytes (*Hebrews*, 20).

²² Hagner writes, “The early church was very probably correct in understanding the first readers to have been Jewish Christian” (*Hebrews* 2).

²³ Carson, Moo, Morris mention the following supporters (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, 402): Marcus Dods, J. Moffatt, E.F. Scott, G. Vos, Ernst Kasemann, and Gerd Theissen.

²⁴ F.C. Syngé, *Hebrews and the Scriptures* (London: S.P.C.K., 1959), 44.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*) discusses the origins of this title: “The earliest occurrence of Πρὸς Ἑβραίους seems to be at the head of the copy of the epistle on folio 21r of p⁴⁶, the oldest extant codex of the *corpus Paulinum*” (3). Both Clement and Tertullian acknowledged the epistle as being “to the Hebrews.”

3:6	ο ο κς σμεν	“we are his house”
3:14	μτοχοι γρ το Χριστο	“For we are ‘sharers’ of Christ”
4:14	κρατμεν τς μολογας	“let us hold fast our confession”
6:9	Πεπεσμεθα δ περ μν, γαπητο, τ κρεσσονα κα χμενα σωτηρας,	“We are persuaded of better things concerning you, brothers, even the things concerning salvation
10:23	κατχωμεν τν μολογαν τς λπδος	“let us hold fast the confession of our hope” ²⁶

These verses strongly imply a Jewish audience. It is unlikely that these references would have been made to Gentiles. It is not impossible but unlikely. Peter O’Brien adds to the conversation:

Much of the exposition of the author of Hebrews is ‘characterized by a dialect of superiority-inferiority with the most esteemed symbols, systems and personages of Judaism’. This suggests that he is addressing a congregation comprising mostly Jewish Christians. They are apparently in danger of returning to a ‘reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant’.²⁷

The strong usage of Old Testament symbols is evidence that the author is addressing Jewish believers. The epistle incessantly compares the old covenant to the new covenant. This would have been much more meaningful for Jewish believers.

Regardless of one’s view concerning the original audience it cannot be disputed that the author is addressing serious issues regarding the contamination of the recipients’ Christian faith. If the original readers were perhaps Gentiles being tempted to revert back into paganism, as some have suggested, this would also work against Pinnock’s argument from Hebrews 11:6. The argument against Pinnock is only stronger if the audience is Jewish. The author of Hebrews emphasizes the high priesthood of Christ who is of the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). He

²⁶ Rodney J. Decker, “The Original Readers of Hebrews,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 3, no.2 (Fall 1999): 25.

²⁷ Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 12-13.

now operates from the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. If the readers of Hebrews couldn't be saved without believing and confessing Christ then on what grounds can Pinnock assert that the unevangelized today can access God through general revelation? Pinnock has no grounds to argue that Hebrews 11:6 communicates salvation through faith in general revelation. This goes against the entire trajectory of Hebrews. With this purpose in mind, it is safe to conclude that the author is not advocating general faith in God as being salvific. The whole point of the epistle is to convey the message that Jesus is greater than Judaism. Where Judaism fails, Christ succeeds. Ray C. Stedman states, "No other letter focuses as fully on the present greatness of Christ as Hebrews, except the book of Revelation."²⁸ Hebrews takes what is sacred to the Jews and reveals Christ as greater through his death, resurrection, and current intercession as High Priest.²⁹ This poses a serious problem for Pinnock's wider mercy view. If any religion were acceptable in God's eyes outside of Christianity it would be Judaism, which laid the foundation for Christianity. The Jews' faith is incomplete yet still possesses many of the same truth claims as Christianity.

The warning passages found in Hebrews suggests detrimental consequences for falling away. Some suggest that the warning passages even imply the loss of salvation if guilty of apostasy. The purpose of Hebrews is to persuade the readers that Christ is greater than Judaism. The warning passages sprawled throughout the book (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29) reveal the level of severity in back sliding. If Pinnock's interpretation is correct, then it is difficult to understand why the author emphasizes faith in Christ rather than general faith in God. Scot McKnight further explains the warnings: "In each warning passage we find: (1) the subjects

²⁸ Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992),14.

²⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, and Ken Durham, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 13.

or audience who are either committing or in danger of committing, (2) the sin that leads to (3) the exhortation which, if not followed, leads to (4) the consequences of that sin.”³⁰ What these verses establish is that, despite the readers’ ethnicity and their temptation, their lifestyles and belief systems were insufficient. If the addressees were Jewish Christians, they were likely established in Rome where Judaism was well accepted and prominent. With the persecution of Christians by Nero, the temptation to revert to Judaism would make sense. Under these conditions the readers may have experienced the temptation to recoil from their faith in Christ and instead place their faith in the Law. The warning passages suggest that the author is addressing a specific audience being tempted to step away from the Christian faith.

The first warning occurs in 2:1-4. The author admonishes his readers not to reject the word spoken through God’s Son.³¹ One begins to understand the comparison the author provided of the Son to the angels. The angels communicated the message of God’s law in the Old Testament. Now God’s final revelation has been provided through his Son and must not be ignored. This chapter emphasizes the superiority of Christ over the angels. Chapter 2, verse 1 states, “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” An emphasis is placed on the information that has been heard. God’s revelation in Christ must not be forgotten or the people will drift away. The readers are urged to stay away from the danger of drifting away, as O’Brien says, “like a boat that is gradually slipping away from its moorings.” The second warning, in Hebrews 3:7-19, emphasizes the importance of listening to God’s spoken word. The readers are compared to the Israelites who followed God through the wilderness yet failed to listen to the word of God. The author warns, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the

³⁰ McKnight, 26.

³¹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 81.

living God” (Hebrews 3:12). It was through unbelief that the Israelites fell away and the author urges the readers not to follow suit. A third warning comes in Hebrews 5:11-6:12 where the author warns against spiritual immaturity. The author warns against disloyalty to Christ in 10:19-39. Again the readers are warned in 12:14-29 against ignoring God’s word. These warnings passages make Pinnock’s wider hope for the unevangelized unlikely. Faith in Christ is repeatedly emphasized and the readers are warned not to reject Christ.

The Faith of Hebrews 11

A key point of Hebrews 11 is that true saving faith leads to obedience to God not that general faith in God saves. Pinnock makes the mistake of missing this point. Hebrews 11:6 is considered one of the great faith chapters of the Bible. Faith in the broader context of Hebrews 11:6 must be considered understand better the epistemological requirements of faith. Hebrews 11:6 reveals many key components of saving faith but it does not fully exhaust the requirements. Robert Peterson says of Hebrews 11:6, “It does not exhaust the Bible’s teaching on the content of faith. It does not even exhaust the epistle to the Hebrew’s teaching on the content of faith.”³² The text here only reveals a narrow scope of Christian faith. The basic elements of saving faith consist of belief in God and seeking him. These are two obvious components. Nash adds:

Obviously one precondition for saving faith is believing that God exists. Just as certainly, believers are expected to ‘seek’ God, although other passages in the Bible will have to give this ‘seeking’ the proper content. This much we can learn from Hebrews 11:6.³³

The basic components of faith and the importance of faith are explored through Hebrews 11. This chapter is considered the “Hall of Faith” chapter. The purpose of this chapter, which

³² Robert A. Peterson, *Our Secure Salvation: Preservation and Apostasy*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 186.

³³ Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 124.

harmonizes with the book's purpose, determines the meaning of Hebrews 11:6. The emphasis of this chapter is on the successful faith of Old Testament believers. The author provides examples of men and women of faith who have lived throughout the ages of salvation history. The author gives an account of their faith and obedience. "By faith" is repetitiously used to describe the manner in which these believers obeyed God. Abraham is emphasized most in this chapter. The author says, "By faith he went to live in the land of promise" (Hebrews 11:9), and "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac (Hebrews 11:17). The author begins by defining the key elements of faith. Then he fleshes out faith in practice. The point of this chapter is not that general faith in God saves but rather true saving faith leads to obedience in God. These examples serve to encourage the readers who are struggling with faith in Christ. The readers are tempted to put their faith in the Law. The patriarchs were privy to special knowledge concerning God's covenant. Dispensationalists maintain that this information was special yet not Christological. Covenant theologians maintain that all Old Testament revelations contained content that pointed to Christ.³⁴ The author of Hebrews reveals the faith that the great patriarchs maintained within the covenant of God. Both dispensationalists and covenant theologians agree that this information came through special revelation. The readers are urged to cultivate the same faith.

Not only does the passage promote obedience in faith, it also shows the need for the kind of content that comes from special revelation. God has always used special revelation to communicate saving knowledge to his people. Each of these heroes of faith possessed specific content regarding God's covenant. Hebrews 11:6 is fleshed out through these believers. These

³⁴ These points will be further discussed in chapter three.

are not examples of believers with general faith that lacks content.³⁵ The Old Testament believers of Hebrews 11 were all exposed to special revelation.³⁶ This significantly separates the unevangelized from this context. The required content was more embryonic then. Pinnock's interpretation of Hebrews 11:6 ignores the progress of covenantal knowledge throughout salvation history.³⁷ Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks of God's new revelation for mankind:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

There is a progression of revelation that God has used since "long ago." Geivett and Phillips comment, "Heb. 1:1-2 states, as the thesis of the letter that at a particular moment in history the focus of special revelation has narrowed to the incarnate Son."³⁸ God always uses special revelation to communicate salvific knowledge. At this point in history that revelation has become Jesus. It is not permissible for inclusivists to compare the unevangelized to the Old Testament believers since they possessed the revelation of their time. The revelation now is Jesus Christ. Geivett and Phillips conclude, "Thus chronology cannot be dismissed. The point is that now salvation is available only through explicit faith in Jesus Christ."³⁹

³⁵ Future chapters will deal with the individuals and each one's personal encounter with special revelation or the lack thereof.

³⁶ John Hick, Dennis L. Okholm, and Timothy R. Phillips. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 240.

³⁷ The dispensationalists acknowledge these different stages within salvation history. In "Reflections on Dispensationalism" Walvoord says, "As noted earlier, only three dispensations are discussed extensively in the Scriptures—the Law, grace (church), and the kingdom (the millennium)—though others are indicated in the Scriptures" (136).

³⁸ Geivett and Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation*, 240.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Hebrews 11:6 establishes great truth concerning Christian faith. First, the purpose of the book is to encourage the readers to establish Christ as the content of their faith. The recipients struggled with this. They were tempted to place their faith in the Law. The author emphasizes the importance of faith in one's salvation experience. The author's goal is not to downplay knowledge but to emphasize the necessity of knowledge in Christ. The audience possessed the required knowledge. Knowledge was not what the backslidden Jews needed. They needed true faith in the promise of God through Christ. Judaism was insufficient to save. If Judaism is insufficient then all other religions also are insufficient. Hebrews 11:6 cannot be used to argue for salvation to the unevangelized through faith in general revelation. The unevangelized are condemned for their evil deeds towards God and not simply because of their deficient knowledge. General revelation can lead one to seek salvation but it is insufficient by itself. Cornelius responded in faith to general revelation and through seeking God was sent a messenger to bring special revelation for him and his family. Also, the context of Hebrews 11:6 works against Pinnock's interpretations. The verse is fleshed out by Old Testament believers who possessed specific content regarding God's covenant made known through special revelation. Pinnock views the Scriptures with an inclusivist lens. Ronald Nash concludes, "The 'Faith Principle' that Pinnock formulates from Heb. 11:6 is incomplete; it distorts and dilutes the New Testament picture of saving faith."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ronald H. Nash. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994),124.

CHAPTER TWO

Holy Pagans: Clark Pinnock's Proof from Gentile Believers

Pinnock argues that “holy pagans,” or Gentile believers in the Old Testament, exist who were saved outside God’s covenant. Pinnock believes the nature of salvation for the Gentile believers was through means outside of Judaism’s standards. Pinnock references Abel, Noah, Enoch, Job, Jethro, the queen of Sheba, and Cornelius as examples. Pinnock contends that these were believers who were brought into a covenantal relationship with God outside of Judaism. Inclusivists make a distinction here between Christian believers and non-Christian believers. Pinnock refers to them as messianic believers and Pre-messianic believers. Inclusivists argue that non-Christian believers still exist today.

Pinnock argues that the holy pagans prove that salvation exists without special revelation of God’s covenant. They prove that the unevangelized too can enter into a covenantal relationship with God outside of the Christian faith. Pinnock believes that God judges these individuals based upon the quality of their faith not their religious knowledge. According to Pinnock, the holy pagans were saved outside of the standards of Judaism by possessing faith in the small, general revelation they received. His argument follows that the unevangelized can be saved the same way. According to Pinnock, the Old Testament Gentile believers were saved through faith not the knowledge that comes from special knowledge: “These were people saved by faith without any knowledge of the revelation vouchsafed to Israel or the church.”⁴¹ These Old Testament saints were saved, as Pinnock states, without revelation concerning God’s covenant with the Jews. He claims that the number of holy pagans that exist cannot be known, but the examples he provides confirm their existence. He further states: “No one can deny the

⁴¹ Pinnock, 161.

fact that the Bible presents these holy pagans as saved by faith, even though they knew neither Israelite nor Christian revelation.”⁴² Walter Kaiser asks the question, “Can these occasional biblical references to Gentile worshippers of Yahweh in the Old and New Testaments serve as models in our modern world as well.”⁴³ This question will be answered in order to help disprove Pinnock’s theory regarding the holy pagans and the unevangelized.

Summary of Argument

Pinnock begins stating: “These were people [the holy pagans] saved by faith without any knowledge of the revelation vouchsafed to Israel or the church.”⁴⁴ The holy pagans, according to Pinnock, were saved though they had no revelation of God’s covenant with the Jews. These Gentile believers were brought to God through faith in God. They maintained saving faith without obtaining information about God’s covenant. He claims that the number of holy pagans cannot be known but these Old Testament examples confirm their existence. He further states, “No one can deny the fact that the Bible presents these holy pagans as saved by faith, even though they knew neither Israelite nor Christian revelation.”⁴⁵ Pinnock focuses largely upon two examples: Job and Abimelech. He also argues that Abel, Noah, Enoch, Jethro, the queen of Sheba, and the centurion, Cornelius are examples of holy pagans.

Pinnock supports his faith principle claim through three separate points. First, he appeals to tradition. He references Justin Martyr’s position on Old Testament Gentile believers and their correlation with the unevangelized. Justin Martyr states, “God approves of only those who imitate his inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of humankind, and any other virtue

⁴² Ibid., 162.

⁴³ Kaiser, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 123

⁴⁴ Pinnock, 161.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 162.

proper to God who is called by no given name.”⁴⁶ Justin Martyr believed salvation was proven through godly living. He further states, “If people by their actions prove themselves worthy of his plan, they shall be . . . found worthy to make their abode with him.”⁴⁷ Second, Pinnock congratulates the dispensationalists’ opposition towards the theology that requires all epochs to explicitly know Christ to be saved. Pinnock says, “Dispensationalists have rightly opposed the notion that believers in other epochs needed to believe in the coming Savior in order to be saved.”⁴⁸ Pinnock uses the dispensationalist position to reveal that the knowledge requirement for saving faith has changed over the course of salvation history. Last, Pinnock attacks the exclusivity of the gospel of evangelicals like Bruce Demarest, James Packer, and Millard Erickson who narrow the hope of the gospel. Pinnock criticizes their positions asking the rhetorical question, “What does ‘evangelical’ mean when applied to those who seem to want to ensure that there is as little Good News as possible?” and “The Bible offers them a strong basis for optimism, yet they decline it.”⁴⁹

Analysis of Pinnock’s Argument

The term “holy pagan” is used by inclusivists to describe Old Testament Gentiles saved outside of Judaism. Pinnock provides eight examples: Abel, Noah, Enoch, Job, Abimelech, Jethro, the Queen of Sheba, and the Centurion, Cornelius. These examples hardly work for Pinnock’s case since they all were exposed to explicit knowledge of God’s promises. Furthermore, there is dispute over whether Abimelech, Jethro, or the Queen of Sheba had conversion experience yet regardless they had experiences of special revelation. Their salvific

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 163.

state is never revealed therefore Pinnock builds his wider mercy theology around unspoken information. Pinnock argues that these Gentile worshippers were not active converts to Judaism. The holy pagans' knowledge transcended general revelation, which immediately separates them from the unevangelized. Pinnock's goal here is to demonstrate examples of OT believers who were saved without covenantal knowledge. Therefore the unevangelized must have access to salvation without knowledge of God's covenant through Christ. The following will explore the faith content of each holy pagan.

Antediluvian Holy Pagans

The antediluvian holy pagans are those who lived prior to the flood. These believers are also pre-Israelite, which means that they came before God's covenant with Abraham. Inclusivists argue that these believers lacked specific knowledge of God's covenant. Pinnock compares these pre-Israelite believers to the unevangelized. Pinnock rightly establishes that these believers were limited in their knowledge of God's covenant yet he draws unwarranted conclusions concerning their state of salvation. This time preceded the many dispensations of God's covenant with mankind. The actual requirement for salvation prior to the flood remains ambiguous but each believer placed faith in God through special revelation. Pinnock argues that knowledge of Christ is never required.

One challenge to Pinnock's claim comes from covenant theology, which says that knowledge of Christ has always been a requirement for salvation even prior to the flood. Inclusivism and Covenant theology take two extreme views. Logically, it would make sense that if Old Testament believers could be saved without specific covenantal knowledge then modern unevangelized adults can be saved without specific knowledge of Christ. Covenant theologians maintain that Christ has always been the knowledge requirement for salvation. Dispensational

theology takes a more moderate position concerning the knowledge requirements prior to the flood. The dispensation prior to the flood was specific and exclusive yet these believers were not required to fully understand the revelation of Christ. Pinnock argues that the epistemological status of Abel, Enoch, and Noah and the unevangelized are synonymous. The following will examine the specific, exclusive covenantal knowledge possessed by Abel, Enoch, and Noah, which proves that they are exempt from Pinnock's holy pagan category.

Pinnock first mentions Abel. Pinnock places him in the category of those outside the covenant community and unaware of the Israelite and Christian revelation.⁵⁰ Pinnock makes the mistake of ignoring a key distinction between the unevangelized and Abel. The unevangelized and Abel both lack knowledge of Christ but the difference is that Abel had access to covenant knowledge. The Edenic Covenant was first the revelation given by God. Here God placed man in dominion over all creation. It is clear that the garden days portray God's mercy and also his divine judgment, which is seen in the Edenic curse and Cain's banishment.⁵¹ Richard Ramesh remarks, "The contribution this period makes to understanding the extent of God's salvation is His non-discriminatory (not equal opportunity or accessibility) stance toward mercy."⁵² Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This was their moral obligation. After Adam and Eve disobeyed, they had to face God's judgment. This act of disobedience brought about death. After the fall of man a new covenant was given. The Adamic covenant, given in 3:15, provides covenantal knowledge regarding God's intentions to redeem man. It promises that Eve's offspring will crush the head of the serpent. This was a promise given by God to humanity. Those within the garden cannot be called pagan and they cannot be

⁵⁰ Pinnock, 162.

⁵¹ Richard Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 31.

⁵² *Ibid.*

compared to the unevangelized who possess no covenantal knowledge. If God revealed special knowledge to the unevangelized then they would cease to be categorized as unevangelized.

The object of Abel's faith was not geared towards a vague perception of God. God made himself known personally to those in the garden. Abel, who came after the garden, was directly connected with those in it. This immediately separates Abel from the unevangelized. Abel may have been pre-Israelite but it cannot be argued that he was ignorant of God's covenant with mankind. It is impossible to know how much of this covenant Abel knew or understood. Abel's actions and what the Scriptures testify about Abel reveal that he had some knowledge of God's covenant. Those in the garden were accountable for their actions before God, their Maker. Cain and Abel, like their parents, were required to live by specific standards. Hebrews 11:4 states, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous." The precise moral code for the garden is unknown, but Abel's actions were done through faith in God who personally revealed himself to Abel. Ramesh Richard points out, "Abel obtained the testimony of his righteousness, God testifying about his gifts."⁵³ This was in alignment with the standard God required. Cain also brought an offering to God. Cain presented 'first fruits from the ground' and God deemed this unacceptable (Gen. 4:3). Even Jesus asserts that Abel was righteous (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51). Dispensationalist Phillips Heideman sees Abel's offering as foreshadowing the cross. He goes so far as to state that this incident implies the gospel message. He argues, "Not only is gospel hearing implied, but also Scripture portrays the gospel in this sacrifice."⁵⁴ Heideman recognizes the significance of Abel's actions in retrospect yet it is difficult to know what Abel understood concerning these sacrifices. The text is

⁵³ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁴ Phillip Heideman, "Dispensational Theology," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 4, no. 3 (July 1998): 35.

unclear regarding how much Abel understood of God's revelation. When one considers God's established covenants, the actions of Abel, and the Scriptural testimony concerning Abel it is impossible to liken him to the unevangelized who have no special revelation.

Second, Pinnock presents Enoch as an OT holy pagan. Pinnock presents Enoch as a pagan who possesses no covenantal knowledge but who is welcomed into the kingdom because of his general faith in God. In this way, Pinnock argues that he is akin to the unevangelized who possess no specific information about God. His argument here fails due to a few simple facts. First, the most obvious reason is that Enoch had personal communication with God and was therefore exposed to special revelation. Second, like Abel, even though Enoch was pre-Israelite he would have had access to God's covenants made in the garden. In order to understanding the nature of Enoch's salvation and the favor he found with God, his appearances in Scripture must be examined.

The Bible says very little about Enoch. He is mentioned only briefly in Gen. 5 and Heb. 11. It is impossible to ascertain from Scripture how much he understood concerning God's covenant. Like Abel, the Bible depicts Enoch as righteous and favored by God. Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam. Enoch and Elijah are the only two Old Testament believers who escaped a physical death. Genesis 5:18-19 reveals that his father was Jared: "When Jared had lived 162 years he fathered Enoch. Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters." Then Enoch is presented as the father of Methuselah, the oldest living person in the Bible. Twice Genesis mentions that 'Enoch walked with God' (Gen. 5:21, 24). Gen. 5:24 reveals Enoch's supernatural transfer into heaven: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him up." Hebrews 11 also mentions God's rapture of Enoch. The last part of verse 5 states: "Before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God." Pinnock argues that Enoch is

in the unevangelized category. This argument is weak since Enoch walked with God, pleased God, and was raptured up by God. Richard Ramesh notes, “Enoch obtained the witness before he was taken up that he was pleasing to God.”⁵⁵ Enoch not only walked with God, but he pleased God. “Enoch is pictured as one who did not suffer the fate of Adam (“you will die”) because, unlike the others, he ‘walked with God.’”⁵⁶ Walking with God transcends general revelation. Enoch cannot be paralleled with the unevangelized who have not walked with God, pleased God, or maintained fellowship with God. Gordon Wenham says, “The phrase suggests a special intimacy with God and a life of piety.”⁵⁷ The Scriptural testimony regarding Enoch’s walk with God disproves Pinnock’s view that Enoch was a holy pagan saved outside of God’s working covenant with Israel.

Third, Pinnock lists the holy pagan Noah. Pinnock’s classification of Noah is more peculiar among the rest. The narrative of Noah reveals the exclusive, particular nature of God’s salvation possibly more than any other Bible narrative. Again, it is difficult to determine how much Noah understood regarding God’s covenant prior to the flood, but his knowledge of God was not minimal. Genesis 6:22 states, “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded of him.” Through God’s personal interaction with Noah, instructions and morality were given and Noah obeyed them. Noah possessed more than special revelation but maintained a divine communication. It is fallacious to compare the epistemological state of Noah with the unevangelized who possess only general revelation. Ramesh says of this comparison:

To use Noah for inclusivist purposes will depend on how much special revelation is sanctioned for the unevangelized today. Noah cannot be used for purposes of

⁵⁵ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 31.

⁵⁶ Gaebelein, Frank E., Dick Polcyn, John Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser, R. Laird Harris, and Ronald Barclay Allen, *Genesis – Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 74.

⁵⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis. 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 127.

general revelation's mediating saving grace, unless general revelation is given specific content, in which case it is a subset of special revelation.⁵⁸

Pinnock tends to blend together special revelation with general revelation yet the distinctive, biblical qualities of each revelation must be realized. Noah cannot be adequately compared to those who have never heard the gospel. Noah may not have fully understood the significance of the coming Christ, but he understood God's promises of the time and, like Enoch, Noah walked with God. The biggest distinction between Noah and the unevangelized is the provided revelatory content.

The number of those killed in the flood is unknown but it was a mass extermination. It is a wonder that Pinnock ignores the depraved sinners destroyed in the flood. Only Noah and his family were saved. This passage highly favors the exclusivist argument regarding the nature of salvation. Richard Ramesh comments, "If the 'restrictivists fewness doctrine' needs to be biblically verified, it is clearly observable at the Flood."⁵⁹ Noah brought his prophetic message from God to the people and they rejected him. Noah was limited geographically in spreading the message of God's coming judgment and it is unlikely that every person on earth heard his message yet they were all judged. The exclusivity of God's salvation and election is clearly seen here. Pinnock's wider mercy for the unevangelized does not fit with this biblical narrative. God chose to judge the world according to his will and few were chosen. Through Noah's faith and obedience to the content filled revelation of God, he and his family were saved. After the flood, God established the Noahic Covenant. This was a continuation of the Adamic Covenant, which came after the fall. Through their obedience and faith in God they were saved. A link cannot be created between the unevangelized and Noah. Ramesh concludes, "A general 'faith response' to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁹ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 33.

any deity other than YHWH is not a valid, timeless principle derivable from this period of salvation history.”⁶⁰

Job

Job is a difficult example to address. Little background information is given about Job. Practically nothing is known of Job’s socio-ethnic background. Pinnock argues that Job “put his trust in God even though inadequately informed doctrinally and morally.”⁶¹ Pinnock wrongly argues that Job was ill formed regarding theology and ethics. The book of Job begins, however, by expressing the righteousness of Job. Job 1:1 states that he was “blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.” Robert Alden expounds upon the meaning of Job’s fear of God: “The picture here is not a man cowering before an offended deity but of a devout man who respects God and obeys his laws.”⁶² Job’s knowledge extended far beyond mere general revelation and general ethics. The implication of fearing God is obeying God. John Harley says, “One who fears God loves him devoutly.”⁶³ The text does not fully reveal Job’s understanding of God’s covenant. Job seems to be a recipient of special revelation considering his knowledge of sacrifices and his personal communion with God. This would separate him from the unevangelized. In the dialogue between Satan and God, God praises Job for his righteousness. God considers Job a servant, a God-fearer, and one who shuns evil. Pinnock can argue that Job may have been a Gentile believer but he cannot argue that he was inadequately informed doctrinally and morally. Pinnock argues that, “A person who is informationally premessianic,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁶¹ Pinnock, 160.

⁶² Robert L. Alden, *Job* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 48.

⁶³ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) 67.

whether living in ancient or modern times, is in exactly the same spiritual situation.”⁶⁴ God’s affirmations of Job makes Pinnock’s conclusion highly unlikely.

The enigmatic nature of the book’s date makes it difficult to know the salvific requirements. Scholars remain divided on this issue. It is unclear what point in salvation history Job lived. Gerald Wilson admits that, “There is no conclusive evidence to command assent to any particular date(s).”⁶⁵ There are convincing clues within the book that imply an early date. Charles Feinberg summarizes these clues:

The events must have taken place in patriarchal times for (1) there is no mention of law; (2) the offerings are burnt offerings and not sin offerings as required under the law; (3) Job performs the functions of a priest himself; and (4) no mention is made of the exodus from Egypt.⁶⁶

If Job lived during an earlier period in salvation history then the epistemological requirements regarding his understanding of Christ would have been minimal. Pinnock asserts that Job had no covenantal knowledge yet given the ambiguity regarding the date of Job it cannot be known what Job was required to understand or even what he understood.

Abimelech

Abimelech makes a brief appearance in Genesis. Little can be concluded regarding his salvation due to the lack of information conveyed. The text never reveals repentance on the part of Abimelech. The Genesis account conveys positive things about Abimelech. Genesis 20 contains the encounter between Abraham and Abimelech. Abraham and his wife Sarah sojourn to Gerar where they encounter Abimelech, the Canaanite king. Abraham deceived Abimelech concerning his relationship with Sarah by telling him they are siblings. Sarah truthfully was

⁶⁴ Pinnock, 161.

⁶⁵ Gerald Henry Wilson, *Job* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 2.

⁶⁶ Charles Lee Feinberg, “Part 1, Job and the Nation Israel-First Study: In the Hands of the Enemy,” *BASC* 096:384 (Oct 1939): 406.

Abraham's sister but conceals their marital status. Abraham withholds their marital relation because he says, "There is no fear of God at all in this place." Abraham does not believe that these Canaanite people contain ethics. Abraham is under the assumption that if he reveals Sarah as his wife then he will be killed and Sarah will be taken. Abraham's assumptions are proven wrong and the king treats them kindly. During the entire course of interaction between Abraham and Abimelech, there is never a sign of repentance or praise towards Abraham's God. Despite the lack of evidence, Pinnock argues that Abimelech 'was in fact another pagan who had a right relation with God outside the boundaries of Israel's covenant.'⁶⁷ Pinnock assumes that Abimelech had a right relationship with God.

If Abimelech did repent it would not help Pinnock's argument for the king was exposed to special revelation through Abraham. The overall attitude and response given by Abimelech makes it possible that he converted but there is no guarantee. He recognized the act of sleeping with Sarah as adultery and refers to it as "a great sin" (Genesis 20:9). The king gives Abraham livestock and unlimited access to his land. He also comes to Abraham with the desire to make a covenant. Abraham is reluctant due to the actions of Abimelech's servants who stole his well. Abraham prays for Abimelech and God heals Abimelech, his wife, and the female slaves (Genesis 20:17). God had closed the wombs of all the women in Abimelech's house. During Abimelech's encounter with Abraham and Sarah salvation is never mentioned regarding the king or his house. The king is kind and forgiving after Abraham's confession yet he never repents or worships Abraham's God. Abimelech represents a lesser evil within the Canaanite religion, as does Tamar (Genesis 38). Frederick Holmgren comments, "Abimelech and Tamar give us pause

⁶⁷ Pinnock, 161.

against making a hasty decision concerning the character of all Canaanites.”⁶⁸ While it is peculiar that Abimelech, a Canaanite king, acted favorably towards the patriarch this cannot be equated with saving faith. Abraham’s encounter with the king provides a much different outcome than one would expect as the title of Holmgren’s article implies, “A Reversal of Expectations.” If the text explicitly revealed that Abimelech was converted in his experience with Abraham this would not parallel him to the unevangelized. Abimelech had personal contact with Abraham who possessed the saving knowledge of God’s covenant with man. If a conversion experience did occur it was only because of the revelatory message of Abraham. Abimelech was not without special revelation and therefore is not representative of a converted unevangelized person.

Jethro

Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, is introduced briefly in Exodus. In Exodus 3, Moses is revealed as the keeper of Jethro’s flock. Moses pleads with Jethro to let him go back to his people in Egypt and Jethro tells him, “Go in peace” (Exodus 4:18). When Moses returns from the Exodus account, Jethro responds to the events that transpired. First, he responds with praise. He exclaims, “Blessed be the LORD” (18:10) because of the deliverance that God provided. Then Jethro declares: “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods” (Exodus 18:10). Jethro acknowledges God as the greatest of all the gods. This might be seen as his confession to salvation. Also, he responds with worship. Jethro brings sacrifices and offerings along with Aaron to be offered to God and God accepts these offerings and sacrifices (Exodus 18:12). Walter Kaiser Jr. has no doubts regarding the new conversion of the stepfather. Kaiser says, “Some might call Jethro a holy pagan because he was a Gentile and not a Jew, but he appears in

⁶⁸ Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, "Looking Back on Abraham's Encounter with a Canaanite King: A Reversal of Expectations (Genesis 20:1-18)," *Currents In Theology And Mission* 37, no. 5 (Oct 1, 2010): 374.

every respect to be a believer in full fellowship with the people of God.”⁶⁹ It is difficult to determine with absolute certainty what the requirements for salvation were at this time. Douglas Stuart provides insight on this issue:

The Israelites had not yet received Yahweh’s covenant with them as a people, so neither Jethro nor the Israelites yet understood all the exact ways to obey Yahweh and had to demonstrate conversion as well as they could. They all knew something about sacrificing as the heart of obedient worship since that concept had ‘trickled down’ into the consciousness of peoples all over the earth from the days of the first family, who understood the basic concept of sacrifice: ‘something else must die so that I may live.’⁷⁰

The required content for faith at this period in history is difficult to determine.

The precise salvific conditions at this point in history cannot be fully known. Knowledge of the woman’s seed had been provided with the Adamic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. Moses may have witnessed to Jethro regarding the coming “Seed.” Kaiser maintains that Moses must have evangelized to Jethro concerning the promised “Seed” of the woman and of Shem’s and Abraham’s line. He argues that this is the only way to explain Jethro’s response.⁷¹ Sacrifices were pleasing and acceptable to God as an act of worship. Jethro responds to the works of God with sacrifice. Some have discredited Jethro’s actions here due to the fact that he was bringing sacrifices based upon his paganistic understanding of sacrifices. This is a weak argument because God accepts Jethro’s offerings and paganistic offerings are never mentioned as acceptable before God.

⁶⁹ Kaiser, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 133.

⁷⁰ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 413.

⁷¹ Kaiser, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 41.

The Queen of Sheba

The account of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon shows up twice. Both accounts are practically identical.⁷² Pinnock lists her as an example of an Old Testament Gentile saved outside God's covenant. Pinnock wrongly assumes that she had not received special revelation. The Queen was formally introduced to the God of the Israelites through Solomon. If a conversion occurred it was through faith in the knowledge of God's covenant. The queen hears of Solomon's success and treks to Israel to meet the great king. When she finds Solomon she announces that his prosperity and wisdom surpasses all that she has heard. The intensity of this meeting and all the questions she asks Solomon reveals that that she knew the Israelite God and the means by which to be saved. Faith and repentance is never revealed. It cannot be assumed that the queen converted because the text does not communicate this. If she was converted it would have been through the knowledge she gained in her rendezvous with king Solomon.

Cornelius

Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, is one of the most common examples used by inclusivists. Inclusivists hold that by fearing God and doing good Cornelius exemplified saving faith prior to Peter's arrival. Ronald Nash observes, "No passage of Scripture is mentioned more often by inclusivists than the story of Cornelius in Acts 10."⁷³ Nash finds it peculiar that this passage is considered a stronghold by inclusivists. Richard Ramesh argues that this passage actually works to disprove the entire inclusivist system.⁷⁴ Pinnock utilizes the Cornelius case to support his faith principle theology. Pinnock fleshes out major elements of his theology with the

⁷² The account appears in 1 Kings 10:1-13 as well as 2 Chronicles 9:1-9, 12. The queen is also mentioned in Matthew 12:42.

⁷³ Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 137.

⁷⁴ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 63.

Cornelius Case. Pinnock uses Acts 10:1-11:9 to argue for God's acceptance of all who fear God and do good. This includes the majority of religious persons in the world, i.e. Jews, Muslims, Mormons, etc. Pinnock argues against two major interpretations of the Cornelius narrative. First, he criticizes the interpretation of John Scott and John Calvin which is that, "God found Cornelius only relatively better than other sinners, while still regarding him under condemnation."⁷⁵ Second, Pinnock criticizes the interpretation that Cornelius proves that diligent seekers of God will eventually receive special revelation.⁷⁶ Pinnock prefers this second interpretation to Calvin's yet Pinnock still thinks it is weak. Pinnock rejects this interpretation because it implies that Cornelius' fate hinged upon Peter's obedience. Pinnock argues:

It may have been satisfactory for an Aquinas who, living in the Middle Ages, thought there were only a handful of unevangelized people in the whole world. But it is not satisfactory for us today because it cannot bear the full weight of the problem.⁷⁷

For Pinnock, it cannot be guaranteed that all who seek God will be granted special revelation. Pinnock rather argues that Cornelius did not need Peter's message to be saved and that Peter's message merely supplemented his salvation with assurance and encouragement.

Acts represents the transitional period from Judaism to Christianity. Controversy exists over when believers were accountable for possessing knowledge of Christ. Cornelius would have been acceptable before God according to Judaism's standards, but he was not privy to Christ. Pinnock argues that Cornelius serves as a prime example of an unevangelized person saved without knowledge of Christ. Pinnock fails to realize that after Jesus, a dramatic shift occurred regarding the minimal requirement for salvation. The requirement extended from merely a

⁷⁵ Pinnock, 165.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 165-166.

⁷⁷ Pinnock 166.

doctrine of God to also a doctrine of Christ. An emphasis and urgency to preach Christ exists in the book of Acts. Another transition that occurs is the acceptance of Gentiles into the faith.

Richard Ramesh proposes that two major conclusions can be drawn from the Cornelius narrative, which manifests these transitional issues. The first is Peter's message of a universal welcoming of all people, and the second is the salvation and forgiveness that comes through Jesus. These transitional issues are important to remember as one reads Acts 10-11. The implications of universal salvation to all who fear God and do good works are not present. The following will investigate the Cornelius' case and provide evidence that he was lost until prior to Peter's arrival.

John Piper provides a critique of Pinnock's position regarding Cornelius. John Piper has argued at length that four major proofs exist within the text that reveals Cornelius' unsaved condition prior to Peter.⁷⁸ Acts 10 begins with attributing many positive attributes to Cornelius, which have led inclusivists to assume he was saved. The text claims that Cornelius was devout, feared God, gave alms to the poor, and prayed continually to God (Acts 10:2). These strong descriptions of Cornelius have led many to Pinnock's position. These attributes do not indicate that Cornelius was saved. Many of the unbelieving Jews that Paul and Peter preached to in Acts were considered devout, God-fearing, and ethical. At Pentecost, the present Jews were referred to as "devout men" (Acts 2:5), like Cornelius, yet Peter called them to repent, be baptized and receive forgiveness through Jesus' name (2:38).⁷⁹ Similar occurrences are seen in Acts 3:19 and 13:38-39.⁸⁰ As Peter preaches the message of Christ to the Jewish audience in Acts 2, he clearly treats them as unsaved. J.I. Packer says it best:

⁷⁸ John Piper, *Jesus: The Only Way to God: Must You Hear the Gospel to Be Saved?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 81-84.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

To Peter's mind, therefore, Cornelius' salvation resulted from his coming to know the gospel, and all that preceded this was prevenient and preparatory grace. Cornelius had in fact been in a position parallel to that of the Jews who were saved on the day of Pentecost (cf. 2:47): as Jews, hoping in God's promises, they had been in the way of salvation, but were not in a state of salvation till they heard of Christ and turned to him. With Cornelius it was the same.⁸¹

Nash adds, "Pinnock's 'faith principle' is noticeably absent from Peter's message. Peter's words clearly assume that everyone in his audience was unsaved and unforgiven."⁸² The gate to salvation was narrowed significantly. Prayer and devotion to God along with ethics were not sufficient to salvation. Judaism was no longer sufficient to save. Cornelius can be compared to the Jews who lacked saving faith. Ronald Nash says, "Morally and spiritually he [Cornelius] was in precisely the same condition as any faithful and believing Jew of that time who had not encountered Jesus. We could go so far as to say that his relationship to Yahweh was similar to that of an Old Testament believer."⁸³ With this understanding in mind, the Cornelius narrative serves as a strong argument for restrictivists.

Pinnock uses Acts 10:34-35, as do other inclusivists, to argue that Cornelius was saved since he maintained fear of God and good deeds. Peter proclaims, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). Pinnock's view of Cornelius' condition largely derives from his interpretation of "acceptable." If one interprets "acceptable" as "saved" then understandably Cornelius would not have needed Peter's message. D.A. Carson has suggested "welcome" to be a synonymous translation for δεκτός (acceptable) which parallels with Luke 4:24 ('no prophet is

⁸¹ James I. Packer, "The Way of Salvation, Part IV, Are Non-Christian Faiths Ways of Salvation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130, no. 518 (1973): 116.

⁸² Nash Restrictivism What about... 137

⁸³ Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 138.

accepted in his home town).⁸⁴ The implication of accepted within this context does not seem to be “saved” or “forgiven.” Carson warns, “If this ‘acceptance is taken strongly, it might be taken by some to imply that God accepts them as forgiven people.”⁸⁵ Peter is making the point here that God welcomes Gentiles. The term *δεκτικος* depicts the non-discriminatory invitation that God provides for the nations. Peter does not pass judgment on Cornelius’ salvific condition rather he articulates an open invitation.

Acts 10:43 is Peter’s acknowledgment concerning the required process of salvation. Peter proclaims, “To him [Christ] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” The ontological and epistemological necessity of Christ is evident here. ‘Through his name’ references the ontological aspect of salvation while ‘everyone who believes’ references the epistemological aspect.⁸⁶ Through this process, one receives the forgiveness of sins. Salvation does not occur without the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is the means of being made right with God (saved). No one can be saved without being forgiven. Although Cornelius was devout and God fearing, he was not forgiven. Piper points out, “Peter says that forgiveness comes through believing in Christ, and it comes through the name of Christ.”⁸⁷ Cornelius needed to hear about Jesus in order to believe and be forgiven. It is highly unlikely that Cornelius and his family were saved prior to Peter’s visit for this would not correlate with the text. A key point of Acts 10:43 is that all who believe in Jesus are forgiven.

⁸⁴ D. A. Carson. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 307.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 63

⁸⁷ Piper, *Jesus: The Only Way to God*, 82.

Acts 11:14 recounts the incident of the angel's appearance to Cornelius. Peter is recapitulating the story of Cornelius. Peter summarizes the angel's words to Cornelius, "He will declare a message to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (11:14). The salvation experience described by the angel is a future event that will occur. The angel does not say Cornelius will receive assurance or clarity of salvation but rather he will receive an essential message to be saved. Cornelius must send for Peter in order to hear the salvific message. Piper states, "If he sends for Peter and hears the message and believes on the Christ of that message, then he will be saved. And if he does not, he won't be saved."⁸⁸ Cornelius desires to be saved and sends for Peter. In Acts 11:18, the crowd rejoices over the news that Peter brings. A celebratory response may not have been given had Peter announced that he merely enhanced Cornelius' faith. At the mention of Gentile inclusion and Cornelius' conversion, the church glorifies God (Acts 11:18).

Conclusion

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. The "holy pagans" all had access to saving covenant knowledge. With Abimelech, Jethro, and the Queen of Sheba the text does not reveal an explicit conversion experience. If they were converted it must be noted that they were probably privy to God's covenant. This entirely separates them from the unevangelized. The antediluvian believers had faith in God's promises. Also, the holy pagans reveal that salvation extended beyond ethnicity. They foreshadow the entrance of Gentiles into the faith. While Judaism incorporated Jews there are examples of those outside of Jewish ethnicity that were saved. Pinnock's attempt to draw a connection between the holy pagans of the Old Testament and the unevangelized is weak and falls short on many levels. Each of these "pagans" would have been saved on the basis of the special revelation that was brought to them. None of

⁸⁸ Ibid.

them were limited to an understanding of mere general revelation. Pinnock's attempt to show that general revelation is enough to save falls short here simply because all of the holy pagans were exposed to more truth about God through special revelation than the unevangelized who have only a general view of God.

CHAPTER THREE

Premessianic Jews: Clark Pinnock's Proof from Old Testament Salvation

Pinnock's argument here focuses upon the soteriology of Old Testament Jews. Pinnock argues that the Old Testament Jews were saved through general faith in God without any epistemological requirements. Pinnock's previous argument dealt with the faith of Old Testament Gentile believers. Pinnock's argument here looks at the faith content of Old Testament Jews. Knowledge of Christ was not present in the Old Testament which Pinnock emphasizes to provide hope for the unevangelized. He argues that Old Testament Jews and today's unevangelized people are parallel epistemologically. Neither group has knowledge of Christ. If the Old Testament Jews were saved without knowledge of Jesus then the unevangelized today can also be saved without knowledge of Christ. Pinnock largely focuses on the faith of Abraham. It is difficult to know how much Abraham understood regarding the coming Messiah. The most important thing to consider is that he had special revelation concerning God's covenant.

Inclusivists argue that the unevangelized are "informationally B.C." and can be saved in the same fashion as Abraham without knowledge of Christ. Pinnock argues that Old Testament Jews were epistemologically deficient yet they were saved through belief in God and general faith. Pinnock fails to realize that the Old Testament believers were all saved through faith and belief in God's special revelation. Without this provided knowledge, salvation was not possible. The following will survey the flaws of Pinnock's argument concerning the connection between the unevangelized and Old Testament Jews while providing a biblically based argument of continuity.

Summary of Argument

Pinnock begins by stating, “The Old Testament describes a large number of believing Israelites who trusted in God, though the Messiah had not yet come to them. Yet they exercised saving faith, as did Abraham, and experienced forgiveness, as did David.”⁸⁹ Pinnock’s argument is that God brought forgiveness without knowledge of Christ. Pinnock argues that God saved Old Testament Jews without knowledge of Christ therefore the unevangelized too can be saved without knowledge of Christ. According to Pinnock, the Old Testament Jews were judged based upon the quality of their faith not the content of their knowledge. Pinnock further states, “Their theological knowledge was deficient, measured by New Testament standards, and their understanding of God was limited because they had not encountered Jesus.”⁹⁰ Pinnock rightly acknowledges the epistemological gap that existed between New Testament believers and Old Testament believers.

Pinnock points to Abraham and argues that he lacked sufficient knowledge according to exclusivists’ standards yet his knowledge was sufficient to save. Pinnock focuses on two passages to establish this argument. First, Genesis 15:6, which states, “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Second, Pinnock quotes Galatians 3:7, “All who have faith are sons of Abraham and are blessed with him.” Pinnock uses these references to strengthen his faith principle theology. God saves based upon the quality of one’s belief and faith in God not his knowledge. Ontologically, Christ is necessary but not epistemologically. Pinnock does not believe salvation comes apart from Christ. Pinnock rather believes that God allows

⁸⁹ Pinnock, 163.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Christ's work to save whether realized by the recipient or not. Pinnock agrees with J.N.D.

Anderson regarding the nature of salvation that came to OT Jews. Anderson says:

It seems clear that believing Jews under the Old Testament dispensation enjoyed forgiveness and salvation through that saving work of God in Christ (dated, of course, according to the calendars of men, but timeless and eternal in its divine significance), by which alone a holy God can and does forgive the repentant sinner—little though can most of them have understood this.⁹¹

Pinnock unabashedly emphasizes the work of Christ in the believer. Pinnock has a strong Christology. Pinnock does not deny the necessity of Christ to save all believers.

He does not downplay the significance and the role of Christ's work on the cross.

Pinnock, as an inclusivist, differs from exclusivists on the knowledge requirements for salvation. This separates Pinnock from the exclusivists who argue that this knowledge is essential. Pinnock also differs from pluralists who deny that Jesus saves. Pinnock concludes this section on Old Testament Jews with: "Faith is our response to information about God in the direction of trusting and obeying him. Nobody can say how much or how little a person has to know in order to be saved."⁹²

Analysis of Argument

Pinnock finds a common denominator between the unevangelized and OT Jews. The common ground between these groups is the absence of explicit knowledge of Christ. This is the crux of Pinnock's argument. If Jewish believers of the OT were not required to know Christ then God will not require the unevangelized to know him. The unevangelized are "informationally B.C." A key point in Pinnock's argument is that general revelation not only condemns but also saves; faith is what God desires. Pinnock does not acknowledge the major distinctions that exist

⁹¹ J. N. D. Anderson. *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 1984), 144.

⁹² Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 163.

between the faith of Old Testament Jews and the unevangelized. This is a serious problem with Pinnock's coverage. Carson argues, "The pre-Christ believers are those who enter into a covenantal, faith-based relationship with the God who had disclosed himself to them in the terms and to the extent recorded up to that time."⁹³

God's plan through salvation history must be considered. Pinnock's argument ignores the revelatory content throughout the course of salvation history, which served as the object of faith. Pinnock limits his argument by focusing solely on what was absent in the Jew's faith rather than all that was present.

Old Testament Salvation

Conservative scholars unanimously maintain that Old Testament believers possessed saving faith. The dispute exists over the nature of this faith. Pinnock disagrees that "saving faith" requires knowledge revealed through special revelation. Pinnock argues that there exist pre-messianic believers and messianic believers. Pre-messianic believers lived during the Old Testament and they live today. John Sanders uses the terms Christian believers and non-Christian believers.⁹⁴ Pinnock argues that salvation in the OT came through general faith in an undefined God and the same can apply to the unevangelized. Pinnock praises dispensational theology for not requiring Old Testament saints to place faith in Christ.⁹⁵ The following will explore the nature of the OT Jew's revelation and the saving faith they possessed.

A brief reading of the Old Testament reveals that Old Testament Jews were not limited solely to general revelation. General revelation provides information about God through creation, conscience, and history. The unevangelized can experience God in these ways. They can even

⁹³ Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 298.

⁹⁴ Sanders, 224-225.

⁹⁵ Pinnock, 162.

cultivate faith in God through general revelation, but they're in a different position than Old Testament Jews. General revelation is a revelation that God has provided to every human. Inclusivists argue that general revelation is sufficient to save through faith. General revelation does not reveal implicitly or explicitly information about the gospel. General revelation reveals information about the handiwork of God but it does not inform man of his sinfulness, God's love, the cross, and the reception of its benefits.⁹⁶ Through creation, one can ascertain that a powerful, intelligent Creator exists and that his creatures are morally responsible before him.⁹⁷ Ramesh summarizes, "General revelation enables mankind to cope; special revelation enables mankind to hope. General revelation helps mankind survive; special revelation helps mankind thrive now and forever."⁹⁸

One critique of Pinnock's position comes from the dispensationalists.⁹⁹ Dispensationalist Richard Ramesh provides an extensive critique in *The Population of Heaven*. Ramesh emphasizes the necessity for special knowledge but not necessarily Christological knowledge. Ramesh harkens back to Charles Ryrie to emphasize the dispensationalists' argument that specific content is necessary for salvation in each epoch. He argues:

One of the distinctives of dispensationalism may well hover on this point that the specific content of saving faith defines, demarcates, and distinguishes a

⁹⁶ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 89.

⁹⁷ Kenneth C. Fleming, "No Other Way, No Other Name," *Emmaus Journal* 04:2 (Winter 1995): 131.

⁹⁸ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 89.

⁹⁹ Dispensationalism is an evangelical theology developed from J.N. Darby. Many distinctives make up dispensationalism and not all proponents adhere to each of these. Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1994, 859) defines it this way: "Although there are several distinctives that usually characterize dispensationalists, the distinction between Israel and the church as two groups in God's overall plan is probably the most important. Other doctrines held by dispensationalists include a pretribulation rapture of the church into heaven, a future literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel, the dividing of biblical history into seven periods or 'dispensations' of God's ways of relating to his people, and an understanding of the church age as parenthesis in God's plan for the ages, a parenthesis instituted when the Jews largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah."

dispensation. Such a distinctive is important in relation to the inclusivist question. That is, it is possible for people to be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ before Christ came, but not after He came. In this way we preserve the truth and the adequacy of Old Testament revelation, while emphasizing that in this age a personal relationship with God is mediated *exclusively* through the Son.¹⁰⁰

Pinnock argues that many pre-messianic Jews were deprived of specific content. Ramesh rejects the universal Old Testament requirement of Christological knowledge but seeks to preserve a knowledge requirement. Ramesh believes the patriarchs and prophets were privy to Christ centered knowledge but that the common Israelite who was saved would not have been privy to information this specific.¹⁰¹ The Old Testament Jews were privy to God's covenant to bring about restoration through special revelation. General revelation never reveals salvation. Nature reveals to man the law but not the gospel.¹⁰² The dispensationalists disagree with Inclusivists argument that special knowledge is not required for salvation. Ramesh concludes, "A normal historical and hermeneutical distinction between dispensations makes a broadened condition for salvation impossible."¹⁰³

A similar critique of Pinnock's position comes from Covenant Theologians. Bob Bryant and Daniel Strange both use this model to argue for the necessity of special knowledge, particularly Christological knowledge, within the Old Testament. Covenant theologians maintain that saving content has always included reference to Christ. The Old Testament believers may not have fully understood their provided revelation. Covenant Theologian Bob Bryant argues that knowledge of Christ has always been required for salvation. Bryant argues, "No one has

¹⁰⁰ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 123. Strange also cites this paragraph in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 154.

¹⁰¹ Ramesh, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," 93.

¹⁰² Strange, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 73.

¹⁰³ Ramesh, "Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism," 94.

ever been or ever will be saved apart from believing in Christ for eternal life. We must reach people with the one and only message that provides eternal salvation today, just as it did before Jesus came.”¹⁰⁴ This view of salvation makes Pinnock’s argument impossible. If Christ has always been the epistemological requirement for salvation then the unevangelized must hear the gospel to be saved. If the inclusivists and dispensationalists are correct that Old Testament believers could be saved without knowledge of Christ, “Seed” or “Messiah”, then the unevangelized could be saved without knowledge of Christ. Pinnock’s argument, along with the dispensationalists’, is that God only desires faith in whatever has been revealed to an individual. Robert Wilkin argues that the terms for eternal salvation cannot change. He argues that if the message changes then the gospel also changes.¹⁰⁵ It is difficult to determine how much Old Testament believers knew and understood regarding the coming Messiah. Bob Bryant concludes, “Abraham, Job, and Moses illustrate that before Jesus came, people were saved by believing in the Christ who was yet to come. Today, we are saved by believing in the same Christ who has come. They looked forward. We look back.”¹⁰⁶

Pinnock says of Old Testament believers: “Their theological knowledge was deficient, measured by New Testament standards, and their understanding of God was limited because they had not encountered Jesus, in whom alone one sees the Father.”¹⁰⁷ This has been proven to be an invalid conclusion. The Old Testament Jews were involved in practices and rituals that were

¹⁰⁴ Bob Bryant. “How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16:1 (Spring 2003), 70.

¹⁰⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, “Is Ignorance Bliss?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16:1 (Spring 2003), 13.

¹⁰⁶ Bryant, “How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came?” 65.

¹⁰⁷ Pinnock, 163.

required. These practices were insufficient to salvation and shadowed Christ. Ronald Nash concludes:

How can Old Testament believers who had a significant relationship to special revelation and whose faith was tied to symbols and practices that looked forward to Christ provide warrant for treating unevangelized moderns as saved believers? If there is an argument here, I fail to see it.¹⁰⁸

Pinnock's comparison of Old Testament Jews and the unevangelized hardly works. The unevangelized cannot access knowledge of Christ or God's requirements for salvation without special revelation. The rituals, practices, and Old Testament Law foreshadowed the Messiah. It shadowed things to come.

The Nature of Abraham's Salvation

Abraham is a common example used by inclusivists to illustrate the minimal knowledge requirement for salvation. Through Abraham, the first Jew, came the Abrahamic covenant that provided hope for the world. Pinnock states, "Forefather Abraham was saved by faith, as is clear in Genesis."¹⁰⁹ Oddly, Pinnock does not mention the fact that Abraham was not of Jewish descent and came from a paganistic background to strengthen his argument. The key question here revolves around the nature of Abraham's salvation. The object of Abraham's faith was specific. Pinnock fails to recognize the object of Abraham's faith. He claims that Old Testament Israelites, along with Abraham, merely responded in faith to the light God revealed without any covenantal knowledge. Abraham's faith was in the promises of God. The promise that God declared to Abraham foreshadowed Christ however it remains a mystery how much Abraham understood regarding salvation through his "Seed." The point is that the content came through special revelation. Pinnock says of Abraham's faith:

¹⁰⁸ Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 127.

¹⁰⁹ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 163

I hold that after death, these people encounter the reality of God's grace in Christ for which they had longed. The analogy is Abraham, whom Paul calls the father of believers, because he trusted God even though he did not know Christ (Rom. 4:16).¹¹⁰

Abraham did not know of Christ yet Pinnock fails to recognize that the Old Testament covenants and practices were all part of God's plan in salvation history. Those saved in the Old Testament possessed faith in God's provided revelation

Genesis 15:6 reveals Abraham's response to God: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." This passage is considered one of the most significant passages on saving faith within the patriarchal period. The major question here concerns the nature of Abraham's faith. It must be determined whether Abraham's faith was a mere act of general believing or if it was a particular faith connected with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹¹ Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness but what was the object of his faith. Kaiser argues that Genesis 15:6 is connected with the previous verses (Genesis 15:1-5) which ties Abraham's belief to the promised "Seed."¹¹² It is difficult to argue that Abraham was saved due to his obedience in Genesis 12:1 where God commanded him to leave Ur of the Chaldeans. Hebrews 11:8-9 calls this an act of faith. It cannot be assumed that this was "saving faith." Genesis 15:6 is the first instance where Abraham's faith is personal and tied to justification.¹¹³ Abraham's act of faith in leaving his home city (12:1) was not credited as righteousness.

Genesis 12:2-3 reveals God's three-part promise to Abraham ("Seed," "land," and "all nations will be blessed"). Not until Genesis 15 does the "Seed" come into play. Genesis 15

¹¹⁰ John Hick, Dennis L. Okholm, and Timothy R. Phillips. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 148.

¹¹¹ Kaiser, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 125.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

brings a shift from the “land” to the “Seed.” The first promise of the “Seed” comes to Eve in Genesis 3:15. After 25 years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah decided to help God bring about Abraham’s heir. God told Abraham that his son, Ishmael, was not the promised son but another son of his flesh would be provided through Sarah. This son would be his heir. Upon hearing God’s promise, Abraham believed God. Martin Luther comments on this verse:

Here the Holy Spirit states emphatically [that Abram believed in God who promised] so that we should learn from this passage that all who (*after Abraham’s example*) believe in Christ are justified. . . .Our righteousness before God is simply this, that we trust in the divine promise (*of Christ*).¹¹⁴

Even Luther’s view of Genesis 15:6 was that Abraham’s faith was tied to the “Seed.” This understanding of Genesis 15:6 makes Pinnock’s argument unlikely. God revealed that he would bless all the nations through Abraham. Abraham believed this promised that God gave him. This belief in God’s provided covenant was considered righteousness. The unevangelized cannot be considered righteous without covenantal knowledge which is now Christ. Abraham’s covenant knowledge consisted of a promised “Seed” that would bless all the nations. Abraham placed faith in the same “Seed” God promised in the garden. This “Seed” would be resulted in the Messiah. Abraham placed faith in the information God provided through special revelation. The revelatory content Abraham placed his faith in pointed to Christ even though Abraham lacked an understanding of this. The promised “Seed” that would bless the nations was God’s revelation at that time in salvation history. Abraham had special revelation to which he could direct his faith. The unevangelized are without special revelation and therefore cannot be compared to Abraham.

Conclusion

The Old Testament Jews, like the unevangelized, were not privy to explicit knowledge of Jesus. This does not mean they are in the same epistemological state. God’s revelation in Christ

¹¹⁴ Kaiser, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 129. Here Kaiser quotes from Luther’s commentary on Genesis.

had not yet been revealed however special revelation concerning God's covenant had been revealed. Old Testament Jews placed their faith in God's covenant, which pointed to Christ. The unevangelized do not have information concerning God's covenant. The unevangelized must know Christ in order to be saved. This may be revealed through evangelism, dreams, visions, or direct divine communication. God is not limited on how to communicate saving truth to the unevangelized. The pre-messianic Jews reveal that special revelation has always been necessary for salvation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Philanthropists: Clark Pinnock's Proof from Matthew 25:40

Pinnock's fourth proof comes from Matthew 25:40: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Here Pinnock makes the mistake of misinterpreting Matthew 25:40. Pinnock's argument is guided by his interpretation of the passage. Pinnock makes the mistake of blurring the line between faith and works with this interpretation. Pinnock seems to broaden his approach to salvation with this argument. He states that, "Serving the poor embodies what the love of God himself is, and it is accepted as the equivalent of faith."¹¹⁵ He uses this passage to argue that the unevangelized may be deficient in their knowledge of Christ but serving the poor and needy is the equivalent of serving Christ. Pinnock adheres to a majority view among modern scholarship in interpreting "the least of these my brothers." His interpretation does not harmonize with the context of Matthew 25:40 which suggests a different conclusion than Pinnock's proposal. Controversy remains on how the phrase "the least of these my brothers" should be interpreted yet Pinnock uses his interpretation to provide hope for the unevangelized. A proper interpretation of "the least of these my brothers" makes Pinnock's wider hope argument unlikely. The goal here is to expose the error of Pinnock's interpretation of Matthew 25:40. First, a proper summary of the argument will be provided.

¹¹⁵ Pinnock, 165.

Summary of Pinnock's Argument

Pinnock focuses on Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40 which are part of Jesus' final judgment parable.¹¹⁶ Pinnock addresses the issue regarding the identity of "the least." Pinnock interprets

these as the poor and needy people of the world. Pinnock argues:

Jesus, speaking as a Jew with the Gentile world in mind, wishes to say (in the spirit of the Noahic covenant) that deeds of love done to needy people will be regarded at the last judgment as having been done to Christ, even though the Gentiles did not and could not have known it under these circumstances."¹¹⁷

He argues that the sheep in this passage are both Jews and Gentiles who do good works for the poor and needy people of the world. A more traditional view of this passage is that Jesus is referring strictly to Jesus' disciples. Pinnock says of this view, "To restrict the reference ('the least of these brothers of mine') to Christian missionaries seems unjustified and unlikely."¹¹⁸ Pinnock also believes that this text can be compared to that of the beatitudes. He says, "Surely the text picks up on the beatitudes: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (Lk 6:20). Serving the poor embodies what the love of God himself is, and it is accepted as the equivalent of faith."¹¹⁹ Pinnock's conclusion is that good works makes a person like Christ, which is the goal of salvation. A person who does good works to the poor and needy emulates the character of God. He closes with, "Those who confess Christ and those who do not are judged alike by the extent to which they walk in the way of the Son of Man."¹²⁰ Pinnock here conveys his point that knowledge is irrelevant. God will not consider what one's knowledge but

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 163-164.

¹¹⁷ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 164.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 164-165.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 165.

rather one's actions. Pinnock emphasizes that how one acts and the service incorporated into one's life serves as the basis upon which every person will be judged. Pinnock is saying we will not be judged according to what we did or didn't know but according to what we did or didn't do.

Analysis of Pinnock's Argument

Pinnock attempts to prove that through Matthew 25:40 the unevangelized may possess genuine "saving faith." He argues that good works done to the poor and needy reveals true faith in God. Pinnock argues that good works done by faith prove acceptable in God's eyes. Pinnock believes that all will be judged based upon the works, both those privy to Christ and those ignorant of Christ. Pinnock largely bases this understanding of salvation upon Matthew 25:40. The interpretation that Pinnock provides on this passage is a majority view of modern scholarship yet it does not fit the context of Christ's last judgment sermon. An analysis of Pinnock's interpretation reveals his unwarranted conclusion concerning the unevangelized. Pinnock also can be charged with an inconsistency here in regards to his "faith principle." Pinnock's argument here strongly suggests a works based salvation. The following will explore the crippling flaws within Pinnock's argument that the unevangelized can be saved on the basis of Matthew 25:40.

Interpretation of "the least of these my brothers"

Pinnock does not take the majority view through church history but the contemporary majority view today. Pinnock provides the following interpretation: "Deeds of love done to needy people will be regarded at the last judgment as having been done to Christ, even though the Gentiles did not and could not have known it under the circumstances."¹²¹ He interprets "the

¹²¹ Ibid., 164.

least” as a universal reference to the poor and needy people of the world. Pinnock argues that Jesus’ sheep are those who perform these acts of kindness towards “the least.” Therefore, if the unevangelized help the poor and needy then they exemplify true “saving faith” in God and are not required to confess Christ. It is sufficient to salvation if one behaves like Christ. This is a common interpretation of the passage provided by inclusivists.¹²² Pinnock references Joachim Jeremias to support his view. Pinnock’s point here is that God will accept those who are Christ-like into the kingdom. He concludes: “Those who confess Christ and those who do not are judged alike by the extent to which they walk in the way of the Son of Man.”¹²³ Several problems exist with Pinnock’s interpretation of “the least” and the qualifications for being Jesus’ sheep. When these issues of interpretation are considered it reveals Pinnock’s application of wider mercy for the unevangelized as ungrounded and misguided.

There are no parallel passages where Christ refers to the unbelieving community as “my brothers.” Pinnock quotes Joachim Jeremias who holds the same view. Jeremias argues that the verse refers to “those who showed kindness to the hidden and unrecognised messiah whom they encountered in the guise of the poor and suffering.”¹²⁴ Jeremias appeals to the Hebrew term for brother (אָח). He argues that the term is synonymous with neighbor.¹²⁵ This terminology in Matthew, along with the NT in general, is restricted solely to Christ’s disciples (5:22-24, 47; 7:3-5; 12:48-50; 18:15, 21, 35; 23:8; 28:10). The term “brothers” references disciples elsewhere in

¹²³ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 165.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164. Here Pinnock quotes from Joachim Jeremias.

¹²⁵ Gaylen P. Leverett, 2007, “Looking for the Least: An Analysis and Evaluation of Interpretation Issues Which Have Influenced the Interpretation of the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46).” PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 29.

the NT (John 20:17; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11-12).¹²⁶ There are instances where Christ refers to his literal brothers but spiritually speaking these references are always directed towards his disciples. It is unlikely that Jesus would identify the poor and needy as “my brothers.” Donald Hagner argues, “The use of $\tau\omicron\nu\ \delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\nu\ \mu\omicron\nu$, ‘my brothers,’ makes it almost certain that the statement refers not to human beings in general but rather to brothers and sisters of the Christian community.”¹²⁷ The term “the least” is also an unlikely reference to the poor and needy. Sherman Gray examines J. Winandy’s study, which reveals that every mention of “little ones” or “the least” within Matthew references believers.¹²⁸ Gray concludes that “the least” must refer to Jesus’ disciples based upon the studies done concerning Jesus’ usage of “the least” in Matthew.¹²⁹ Exegetically Pinnock does not have the support to argue that “the least” or “my brothers” refers to all suffering humans.

The four most common interpretations of “the least of these my brothers” are: (1) all humans; (2) all Christians, (3) Christian missionaries; (4) Jewish Christians.¹³⁰ The two most common from this list are the all Christians (disciples) view and the all people view.¹³¹ Pinnock’s view has been examined. Exegetically, the all Christians view is most sound. David Turner points out, “The strength of this view is its understanding of Jesus’ needy disciples in the Matthean context rather than in a modern context that emphasizes the brotherhood of all

¹²⁶ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew. 14-28* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 744.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Sherman W. Gray, “The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation,” *SBL Dissertation Series* 114 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 357.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Hagner, *Matthew*, 744.

¹³¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 639.

humans.”¹³² Jesus’ point here is that how one treats his disciples reflects how they’ve responded to his message. If one accepts Jesus’ disciples then they have accepted Jesus. This correlates with Jesus’ teachings from Matthew 10:42 where he mentions the “little ones.” Tradition sides with this interpretation. This has been the view traditionally held by the church. Gray provides the statistics: “Prescinding from the neutral evidence, throughout the centuries the combined restrictive interpretation of ‘the least’ (38.68%) is nearly twice that of the universal interpretation (20.58%).”¹³³ D.A. Carson also argues that “the least of these my brothers” references believers persecuted for the sake of the gospel.¹³⁴

The implications of this interpretation must be understood. This view does not imply that good works to the poor and needy are not essential. This was an essential part of Jesus’ ministry and in many ways neglecting this ministry is to neglect the gospel. D.A. Carson elaborates this point, “Certainly Jesus, not to mention the entire prophetic tradition before him, displayed wonderful compassion for the poor and suffering. Would-be-disciples of Jesus today are not really following him if they ignore this fact.”¹³⁵ The point of this text is not good works done to the less fortunate are done to Christ. Jesus wants to reveal the way by which his sheep can be recognized. Helping poor and needy disciples strongly implies a positive response to the gospel. The emphasis of 25:40 is that Jesus’ disciples will endure hardships. Sheep will be recognized by their deeds done to Jesus’ disciples. As Turner states, “When this community/family goes out in mission, it will encounter the most severe difficulties and will need help to endure its

¹³² David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 605.

¹³³ Gray, “The Least of My Brothers,” 351.

¹³⁴ Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 301.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

hardships.”¹³⁶ For one to give aide to Jesus’ disciples implies that they have accepted Jesus along with his message. Morris concludes, “To receive a disciple is to receive Jesus.”¹³⁷

Salvation through Works

Pinnock blurs the line between faith and works with this argument. All of his proofs focus on the importance of faith yet here his emphasis takes a shift. Nash argues that at this point inclusivists desire to walk down both sides of the street at the same time.¹³⁸ Pinnock states, “Serving the poor embodies the love which God himself is and is accepted as the equivalent of faith.”¹³⁹ Pinnock proposes here that faith or works are evidence of salvation. They are one in the same. John Sanders affirms Pinnock’s argument here that service to the poor can be substituted for faith based on Matthew 25:31-40.¹⁴⁰ Pinnock argues that good works done to the poor proves that “saving faith” is present. Ronald Nash fears that Pinnock’s theology has crumbled the very essence of the Christian faith. He urges fellow evangelicals to answer the challenge from Pinnock who now speculates that even faith is not an essential component to salvation.¹⁴¹ With this argument, it is difficult to imagine who is not saved. All humans are born with a moral consciousness and an understanding of right and wrong. Most all individuals have innate benevolent tendencies to aide those in need. By Pinnock’s logic, almost the entire human race is saved. Pinnock even suggests that philanthropic atheists are saved. Pinnock argues, “Even the atheist who, though rejecting God (as he understands God), responds positively to him implicitly

¹³⁶ Turner, *Matthew*, 606.

¹³⁷ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 639.

¹³⁸ Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 169

¹³⁹ Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Sanders, *No Other Name*, 259.

¹⁴¹ Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 170.

by acts of love shown to the neighbor.”¹⁴² This line of reasoning clearly supports works based salvation, which undermines Pinnock’s previous arguments regarding the faith principle. Pinnock has completely stripped the importance of faith and necessity of faith in Christ. According to Pinnock, the Spirit works in all humans to help produce Christ-like behavior whether they possess faith or not. Whenever the NT speaks about faith it always has a specific object. The Holy Spirit never works in unbelievers to produce good works or Christ-like behavior without first exercising faith and repentance.

Conclusion

The context of this passage does not allow for Pinnock’s interpretation or conclusion regarding the unevangelized. The author writes about the separating of the sheep and the goats in the context of the final judgment. It pleases God when believers reach out and minister to fellow believers enduring persecution. In fact, this is an act that wouldn’t be done by goats but rather sheep. Some dispensationalists suggest that this occurs during the tribulation based on the full context of the passage. This may be possible but this is not explicitly evident. It isn’t salvific in nature to serve persecuted believers, but it is a by-product of the faith one has in Christ. A willingness to help fellow brothers in Christ reveals the true nature of salvation. This is not a promotion of works based salvation. Without Christ’s imputed righteousness then our goodness does not measure up to God’s standard of holiness.

¹⁴² Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 98.

CHAPTER FIVE

Infants: Clark Pinnock's Proof from the Mentally Incompetent

Pinnock focuses on the nature of infant¹⁴³ salvation to emphasize his point here. Pinnock makes the mistake of applying his misdirected conclusion on infant salvation to the unevangelized. One's view on the nature of infant salvation greatly affects one's overall view of salvation. Most evangelicals adhere to universal infant salvation, which for Calvinists opens the door to questions and inconsistencies.¹⁴⁴ The Bible remains almost completely silent on the issue of infant salvation. Most evangelicals believe children who die before the "age of accountability" are safe from hell. Pinnock utilizes this difficult doctrine and channels it to strengthen his argument for the unevangelized. His focus is on the nearly unanimous consensus among evangelicals regarding the destiny of those who die in infancy. Few are willing to admit that any infants will be damned. Pinnock argues that infants and the unevangelized are both helpless to salvation. Pinnock argues that if infants can be saved without knowledge of Christ then the unevangelized also should be granted access to salvation without knowledge of Christ.¹⁴⁵ Pinnock makes the mistake of ignoring clear distinctions between those who have not heard and those who cannot hear. The problem with Pinnock's argument is that he only focuses on the contradictions and logical errors within the Calvinist doctrine assuming this to be the majority view of evangelicals. Pinnock adequately exposes problems with the Calvinists' solution to universal infant salvation. Pinnock believes that arbitrary election must not be neglected when handling the issue of infant salvation for the sake of consistency. The following will summarize Pinnock's basic argument here.

¹⁴³ The term infant will be used throughout this chapter to refer to all mentally incompetent persons. It also refers to both living and deceased infants.

¹⁴⁴ Sanders, 288.

¹⁴⁵ Pinnock, 167.

A. Summary of Pinnock's Argument

Pinnock believes if he can expose irreconcilable issues regarding traditional views on infant salvation then he can expose the same issues for the unevangelized. It is true that infants and unevangelized adults are unable to profess Christ. Pinnock views deceased infants as a perfect instance where epistemological requirements are waived for salvation. He says infants are “a practically uncontested example of unevangelized people being saved.”¹⁴⁶ Pinnock argues that evangelicals’ provide weak attempts to remedy this problem of deceased infants. He looks to history to trace this issue beginning with Augustine who taught that unbaptized infants were damned because of Adam’s sin.¹⁴⁷ Peter Abelard developed a different solution. He established the idea of “limbo” which maintains that infants are not in heaven or hell but rather in some in between state.¹⁴⁸ This is the safe approach, which avoids declaring infants damned or saved. Pinnock then reverts to the theology of Zwingli and B.B. Warfield. Pinnock critiques Calvinist B.B. Warfield who adhered to universal infant salvation. Pinnock charges Warfield and other Calvinist with inconsistency. In reference to arbitrary election Pinnock asks: “Why balk at babies.”¹⁴⁹ Pinnock argues that theologians become clouded by emotion with deceased infants and stray from logic. He concludes with the question: “Why so great a compassion for infants who cannot believe, and so little for large numbers of others perishing without God lifting a finger to save them?”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Pinnock, 167.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 167.

Pinnock provides his approach to infant salvation. First, he emphasizes that God has reconciled all things to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19) and that Paul asserts to “Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).¹⁵¹ Pinnock argues that some cannot choose to be reconciled to God. In this case, God waives the requirement or postpones it at least. He says, “In the case of babies dying in infancy, the decision for God can come after death, since it could not have come before.”¹⁵² Pinnock introduces his own version of “limbo.” He believes that infants have not done anything to deserve heaven or hell. He uses this concept for the unevangelized.

Analysis of Pinnock’s Argument

Pinnock dismisses a common view of infant salvation only to introduce his own. He believes that his view of grace for infants can also be applied to the unevangelized who also deserve it. Pinnock does not adequately cover the different views on this issue. He offers a view that is hardly compatible with evangelical theology. Pinnock emphasizes the common denominator of lacking the gospel yet he ignores the stark differences between infants and the unevangelized. Pinnock does not adequately handle the alternative views concerning this controversial topic. He briefly criticizes and inadequately dismisses the Calvinistic view of universal infant salvation assuming this to be the majority view of evangelicals. Pinnock successfully exposes the difficulties concerning infant salvation. Theologians have attempted to remedy the problem of infant’s being saved without confessing Christ. Pinnock traces Augustine’s baptismal regeneration and Peter Abelard’s “limbo” view. Pinnock follows the historical development regarding the destiny of infants but leaves large gaps. Many have held universal infant salvation but not all. Baptismal regeneration was a popular option until the

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 168.

reformation yet it is still held by Roman Catholics. Catholics argue that unbaptized babies possibly enter into 'limbo', which is similar to Purgatory. Pinnock argues that for Calvinists there is too large of an inconsistency to allow them to hold universal infant salvation.

The Logic of Infant Salvation

Pinnock addresses the logical inconsistencies that exist in popular views on infant salvation. Pinnock provides a case against traditional views on infant salvation yet his conclusions do not follow. Pinnock believes that if he can prove ambiguity with infant's salvation then also too ambiguity exists with the destiny of the unevangelized. He makes a case against evangelicals who maintain a doctrine of election and also universal infant salvation. Pinnock references two major Calvinists supporters: Zwingli and B.B. Warfield. Logical inconsistencies do exist within the Calvinist doctrine of salvation and universal infant salvation. Traditional Calvinism teaches that God's election is arbitrary. Age should not be considered regarding God's eternal election. Warfield argued that all infants are saved but only on the basis of Reformed principles. Warfield wrote a substantial amount on this topic. Many renowned Calvinists have held this same view.¹⁵³ The difficulty with universal infant salvation is God's arbitrary election, which Pinnock recognizes. Logically, Warfield cannot maintain arbitrary election and universal infant salvation. David Clark comments, "If some adults are not saved and God's will is reasonable, then the logic of Warfield's Reformed position requires that some infants who die will not be saved."¹⁵⁴ Warfield neglects coherence on this issue. In regards to

¹⁵³ Three early adherents include: John Calvin, John Owen and Charles Hodge.

¹⁵⁴ Clark, David K., "Warfield, Infant Salvation, and the Logic of Calvinism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:4 (Dec 1984): 463-464.

salvation, God is no respecter of age. Warfield argues, “Man’s salvation is causally suspended on any act of his own.”¹⁵⁵

A major issue with Pinnock’s argument regards the short range of his argument. Pinnock ignores other plausible views held by evangelicals. Erickson acknowledges six different approaches infant salvation: Pelagianism, sentimentalism, Arminianism, probation of the infant, baptismal regeneration, and Calvinism.¹⁵⁶ Pinnock ignores the partial election view, which remains consistent yet is considered harsh treatment of the mentally underdeveloped. The greatest criticism against this position is its harsh treatment of infants who have not yet lived and willfully sinned. The Westminster Confession of faith is the Calvinist doctrine that seems to be in alignment with this position. Tiessen praises the confession for its unwavering consistency. The Westminster Confession states, “Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit who worketh when, where, and how he pleaseth” (10.3). While the confession doesn’t explicitly state that non-elect babies are damned, it implies that there will be elect and non-elect that die in infancy. This doctrine keeps the consistency of arbitrary election. Adherents have evaded the inconsistency dilemma yet Pinnock fails to recognize this point. A dedicated view of predestination would seem to back any into the view that the non-elect babies are damned especially those who hold to the view of God’s middle knowledge. Tiessen’s theological inclinations pull him towards the partial election view for the sake of consistency

Some argue that only children of Christian parents are saved. There seems to be some biblical support for this view. Loraine Boettner argues this view, “Scriptures seem to teach plainly enough that the children of believers are saved; but they are silent on or practically so in

¹⁵⁵ B.B. Warfield, “The Development of the Doctrine of Infant Salvation,” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford, 1932): 441.

¹⁵⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?: The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 239-248.

regard to those of the heathens.”¹⁵⁷ According to Tiessen, this same doctrine is found in *Canons of Dort*.¹⁵⁸ Spurgeon also suggests and quotes Exodus 20:6 which says that God shows mercy to the thousandth generation of those who love him.¹⁵⁹ Pinnock also ignores the view that infant reprobation view. With this position, it would follow that all unevangelized adults are damned. This is the most rigid view concerning the infants’ salvific state. The major problem with Pinnock’s argument is that he ignores the Arminian solutions to infant salvation focusing only on contradictions within one Calvinists solution.

Pinnock introduces his own view, which resembles the “Limbo” approach of Peter Abelard. Pinnock, as an inclusivist, believes that God is reconciling all things to himself, including those who never hear of Jesus. Pinnock quotes passages to reinforce this notion. First, he references 2 Corinthians 5:19: “That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” Pinnock also mentions Paul’s imperative: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Pinnock reasons, “But if it cannot be ratified, one would expect this requirement to be waived or at least postponed.”¹⁶⁰ Pinnock assumes that God’s “reconciling the world,” means equal opportunity. Assumptions lead to more assumptions, which leaves Pinnock’s argument flimsy.

One of the strongest arguments against Pinnock’s “Limbo” view for infants and the unevangelized is its absence in Scripture. Mal Couch asserts that Limbo was created out of thin

¹⁵⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1932), 146.

¹⁵⁸ Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 208.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

¹⁶⁰ Pinnock, 168.

air.¹⁶¹ Pinnock's assumption is that there must be a post-mortem opportunity for the unevangelized to repent and confess since God is reconciling all things. Pinnock summarizes:

In the case of babies dying in infancy, the decision for God can come after death, since it could not have come before. This in turn may suggest that they are also given time to grow up and mature, so then a decision could be made. In this case, the salvation of all the unevangelized would not be certain.

Pinnock creates hope for infants and the unevangelized without biblical support. He even admits that the unevangelized may not be saved during post-mortem evangelism. It is difficult to understand why the unevangelized need to be evangelized post mortem if knowledge of Christ is not necessary.

Distinctions Between Infants and the Unevangelized

Pinnock says nothing regarding the distinctions that exist between infants and the unevangelized. He makes the mistake of ignoring the difference between those who have not heard and those who cannot hear. Surely differences exist between mature adults who willfully sin against God and children without the mental faculties to decide anything. Although each group stands epistemologically deficient, the nature of original sin and general revelation separates them soteriologically. The following will survey the nature of original sin and general revelation as major distinctions between infants and the unevangelized.

Original Sin

An issue that arises with infant salvation is original sin. Paul teaches that through one act of disobedience all were made sinners (Romans 5:12-21). A major question in this debate concerns whether original sin means original guilt. Through Adam, all have been made sinners. This does not mean that all are born guilty before God. Infants have

¹⁶¹ Mal Couch, "The Catholic Doctrines of Purgatory and Limbo," *Conservative Theological Journal* 6, no. 19 (Dec 2002): 324-336.

not chosen to disobey God. It is safe to assume that since condemnation comes to all through Adam without choice then also Christ's righteousness may be imputed through indecision. This does not mean that infants are saved without Christ. They still need Christ to be saved. The imputation comes through their inability to choose. The imputed sin of Adam has not been activated therefore it can be assumed that Christ's blood is provided. It is difficult to imagine this same transaction occurring with adults who willfully sin. John Sanders, along with Pinnock, finds it difficult to accept that God would save infants but not the unevangelized when both possess original sin. Sanders asks the question: "Why do restrictivists speak of the great power and will of God in other doctrines but when speaking of the unevangelized prefer to emphasize the power of human sin over the power of God's love?"¹⁶² The issue does not concern which is more powerful, human sin or God's power, rather what qualifies for God's redeeming power. Inclusivists make the assumption that rejection of Christ is the sole reason for condemnation. Ronald Nash argues that man is not lost solely through rejection of Christ. The unevangelized fail to respond to God's given light.

General Revelation

Paul perfectly defines general revelation and the capabilities it contains. Romans 1:18-25 indicates all that general revelation provides. General revelation teaches man that he is sinful and that a creator exists. Through this knowledge, man understands his condemnation. This revelation does not reveal Christ the Savior. Paul's argument in Romans 1 is that the creation provides enough knowledge to condemn but not to affirm.¹⁶³ Paul writes to convey that the

¹⁶² Sanders, 61.

¹⁶³ William V. Crockett, and James G. Sigountos. *Through No Fault of Their Own?: The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 131.

Gentiles are without excuse because they perceive God's divine qualities through nature. God's law is written on man's heart. These elements leave man condemned before the Law Giver.

Infants are not in this same category. They have not been exposed to God's divine attributes and qualities nor have they cognition to understand morality. Paul emphasizes that the Gentiles are without excuse yet the same could not be said of infants. Ramesh says, "Infants who die and mentally incompetent cannot respond to divine communication and believe; others do not believe because they will not respond to divine communication."¹⁶⁴ Infants who die never responded to God's light one way or the other. They cannot be condemned for performing no actions and containing no knowledge. The unevangelized have a clear understanding of God's essence and nature (Romans 1:18-25; 2:14-15). Despite their knowledge of God, the unevangelized go their own way (Romans 1:18, 21). They give up their knowledge of God and instead worship idols (Romans 1:23, 25). Morgan and Peterson concludes, "Infants and persons who are severely mentally challenged do not have such knowledge and are incapable of rejecting anything. Consequently, the inclusivist comparison does not stand."¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

In regards to salvation, the unevangelized cannot adequately be compared to infants. Pinnock charges that many evangelicals who maintain universal infant salvation are inconsistent. Pinnock dismisses views regarding infant salvation only to introduce his own view. Pinnock proposes that infants possibly enter into "Limbo" after death where they grow up and mature to eventually accept or reject Christ. Pinnock postulates that the same is probably true for the unevangelized. The provided analysis refuted the "Limbo" view and argued major distinctions

¹⁶⁴ Ramesh, *The Population of Heaven*, 101.

¹⁶⁵ Morgan and Peterson, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 243.

between infants and the unevangelized, which make Pinnock's assumptions impossible. The unevangelized have received general revelation and understanding God's nature through creation. They choose to sin and reject God's light. Infants have had no such opportunity. Infants are under the curse of Adam yet they are not condemned by the curse. Pinnock does not accept that God would make all babies elect who have not heard the Gospel, but not do the same for the unevangelized. To Pinnock this is nonsensical. If God has predetermined all who will be saved then logically it would seem to follow that some babies would be saved and some not. However this is worked out soteriologically, the distinction of general revelation and original guilt exists between the two. Infants will not be accountable for committed sins or God's revelation through nature. Therefore they are not held accountable for Adam's imputed sin.

CONCLUSION

Pinnock's desire for wider hope is commendable. It reflects genuine care for those who are lost and without Christ. The conclusions that Pinnock draws from his provided examples are not warranted. If God plans to save the unevangelized or provide further opportunities for them, he has not communicated this. God's intentions cannot always be ascertained. Where Scripture is silent, theologians should be silent. Pinnock's first proof from Hebrews 11:6 only proves that faith is an essential component in one's salvation. Pinnock uses this verse to argue for the ability of God to save through faith in general revelation without knowledge of the Savior. This faith principle has been proven false. It is not fleshed out in Hebrews 11:6 or any of the other four proofs. No one has ever been saved without saving knowledge through special revelation. The unevangelized must hear the good news of Jesus Christ through special revelation.

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