

Chapter 1

INTRODUCING THE ISSUE

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Jesus Christ, when speaking to His disciples in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25) during the week leading to His crucifixion, spoke this parable regarding His second coming:

45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, “My master is delaying his coming,” 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of 51 and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 24:45-51)

Should unfaithful Christians live with the frightening possibility of being cut in two (either literally or figuratively) when Jesus Christ returns again? Is it possible that they could be appointed a portion with the hypocrites? What is this passage teaching? What would this involve? Should you as a believer fear a future experience that involves wailing and gnashing of teeth when Jesus comes again?

Later in this same discourse, Jesus Christ utters these ominous words:

And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
(Matt. 25:30)

In this context, do these words apply to believers in Christ or unbelievers? Is this “servant” an unfaithful believer or a lost sinner? If this verse is in reference to believers, should Christians fear the possibility of being cast into outer darkness because they were not faithful enough or a practical overcomer in their Christian lives? What exactly is this “outer darkness” they will experience? And what does “weeping and gnashing of teeth” actually mean?

Most in evangelical Christianity in the past and present would reply to these questions with a question and statement in return: “Why are you even asking this question? Of course these are not born again, blood-bought, children of God being referred to!” But before you quickly dismiss this issue, let me underscore for you why these are relevant questions for our day from several standpoints.

RELEVANCE OF THIS ISSUE

From a *theological standpoint* these are pertinent questions since there are those who believe in justification by faith alone in Christ alone, along with the eternal security of the believer, who are now answering “Yes” to these questions. Yes, unfaithful Christians should fear being cast into outer darkness and experiencing punitive damages at the Judgment Seat of Christ, including wailing and gnashing of teeth. I ask you, is this “sound doctrine” and consistent with the teaching of God’s grace? How does this relate to Christ’s sacrificial death and the biblical doctrine of “propitiation”? Is the Bema or Judgment Seat of Christ a place of possible punishment for the unfaithfulness and unconfessed sins of believers? These are very important doctrinal questions that need answering.

These are also relevant questions from an *exegetical standpoint*. What is the context of the scriptural passages and statements that make reference to this “outer darkness” and “wailing and gnashing of teeth”? Are the people being referred to in these passages believers or unbelievers? If they are believers, does this passage have a direct connection with Church-age saints and the Bema Seat of Christ, or are they referring to believers of another age? And where else in Scripture are there references to “outer darkness” and “wailing and gnashing teeth” that may shed light on these verses and this subject?

There are many exegetical issues that need to be untangled for us to rightly divide or accurately handle the Word of truth.

In addition, it is alarming from a *pastoral standpoint* to see believers who embrace the message of salvation by grace for justification, now also embracing and teaching a kind of Protestant purgatory for failure in one's present walk and sanctification. As I have taught on this subject in various places, I have been approached by pastors, missionaries, Christian school teachers, and others that have confessed to me that not only were they taught these alarming doctrines in their local church but in some cases even taught these doctrines themselves in their ministries. This should be of great concern to every pastor and teacher since James 3:1 warns us: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

Lastly, these are important issues to be addressed from a *personal standpoint*. There are those who have been taught and believed these doctrinal conclusions, resulting in suffocating, legalistic bondage in their Christian lives. Some live in fearful torment instead of joyful anticipation of seeing the Lord either when they die or at the Rapture. Below is a brief segment from a personal testimony that was sent to me by a young woman who suffered under such legalistic teaching and practice. As you read it, you can sense some of her past anguish of soul and present liberty by grace:

A year ago tonight, my father sat me down and told me what my future was to be. I was to quit my job, never drive, quit school, and marry a 40-plus year old man I did not love. A year ago tonight, I decided to leave my father's church believing I was going to spend my eternity in a flameless hell, naked and weeping and gnashing my teeth forever. I have so much to be thankful for! What a difference one year of sound teaching has made in my life. I am so thankful for this local church and the family we have there! It's been an incredible year; He has shown me unfathomable mercy!

While this is an extreme example of the personal damage this legalistic teaching is causing in believers' lives and churches, it nevertheless illustrates that this doctrine is not a hypothetical problem but a real-life issue affecting a growing group of people. Unfortunately, these beliefs seem to be gaining traction and becoming more entrenched in our day, especially among Free Grace churches and pastors.

For those who want to downplay the significance of the aberrant teachings exposed in this book, as though they are merely the kind of *interpretative* differences which happen among all good Bible teachers, let me state unequivocally that these are very significant *doctrinal* differences. These false teachings result in great ramifications related to Theology (your view of God), Christology (your view of Jesus Christ), Soteriology (your view of the propitiatory work of Christ), Christian Living (based on one's position in Christ and lived by grace through faith and not fear, motivated by love and not law), and Eschatology (as it relates to the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, and even in some cases the Eternal State). These are no small issues to be disregarded. The writers of this book are not like the Pharisees of old who were straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel. Nor are we making a tempest in a teapot. These are significant doctrinal issues with tremendous practical ramifications, affecting pastors in their teaching and believers in their daily Christian lives where the rubber meets the road.

Also, in case you anticipate that this book will be negative in nature, I believe you will be pleasantly surprised as you read it. While we must expose these false teachings for what they are, we devote much more time and space to positively explaining and exalting the wonderful truths of God's grace. In doing so, the contrasts should be glaring between the grace-oriented approach versus legalistic approaches to the Christian life—all based upon the Scriptures. If, by God's grace, this intent is accomplished as we hope and pray it will be, you should find yourself very spiritually edified by the time you are done reading.

REASONS FOR THIS DOCTRINE

But perhaps as a reader you are asking yourself right now, "*Why* are some pastors and teachers actually teaching these doctrines? What is motivating them to do this?" While I certainly cannot speak for every Bible teacher of this persuasion, I am confident that I can offer at least two explanations why many are teaching this view.

First, they are convinced from their own study of the Scriptures that these conclusions are exactly what the Bible teaches. They have no personal agenda or pernicious motives; they are just persuaded of these doctrinal views from their searching of the Scriptures. Thus this book does not question the motives or character of those teaching these views but deals strictly with their public teachings on

this subject. In fact, I commend them for being willing to take a stand based on their convictions regardless of their erroneous conclusions. But is the doctrine of outer darkness for believers really what the Scriptures teach? We need to answer this question from a careful study of the Scriptures alone.

Second, those who hold to this view want to stem the accusation of antinomianism (lawlessness & licentiousness) made by those who reject salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and eternal security. In addition, the teachers of this view desire to motivate genuine believers to live godly lives now and to receive eternal rewards later at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Without debate, God wants all believers in Christ to live holy lives in this lifetime and hear a "Well done, good and faithful servant" in the next when they stand before Jesus Christ at the Bema. But is the fear of standing before Jesus Christ at the Bema and possibly being cast into outer darkness with its wailing and gnashing of teeth the right motivation for godly living under grace? Does it even apply to a believer who is wrapped in the robes of Christ's own righteousness? What saith the Scriptures?

Get ready for the forthcoming journey. This book will interact with this subject exegetically and doctrinally from Scripture, but it will not attempt to answer every argument presented in recent tomes which teach that outer darkness is for believers. Instead, this book will focus on the big picture in order to arrive at biblically balanced conclusions that not only square with Scripture but will result in your heart "being established by grace." Read on!