

1. INTRODUCTION

As indicated on its website,¹ the Christ-Centered Exposition Series is designed to provide pastors (primarily) and interested/educated churchgoers (secondarily) with an exposition of the Bible that is Christocentric, exegetically based—i.e., faithful to the text—and missional in its application. Moreover, given the specific target audience, this Series aims at (relative) conciseness,² relevant discussions of the arguments in the text, and accessibility without burdening the commentary with overly detailed or technical treatments of the passages. Or as the creators assert: “It’s not academic. Our aim is to present an easy-reaching, practical, and friendly commentary.”³ Fair enough.

2. SCOPE

With his commentary on the two Thessalonian letters, Mark A. Howell, pastor of First Baptist Church (Daytona, FL), is one of the more recent contributors to the Series. If we go by the praise for the book, found just inside the cover and on the back, Howell’s contribution looks to be a welcomed one. And in many respects, I would agree: this is a timely commentary, given the growing trends of cultural pressure upon the church—specifically its identity and mission—and the need for faithful endurance in such times. Paul’s solid advice, originally given to an ancient church struggling with similar issues, can and does speak to us today. Moreover, Howell’s commentary appears in the midst of persistent fears and confusion about the last days and how Christians should respond to such things. Like Paul, Howell seeks to meet these types of issues pastorally and (theo)logically, so that church leaders and members will be able to respond in faithful and reasoned ways.

The following review will examine not only Howell’s treatment of the Thessalonians letters, in terms of their contents, but also the degree to which he fulfills the aims of the Series as well as his own. Admittedly, this review will be considerably longer than usual, but for that I am unapologetic. And I am unapologetic for two reasons. First, this review is not being submitted to a journal or some other publication, which means I am not confined to word-count. In fact, this is (to date) the longest review I have ever written. And second, while there are several commendable aspects of Howell’s contribution, the nature of the contents and the sheer number of concerns found throughout the commentary required a protracted treatment.

¹ See www.christcenteredexposition.com (accessed 10-May-2015). The site, however (at the time of access) appears to be a touch behind; it’s still showing several commentaries as “Available in 2014”. (NB: since I originally wrote this footnote, the site has been updated and now reflects a more accurate picture of availability. For the original version I saw, go here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160214153909/http://www.christcenteredexposition.com/> [accessed 11-Jul-2016]).

² “Relative” is bracketed off simply because the commentaries in this series are roughly similar in length to most other commentaries on the same books. Thus, what the Series means by concise is certainly up for discussion.

³ See www.christcenteredexposition.com/why/ (accessed 10-May-2015. NB: since writing this footnote, the site has very recently added a new “Why” section, which is now called “About”. This new section is a video and the claim beneath is not nearly the same [or similar] to what is cited above. Unfortunately, an archived version of the “Why” page is no longer accessible). The Series introduction found in the book tweaks this claim a little: “This series is not academic in nature. Our aim is to present a readable and pastoral style of commentaries” (xi). Either way it’s sliced, this is ultimately a disturbing and sad admission; it leaves too much room for continuing the divide between academia and the church (or scholarship and faith)—i.e., the anti-intellectual mindset. Moreover, it’s not the best approach for writing a commentary, especially one claiming to be exegetically faithful.

3. CRITIQUE

Any review must take into consideration a book's strengths, weaknesses, and overall contribution. This review will be no different. The contribution question will be answered in the "Assessment" portion of the review. Here, in the "Critique", I assess the positive and negative aspects of Howell's commentary, though I admit now that the scales are tipped to one side.

3.1. Positive (i.e., Strengths)

Howell's basic treatment of the text is commendable in several ways, many of which reflect the aims of the Series as well as his own. These positive elements can be divided into two basic categories: 1) the general or overall presentation and outcomes of the commentary, and 2) Howell's specific contributions that repay close attention by the reader.

3.1.1. General Perks

In terms of layout and flow of treatment, Howell's commentary is quite useful. This is the case not just in reference to following the arguments throughout the commentary, but especially for discerning applications for the church's life and mission. Each major section of the two letters is prefaced with a helpful summary statement, and then the argument is divided generally, with usable headings (and subheadings) that emphasize the key themes for each section. This allows the reader the have the ability not only to follow the flow of the letter's argument but also to isolate workable topics that could be used for personal study—and even memorization. Also, each section is capped off with varying numbers of questions for reflection and continued study. These questions not only re-emphasize the key elements of the preceding treatment but also encourage the formulation of real-life applications for both the individual believer and the wider church. In all of this, Howell's pastoral background and interests are evident. He is able to work through the material and its message in such a way that they are accessible and relatable to the (lay) reader.

As previously stated, the Series as a whole seeks to present the text of Paul's two letters in an unburdened fashion—i.e., sidestepping the (potentially) lengthy discussions on exegetical technicalities and not weighing the book down with a heavy load of footnotes. And while there are a number of in-text quotations of scholars—some of which are a bit lengthy (see e.g., 6, 13, 16, 37, 44, 62, 72, 76, 103, 151, 158, 170, 204, 206, 210, 221, 232, 256; cf. 18, 25, 28-29, 39-40, 40-41, 45-46, 49, 54, 68, 82, 101, 142, 144, 149, 150-51, 154, 157, 165, 186, 191-92, 194-95, 207-08, 222, 229, 231, 247, 255)—they are judiciously used and the vast majority are indeed beneficial to Howell's arguments. Thus, in the main, Howell does rather well in this regard—especially with the footnote count.⁴ Admittedly, there are a handful of cases where he is compelled to treat some key points with more depth (see e.g., 107-24, 126-45, 215-33). But again, these are rare and he covers them reasonably in a summary-like fashion.

Along with these two broad perks, we could add a third—one that is related to the previous two. In the main, Howell does well with keeping the discussion of the text moving in a positive way. In other words, he does his best not only to wrestle with the text but also to keep the reader interested. One of the key ways in which he accomplishes this is his well-timed back-and-forth between elements of the text and real life illustrations. Moreover, this feature is not uniform or atomistic; he quite often varies how and when he engages the back-and-forth between the two sides. At the very least, this is helpful because it keeps readers alert and not lulled into a predictable pattern, thus inadvertently causing them to miss something vital to Howell's argument.

⁴ In the entire commentary, there are only 18 footnotes. By comparison, Leon Morris' commentary (which is roughly the same length as Howell's) has nearly three times that many just for the Introduction, which spans 30 pages—see *The First and Second Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1-30. But this is to be expected, since Morris' treatment would fall under the category of a more "academic" commentary.

Finally, Howell does a commendable job at fulfilling the overarching aim of the Series, which is to show how the biblical texts being studied exalt the person and saving work of Jesus. Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica, while brief, are certainly two whose aim is to glorify and exalt the person and work of Jesus. In fact, throughout the commentary Howell rightly emphasizes the fact that exalting the person and work of Jesus occurs in explicit and implicit ways. By explicit, I mean the focus of the text/argument is specifically concerned with Jesus, whether that means his person, life, ministry, or present (and future) reign with God. And by implicit, I mean the focus of the text/argument is specifically concerned with Jesus' representatives—i.e., the church. In these cases, the focus is similar to Paul's (though not exactly parallel) in that he is dealing with the ways in which the "person", life, ministry, and service of the church exalts the name of Christ. Thus, one is hard pressed to find a portion of Howell's treatment where the exaltation theme is absent.

3.1.2. Specific Benefits

In terms of specific strengths of the commentary, these are limited to those points where Howell uses the essence of Paul's argument to speak into not only the role of the Pastor but also the life of the believer. I say these are "limited" because they are not always overt or even teased out in the pages of the commentary; rather they make a brief appearance and then become a kind of current that flows throughout the commentary, just below the surface. There are five that stood out to me.

First, Howell rightly emphasizes the fact that the gospel is not to be reduced to a simple message preached; it is a message that God uses for the purposes of leading one to salvation (cf. 4). Granted, and I'm confident Howell would agree, the gospel is the not *the* means for leading one to salvation—that task belongs to the power and work of the triune God; rather it is *a* key vessel in carrying out how salvation is made known (or revealed). Moreover, and Howell is wise to point this out, the gospel—as a revelatory tool—and its usefulness are not to be left to initial evangelistic preaching. The truth of the gospel is relevant for the ongoing life of the believer post-salvation, and that relevancy becomes part of the task of pastoring—i.e., showing believers the continuing effects of the gospel on their daily lives (cf. 238).

Second, Howell helpfully reminds us that pastoring is not a boast-inducing vocation—nor should it ever be turned into one; rather, it is a life humbly submitted to God's work (cf. 6, 33). Our time is not one that has monopoly on pastors who approach things from the other way round; the choice of using church leadership roles for personal advantage is not new—in fact, it's been around for as long as there's been a church (if not longer). And I would venture to say that the appeal and ease for such an option is also not a new phenomenon. The only difference and why we hear more about it today is simply because of the speed and coverage of "news." But as Howell reminds us, all of that does not excuse pastors from fulfilling their vocational calling in a way that honors God rather than self. And Paul's ministry, not just in Thessalonica, serves as an illustration of a pastor who submits humbly to God's service.

Third, Howell touches on a topic that is admittedly tricky—especially in today's climate—and that is: our failure (or inability) to be Christ-like followers (and even pastors) is tied to our resistance toward full surrender to God (cf. 76, 188). In some ways this topic is related to the previous one in that the occasional high views of self relativize the need for admitting weaknesses or faults and how to address them in a Christ-honoring way. Moreover, when troubles or failures or difficulties arise, this high view of self often responds with the inappropriate question: "Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?", which carries the (equally inappropriate) underlying assumption: "I'm not at fault." But the truth of the matter is: more times than not, we are the ones at fault, and the cause of that is not only our wrong-headed view of self (and vocation) but also our refusal to admit it, bring it to the throne of Christ, and beg for his rescue from it.

Fourth, Howell stresses the reality that a living church is one filled with and fueled by hope in what God is doing and is yet to do (cf. 132). While unlike Paul's treatment on the subject, Howell expends some time on the details concerning the glorious return of Christ and how that hope is to

encourage faithfulness and steadfastness in the life of the church. Faithfulness and steadfastness are vital not only to the livelihood of the church in a tumultuous world but also to its witness to the world, as it strives to be a refuge in the storm. Churches that fail to live according to that hope are the ones easily shaken, and they are easily shaken because they are not securely fixed to the solid foundation of Christ. And because they are not fixed, the slightest breeze jeopardizes their stability and they freak out and react in fear rather than respond in faith. But a church anchored to the rock is able to withstand whatever comes its way. And that is a reminder that is timeless and necessary.

Finally, Howell encourages us to remember that the trials of life will reveal the genuineness of our faith (cf. 185, 189). This is related to the previous one explicitly and the others implicitly. In particular, Howell observes: "The person who has a genuine faith in God will view affliction and suffering through the lens of an enduring hope—not the kind of endurance that waits to thank God when trials pass, but the kind of endurance that thanks God even if the trial does not pass" (189). It is here that the Christ-centered perspective is most influential in grasping Paul's message to the Thessalonian believers—a message (and perspective) that still applies to us today. While he does not refer to it, I'm sure Howell would agree, that this Christ-centered genuine faith is modeled for us in Jesus' prayer in the garden: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22.42). And it is from this model of genuine faithfulness that Paul constructs the beautiful picture of Christ's humility: "although he existed in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God something to be stolen, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of a human, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2.6-8—my translation).

3.2. Negative (i.e., Weaknesses)

The commentary, however, is not without its faults. A substantial number of these are relatively minor (e.g., typos, formatting, citation issues), one is rather problematic, and the others are found somewhere in between. In this part of the review, I will focus my attention on the latter two categories, beginning with the mid-range concerns. For an extensive (and nearly exhaustive) list of the minor issues, see the "Appendix" at the end of this review.

3.2.1. General Mid-range Concerns

This first section deals with the similar types of concerns or issues that appear throughout the commentary. Some of these are more pressing than others. On the weaker side, the practice of italicizing block-style quotations from the Bible was both unexplained and unnecessary.⁵ Why not simply quote them in plain text? It cannot simply be (though I'm open to a response from him) because Howell wants to distinguish the Scriptural quotations from non-Scriptural ones—the latter are always all in plain text, unless he is emphasizes something. If that were the case, then *all* Scripture quotations—block **and** non-block—would be so indicated. But they're not. Though, to his credit, this might be a decision made by the Series editors and he is simply keeping to it. Even so, there is no explanation for this (older) stylistic oddity.

Also, there are occasional disruptions in the flow of the verse order when dealing with specific passages. This is the case with Howell's treatments of 1 Thess 1.2-10; 2.1-12; 2.17-3.13; 5.23-28; 2 Thess 1.6-12; 2.1-12; 2.13-3.5; and 3.6-18. Generally speaking, commentaries follow the argument as it is presented in the biblical text, in a verse-by-verse fashion, thus engaging with the logic (and structure) of the text as it stands. For those who read commentaries on a regular basis, these occasional disruptions found in Howell's commentary will seem a bit odd, sometimes jolting. Granted, Howell's approach might be a rhetorical decision—i.e., he arranges the topics discussed in

⁵ It is worth mentioning that Howell's use of block quotation is neither stylistically correct nor consistent—i.e., it does not follow the guidelines for block-quotations, which requires five or more line of text. Nearly half of his block-quotations (and that's being generous) are *less than* five lines.

the passages categorically or topically rather than sequentially—in which case my criticism of it here might be slightly subjective. But, if he did make that decision, it is left unexplained and that is a bit unfortunate.

On the weightier side, Howell's attempt to engage with or relate to his readers was blunted by the random (and, let's face it, rather clumsy) bouncing back and forth between first-person and second-person references—usually in a single argument.⁶ The flow and feel of the commentary would have been better served if Howell stuck to one "person". Given that Howell seeks to create a sense of relation and/or partnership with his readers, a consistent use of first-person references would have been the better choice. Moreover, there were quite a few instances where the switching between first- and second-person gave the impression that Howell was removed from the situation described, or that the advice given to readers did not apply to him. In these cases, I found myself asking: "Why is this directed at us and not you? Are you immune to these things?"

Continuing with the weightier problems, a few of the analogies that Howell used to bolster his point (or to preface his discussion) were either ineffective or incongruous, while a few were simply not good. Specifically, the analogies seemed out of place (logically and/or contextually) or they came across as a bit forced. To put it more directly: they were the kind of analogies that would be excused under preacher's license, and such things would be accepted (if not tolerated) in a church setting. However, while the analogies might work in a sermon or church newsletter, they do not need to be found in an examination of a biblical text. Am I suggesting that analogies are not to be used in commentaries? By no means. I am simply saying: if analogies are used, they need to be effective, congruent, good, and/or not forced.

On the more problematic side, Howell frequently skews or misapplies the emphasis (and even the point) of a given biblical text (or texts) to justify the argument he's making. This issue is one that pervades the commentary (see e.g., 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 41, 42, 44-45, 50, 52, 57, 60, 87, 99, 119, 120 n.13, 121, 129, 141, 165, 175, 177, 185, 195, 199, 200 n.16, 224, 225, 226, 227, 229, 231). Some of these are simply instances of proof-texting, which is not a good (exegetical) strategy, while others are obvious misinterpretations (and thus misapplications) of the text—also not a good exegetical practice. There were numerous occasions where I found myself saying, "But the text does not say/mean that" or, "But the text is talking about something else." A detailed look at some of these instances will be given in the next section.

Finally, the commentary contains a number of argumentative issues. On a few occasions, Howell makes statements that are simply too categorical to be fair and/or accurate (see e.g., 10, 28, 41, 45, 64, 71, 74, 79, 81, 92, 98, 114, 185, 194, 235, 253). Also, there were several instances where Howell either made a speculative claim or he allowed the assumed truth of the speculation to dictate the argument (see e.g., 4, 19, 20, 41, 47, 51, 55, 57, 64-65, 98, 101, 110, 128, 218, 221, 239). On a small handful of occasions, both happened. This latter problem was especially the case in his treatment of the eschatological portions of the two letters. (More on that in the "Major Concerns" section). And lastly, there were a few statements from Howell that were simply random, repetitive, and even redundant (see e.g., 17, 34, 35, 83, 100, 130-36, 140-43, 158-59, 172 n.15, 189, 231).

3.2.2. Specific Mid-range Concerns

This section deals with the concerns or issues that appear sporadically throughout the commentary and differ in terms of type and effect. The issues addressed are also more specific and often technical in nature. To some, the criticisms given here might appear pedantic, since the commentary (after all) is not intended to be "academic." However, even though the Series protects itself by claiming to be non-academic, the criticisms given are required because the Series

⁶ On at least three occasions, Howell does this in a single breath. For example: "Rather than running such a person over in an attempt to get the work done, *we* must be willing to roll up *your* sleeves, get *our* hands dirty,..." (158—emphasis added cf. also 161, 255-56). While some might call it being relational, it's really just sloppy writing.

(paradoxically) also boasts of desiring "to display exegetical accuracy" (xi), which, oddly enough, is an academic exercise. Thus, if any kind of *inaccuracy* is discovered in the commentary, whether it be exegetical, logical, theological, textual, and even historical, it cannot be ignored, dismissed, or excused simply because the Series claims to be non-academic. With that in mind, let me begin.

Early on in the commentary, when he discusses the location and vibrancy of Thessalonica, Howell seems to get a little carried away when he states: "It was also the temporary home of thousands of sailors, travelers, and immigrants who visited its bustling port or traveled its busy *highways*" (4—emphasis added). Technically, there was only *one* highway—not multiple—through Thessalonica: the Via Egnatia, which Howell does mention (and *only that one*) in the next sentence.

A few pages later, Howell makes the following observation: "The word translated 'church' is *ekklēsia* coming from two Greek words (*ek kaleō*) meaning 'called out.' The church then is the 'called-out-ones'" (10). This is not only a perpetuation of a rather churchy and misguided (not to mention incorrect) explanation;⁷ it is also an example of what is known as the "root fallacy".⁸ Essentially, Howell puts too much trust and meaning into the (supposed) individual parts of the term rather than allowing the whole term's lexical, semantic, historical, and contextual usage to determine its meaning. The normal rendering or default meaning of ἐκκλησία in the ancient world was simply, a "gathering" or "assembly" of people. And as Everett Ferguson helpfully observes: "The emphasis was on the concrete act of assembly, not a separation from others."⁹

In one of his analogies (i.e., sin is a fog that keeps us from seeing God), Howell observes: "We are like the travelers on the highway *wanting so desperately to speed on* ahead but *unable to do so* because we can't see beyond the hoods of our cars" (11—emphasis added). Fair enough. But after going on about people feeling lost in the fog and unable to escape it, Howell then declares: "Sin has blinded them and they cannot see. The prognosis is not good. There is a cliff in the distance, and it is called 'judgment.' *They speed down life's highway* oblivious to the imminent danger ahead" (*ibid.*—emphasis added). So which is it? People wanting to speed but cannot, or people who are in fact speeding? It cannot be both.

While addressing the topic of our worldview being altered (for the better) because of Christ, Howell observes: "The Thessalonians learned from Paul that **the Christian should view present circumstances in the light of eternal promises**" (19—emphasis original). Well said. Or to channel my childhood Baptist roots: Amen, brother! But then things get a bit strange when Howell states: "During Paul's short stay in Thessalonica, he taught the people *extensively* about the return of Christ (2 Thess 2:5)" (*ibid.*—emphasis added). Three basic problems here:

1. Howell's claim is nothing but pure speculation, despite the fact that he presents it as a known or accepted truth. We simply cannot know how much time Paul spent teaching on a given topic. Moreover, if we follow Acts 17:2-3, we get the impression that Paul's emphasis was on the identity, person, and work of Christ and that this Christ was the heart of the gospel message (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5—esp. 2.2).
2. Just because Paul, in 2 Thess 2:5, reminds the believers that he previously said something about the return of Christ, that by itself does not provide any indication about the depth or length of what he said. Further evidence would be required in order to make any claims about duration or extensiveness, but Howell does not give that evidence. Hence, problem 1.
3. While Howell's treatment of the eschatological sections of both letters will be dealt with later, it is worth pointing out now a fundamental conflict. Since Howell adopts the (Classical

⁷ Cf. Ferguson, who rightly observes: "The Greek word translated 'church' is *ekklēsia*. Its basic meaning was 'assembly,' *referring to what was done and not where it was done*. The popular etymology deriving the word from 'called out' (*ek + kaleō*) is not supported by the actual usage of the word" (E. Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 130—emphasis added).

⁸ For an explanation of this fallacy, see D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 28-33.

⁹ Ferguson, *Church of Christ*, 130.

and Modified/Revised) Dispensationalist view of eschatology (see below), it is surprising to see him use 2 Thess 2.5 as support for his claim about "the imminent return of the Lord" (*ibid.*). I say that because on a Dispensationalist reading, the imminent return—i.e., the so-called "rapture"—is the focus of 1 Thess 4.13-18, not 2 Thess 2.1-12.

In his discussion on 1 Thess 2.12b, specifically the hope for the life to come, and after quoting Heb 11.13-16, Howell declares: "This great host of Old Testament saints reveals a most significant truth about the life of faith—**this world is not our home**" (36—emphasis added).¹⁰ This declaration reveals three very basic problems:

1. The implied earth-heaven dualism in Howell's claim is not simply a throwback to the earlier forms of Dispensationalism, it also flirts with quasi-Gnostic views of creation. Neither is good or appropriate for a faithful study of two NT texts.
2. Howell has not only misunderstood—and thus misapplied—the Hebrews passage, but he has also missed the rhetorical force of that letter as a whole.
3. And Howell has failed to take into consideration the promise in Rev 21, which speaks of a renewed (and rejoined) heaven **and earth** as the final, eternal dwelling place of believers. So to say that "this world is not our home" (*ibid.*) is to offer only a half-truth. Thus, Howell's conclusion and the underlying assumptions for it are not supported by Scripture.

When dealing with the topic of the Bible as God's word, specifically as it relates to the discussion of 1 Thess 2.13-16, Howell refers to the song, "Revelation" from the band, Third Day. He does this because he is addressing the issue of Christians seemingly always seeking new insight or words from God. Thus, Howell notes: "The lyrics of a popular Christian song, for instance, implore God to give us a 'revelation' to guide us through life's confusion" (44). Fair enough. But then Howell says: "While I recognize the intent of the song is to seek God's guidance to navigate life's difficulties, to speak of God giving us a revelation implies that we need God to give us a new word" (*ibid.*). Two problems here, and one potential concern:

1. Howell acknowledges that he understands "the intent of the song", yet he not only sidelines that intent and his understanding of it but also continues to use the song as exemplifying the very thing he seeks to correct—i.e., the bad tendency of seeking new revelation or words from God. In terms of standard research practices and even academic honesty, this kind of treatment falls under the issue of not treating one's sources fairly—or not representing the viewpoint of one's sources accurately.
2. Because he sidelines the (acknowledged) intent of the song, Howell puts too much emphasis on not only the assumed correlation between "revelation" and a "new word" from God but also the idea that revelation means the word of God—i.e., the Bible. Thus, the implication (for Howell) is: seeking revelation or new words from God means seeking something more than the Bible (or seeking more revelation than has been revealed). So the problem here is that Howell proceeds on the basis of these two things being true, yet he has not done or said anything that would prove that they are true.
3. The potential concern has to do with the fact that, just two pages prior to this claim, Howell openly declared: "Paul's message in Thessalonica was not creative, but it was powerful. It was not his own, it was God's. **When God gives you a word, the only fitting response is to proclaim it**" (42—emphasis added). In the light of what we've just said about Howell views on Third Day's song, I cannot help but notice a double-standard here. My only assumption is that Howell would vindicate Paul's situation as being under the protection of inspiration or apostolic office—or both.

¹⁰ The hymn that Howell cites in support of his claim is equally wrong and incomplete.

Howell gets a little carried away when he says: "Clearly, Paul did not have a copy of the New Testament to share with the Thessalonians (**he was writing it!**)" (45—emphasis added). Seriously? I know this commentary is "not academic" and that it's aimed at pastors and interested church members, but such a parenthetical remark is not necessary. Not only that, the implication of it is misleading in two ways. First, we cannot say that Paul had any idea that what he was writing would either be seen as equal with Jewish Scripture or later be compiled with other writings and formed into the NT. And second, Paul didn't write the NT; he was one of ten contributors.¹¹ In fact, he's not even the largest contributor. That honor goes to Luke.

Following his discussion about God's word and the need to respond appropriately, Howell says: "If the Bible is the Word of God, then we must acknowledge **three things**..." (46—emphasis added). Okay, fine (and very preacher-like). The trouble with this, however, is that Howell proceeds to list **four** things (with preacher-like alliteration): "it's [1] true and [2] timeless, it [3] transforms, and it can be [4] trusted" (*ibid.*). Howell might say he meant for the first two be seen as one. While the possibility of that linkage could be debated (since the first two terms are not necessarily or even logically related), that intention does not play itself out in the rest of the paragraph, where Howell elaborates on all four points separately.

When discussing 1 Thess 2.14, Howell says this about the Thessalonians believers: "Jesus changed their affections. Like Paul, they no longer counted their life [*sic*] to be of any value to themselves (Acts 20:24; Phil 3:7-8). Followers of Christ do 'not love their lives in the face of death' (Rev 12:11)" (50). Some rather basic problems here:

1. We cannot know if the Thessalonians reflected Paul's assessment of his life. The text never says one way or the other. To assume and say that it did, though, is not based on an exegetical conclusion; it's based on pure speculation.
2. Not only is using the Acts passage to support the claim a bit of a stretch, but using of the Philippians text is rather misleading. Paul's point in that passage is quite different from the one Howell attempts to make: for Paul, what he counts as crap (σκύβαλον) is his life—and all the pursuits to define life in a particular way—**before** Christ; Paul's focus in 1 Thess 2.14 is the Thessalonians' life **after** Christ.
3. And third, Paul is not encouraging the Thessalonians to see their lives (*now, in Christ*) as valueless; that would be patently absurd and ascriptural.

After dealing with Paul's remarks in 1 Thess 2.17-20, Howell drifts into a tangent about the coming of Christ. Not only does he speculate (once again) that, "Paul had apparently spent a **considerable** amount of time teaching the infant church about Christ's coming (2 Thess 2:5)" (57—emphasis added; cf. 19), but Howell boldly goes on to claim: "Christ will one day **remove us from our troubles** and take us to be with Him (**John 14:1-3**)" (*ibid.*—emphasis added). Three basic concerns here:

1. As mentioned before, it is impossible to know just how much time Paul spent teaching on eschatological topics. At best guess, and given the tenor of both letters, it would seem safer to say that Paul's time in dealing with such things was **not** "considerable", but brief.
2. Howell's decision to use John 14.1-3 in the service of his claim about our removal from trouble is unjustified—logically, exegetically, and theologically. This is partly because the text does not say things in the way Howell portrays them; he is simply adding nuances (from theological presuppositions) to the text to support his argument. That's eisegesis.

¹¹ Yes, I hold to traditional authorship for each of the writings in the NT—i.e., the names attributed to the texts refer to the original authors. Don't like it? Sorry, dude.

3. Finally, the other reason for the unjustified use is that Howell allows his Dispensationalist eschatology to guide his interpretation of John 14.1-3—i.e., he reads this text as not about the hope of a place of eternal presence with God (which *is* the focus of the passage); rather, for Howell, it's about the church being raptured out of the world while all hell breaks loose upon the non-believing world. I know this to be the case because he says as much later in the commentary (see 120, 121-22). Exegetically and theologically, he's wrong to use John 14.1-3 in this way.

When speaking on "Paul's departure from Thessalonica", Howell makes a rather bold claim: "Traveling *by himself* to Berea and then later to Athens" (55—emphasis added), and cites Acts 17.10 and 1 Thess 2.17 to support his point. Two problems here:

1. The text in Acts never says Paul was alone in his journey to Berea; and the Thessalonian passage does not allow for the conclusion either. Both texts state that others accompanied Paul when he left Thessalonica.
2. The more detrimental problem is that, a few pages later, Howell contradicts his own claim when he says: "When *Paul, Silas, and Timothy* left Thessalonica, *they* made *their* way to Berea" (60—emphasis added). Either Paul traveled alone (per 55), or he did not (per 60). He cannot do both.

In his discussing of 1 Thess 3.1-2a, Howell makes the repeated and rather definitive claim that Timothy was asked to meet Paul in Athens and that he did in fact do so, only to be sent back to Thessalonica at Paul's request (see 60-61). While Paul may have requested Timothy to join him in Athens as soon as possible (see Acts 17.15; though, the text is not clear or unambiguous), Luke in Acts never says Timothy did so—contrary to Howell's definitive portrayal.¹² In fact, according to Luke (see esp. Acts 18.5), the next time Timothy and Paul are together is in Corinth—not Athens. Moreover, Howell's argument seems to overlook the historical details implicit in the syntactical nuances of 1 Thess 3—i.e., Paul is writing to the Thessalonians from Corinth, *after* Timothy and Silas rejoin him *in Corinth*.¹³

Moreover, Howell's argument engages in needless speculation about Paul's responsibilities in Athens and the tiresome effects such things had on him, thus enhancing Paul's decision to "[sacrifice] the companionship of Timothy" (62) and to be left "to engage the enemy alone" (61). Seriously? This sort of reading is not only quite speculative, but it also unnecessarily psychologizes and dramatizes the text. And it does so without justification. There is simply no evidence to support Howell's reading. Thus, the reading is more eisegesis than exegesis. The advice of E.J. Richard is appropriate in this case: "One must avoid an overly dramatic and even romantic view of Paul tragically languishing alone in Athens."¹⁴

In his discussion of 1 Thess 4.1-2, specifically the idea of faithfully walking with God, Howell says: "Knowing the truth is one thing; doing it is another. The Thessalonians were taught by one of the greatest preachers who ever lived. *Their spiritual depth was as deep as it was wide*" (78—emphasis added). Not only does Howell overplay his hand, but this very claim also conflicts with his earlier and subsequent descriptions of the Thessalonians' spiritual maturity—i.e., "baby Christians" (55), "infant church" (57, 67, 148, 184), "infant congregation" (65, 69), "infant Thessalonian church" (157). I am at a loss as to how Howell can reconcile the two descriptions. I'm open to his reply.

When speaking about the significance of the Spirit in the life of the believer, Howell asserts: "The Spirit takes up permanent residence in your life. He makes your heart His home (*John 14:15-*

¹² For an equally unconvincing case, see Morris, *First and Second Epistles*, 92-93.

¹³ Cf. J.A. Weatherly, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (CPNIVC; Joplin: College Press, 1996), 102.

¹⁴ E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians* (SP11; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 147.

26; Rom 8:9). **God gives you all of His Spirit (1 Cor 12:13)**" (87—emphasis added).¹⁵ Leaving to one side the "permanent residence" idea, which is nothing more than Howell's Baptist/Reformed context influencing the argument, there are two problems here:

1. The John passage cited in support of the heart-is-the-home-of-the-Spirit idea is not about that. While such an idea might be an implication, it's more of a personal inference. Not only that, but Howell's reading removes the specificity of the passage in order to make a more general or wider application. In short: Howell does not follow the intent of the passage.
2. The 1 Corinthians passage says absolutely nothing about God giving "all of His Spirit" to anyone. That's simply not the focus or even the point of the text.

In his treatment of 1 Thess 4.9, especially the "taught by God" phrase, Howell says: "This unusual expression is used only here in the New Testament" (93). This is somewhat true, but it is also a tad misleading. If Howell is referring to the specific Greek term, θεοδίδακτος, which gets translated as "taught by God", then he's correct. But he does not indicate that the Greek term is in mind; his claim reads as though he's referring to the English phrase/expression "taught by God" (I am open to correction on this). On that basis, his claim is misleading, for, as Morris points out,¹⁶ that English expression *is* found in John 6.45 when quoting Isa 54.13. Moreover, there are other parallel variations of the expression in the NT (cf. 1 Cor 2.13; Eph 4.21), the combination of which might provide a Trinitarian reading of the entire concept.

When beginning his treatment on the eschatological section of 1 Thess 4.13-18, Howell lists the usual hot topics (and hang-ups) people tend to emphasize. In particular, he has in mind the so-called rapture, about which he says: "Indeed, the topic of the rapture has served as the story line for dozens of books and movies and has also been the topic of much speculation, debate, and fanaticism **through the centuries**" (107—emphasis added). Here, specifically the second half of the point, Howell overstates his case. It is simply not true that "speculation, debate, and fanaticism" have been going on "through the centuries". The speculation, debate, and fanaticism began alongside, in conjunction with, and/or as a result of the rise of Dispensationalism, which began in the mid-19th century. Accordingly, at best, such things are not even two centuries old. To describe things as taking place "through the centuries" is to give the impression that this has been an issue throughout the history of Christendom (which is what some Classical Dispensationalist contend); but that is simply not the case. Any honest and objective study of the discussion would reveal the limited time and effort given to the topic—not to mention its flaws. More on that later.

While introducing the basic contents of 1 Thess 4.13-18, specifically the occasion for the argument given, Howell says of the Thessalonians: "They feared that those who died prior to Christ's death would somehow miss out on the great gathering of God's people that would occur at the end of human history" (108). While I would quibble with a couple of points here, the real problem is with what Howell says next: "To make matters worse, false teachers were adding to their confusion **by circulating a letter, purportedly from Paul, suggesting that the day of the Lord's judgment had already come** (2 Thess 2:1-2)" (*ibid.*—emphasis added). This is patently false. The reason for Paul's argument in 1 Thess 4.13-18 has **nothing** to do with the circulation of a pseudonymous letter. Even a cursory reading of 1 Thessalonians would prove that. Moreover, there is absolutely no reason or justification for using the situation specifically related to occasion for **2 Thessalonians** as the occasion for **1 Thessalonians**. Yet Howell has done precisely that. And he does it five more times in his treatment of 1 Thessalonians (see 112, 119, 135, 156, 165).

In an effort to deal with the topic of the Thessalonians' fears and doubts, as intimated in their questions to Paul, Howell (randomly) prefaces things by saying: "Anyone familiar with the art

¹⁵ This is one of the (many) places where Howell switches to the second-person plural and gives the impression that the following advice does not apply to him.

¹⁶ See Morris, *First and Second Epistles*, 128 (cf. n.42).

of rhetoric has heard of Socratic reasoning" (113). And by "Socratic reasoning", I am assuming that Howell means the methodical process of questions and dialogue to arrive at truth. A small handful of problems here:

1. Anyone familiar with the art of rhetoric—especially as a defined discipline—would not default to Socrates; rather one would think of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, or anyone else other than Socrates.
2. Anyone familiar with Socrates would know that he was not one to see his reasoning as either rhetorical or an art; for him, his methods were simply reasonable, logical, and faithful to and in the service of wisdom. Moreover, Socrates was rather critical of the use of rhetoric as an art to make a point or offer something as acceptable or true.¹⁷
3. And anyone familiar with rhetoric would know not to reduce the entirety of the discipline to one of its more basic elements—i.e., questions or diatribe.

During a tangent, Howell recalls the story of the crippled man who was lowered into a crowded room and then subsequently forgiven and healed by Jesus—the former act causing quite the stir for the religious elite in the room. In his retelling, Howell boldly declares: "Hearing Jesus' words, the scribes accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to have the ability to forgive sin. Sensing their contempt, Jesus told the man to get up and walk. His response is classic. *Ignoring the scribes*, He said *to the man*, 'So you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...I tell you: get up, pick up your mat, and go home' (Mark 2:10-11)" (115—emphasis added, but ellipses original). There are three issues here:

1. Howell leaves off the initial "But" and begins the statement with "So." While subtle, this change is crucial for Howell so that he can keep his point where he wants to take it—i.e., Jesus is speaking a message of fulfilled promises to the crippled man and not to the scribes. But this introduces the second problem.
2. Howell's insistence that Jesus is speaking only to the crippled man is both misguided and false. The Greek is quite clear: ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆτε [plural] ὅτι ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς - λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· σοὶ [singular] λέγω ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου (emphasis added). The opening remark is directed specifically at the scribes (*contra* Howell's version)—hence the use of the second-person plural suffix. It is only when Jesus commands the crippled man to rise up and go home that he speaks directly to him—as Mark makes abundantly clear, not only with the switch to the first-person singular pronoun¹⁸ but also with the prefatory description, λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ. Funnily enough, this description is the bit that Howell conveniently left out of the quotation, as indicated by his ellipses. But again, this alteration is necessary for Howell to keep his point going where he wants to take it, rather than following what the text in fact says.
3. Since the Greek clearly shows that Jesus' opening remark is aimed right at the scribes' disbelief and criticisms, and since the miracle that follows is meant to prove a much larger (theological) point, Howell's dramatic claim, "Ignoring the scribes" is both over-stated and demonstrably false.

A careful reading and handling of the Greek text (i.e., exegesis) would have prevented all three of these issues. Instead, we have an interpretation based on eisegesis.

In the (rather protracted) preface to his discussion on 1 Thess 5.1-11, Howell states: "As we turn our attention to the text, remember that Paul had just informed the Thessalonians that Christ

¹⁷ See esp. *Protagoras*; *Gorgias*.

¹⁸ Howell is not unaware of such shifts taking place in the Greek text (see 177).

could come at any moment. **This obviously triggered a question....** In addition to their curiosity about signs and seasons, **the Thessalonians had a more significant question.... To address their questions**, Paul has three objectives in mind as he pens..." (130—emphasis added). So let me see if I get this straight: Paul (while in Corinth) writes what he does in 1 Thess 4.13-18, and the substance of what he writes (still in Corinth) raises questions for the Thessalonians (who are more than 300 miles away and have not yet read what he just wrote, which they couldn't do because he has not yet sent the letter to them), and so Paul specifically addresses those raised questions (from 300 miles away) as he moves from the argument found in 4.13-18 to that of 5.1-11. Did I get that right?... Give me a break. This reading, which attempts to be dramatic and engaging for mere effect, crashes on the rocks of history and logic.

When dealing with Paul's opening encouragement for perseverance in 2 Thessalonians, and applying it to modern readers,¹⁹ Howell declares: "You would do well to remember that your enemy is not seeking ways to give you a bad day; he is on an all-out mission to give you a bad life (1 Pet 5:8)" (185). Oddly enough, not only does Howell read too much **into** the passage, he also reads too little **from** the passage. In effect, Howell downplays the full weight of the text by ignoring what it says and means so that he can make the point he wants to make. But the imagery in the text is not the devil seeking to give people a bad life; he's seeking to destroy/kill them.

Further in, Howell addresses the delicate topic of suffering, but he seeks to show how God often uses it to make believers more Christ-like, which is a reflection of the redemptive work of Jesus. To this Howell states: "From the moment of your conversion, God begins the work of shaping and pruning you to be more and more like Jesus (Rom 8:29)" (195). I have no issues with the claim; I do, however, have issues with using a passage that has very little (if anything) to do with that claim. But the problem does not stop there. Near the end of the same paragraph, after mentioning the possibility of God's discipline upon those who resist the shaping and pruning, Howell says: "And there is no question that God's discipline will always achieve its intended purpose both in this life and in the life to come (Rom 8:30-39)" (*ibid.*). Once again: like the claim, but strongly dislike the proof-texting. The Romans passage has **nothing** to do with the point Howell seeks to make.

In the introductory remarks to 2 Thess 1.6-12, Howell cites three passages to support his emphasis on the faithful people of God seeking and crying out for an end to their suffering (see 198-99). The first comes from Hab 1.2-3, which is apropos. However, the next two are not. The first of these is from Ps 13.1-4. The problem is that this text is not dealing with struggles of uncertainty and/or wanting to know when suffering brought on by persecution will end; the focus/emphasis of the passage is much deeper—i.e., the psalmist's fear of being forgotten by God. Moreover, Howell leaves off the end of the text, which speaks of the psalmist's hope of rescue or salvation (see 13.5-6)—i.e., not being forgotten. The second non-apropos text comes from Luke 18.2-8. Howell uses this passage to justify his claim that God is not only "not offended" by our questions about relief but he also encourages us to ask for such things. The problem is that the parable in Luke 18 makes a completely different point and its true force (i.e., meaning, effect) undermines the point Howell seeks to make.

In a footnote, Howell attempts to differentiate the (supposed) various stages of Christ's return (see 200 n.16). This is apparently necessary because in the body of the text, when he is explaining 2 Thess 1.7, Howell speaks about the **final** return of Jesus, which he sees as a separate event from Christ's initial (second) coming, as (supposedly) described in 1 Thess 4.13-18. To justify this distinction, Howell refers to the difference in terminology in the two texts: παρουσία for the (initial but not final) second "coming" and ἀποκάλυψις for the true final coming. Howell then proceeds to delineate other key features about the two (supposedly) separate events. Not only does Howell have **zero** lexical support for making the distinction—e.g., he ignores the fact that Paul uses

¹⁹ This is another place where Howell switches to the second-person plural and gives the impression that the following advice does not apply to him.

the terms in synonymous and overlapping ways²⁰—but also the logic of the respective texts (along with their surrounding contexts) does not permit such a distinction. And we will bypass the fact that the only people emphasizing this supposed distinction are either Dispensationalists of the Classical and Revised/Modified variety or people who have influenced by such things.

When dealing with one of the more notorious sections of 2 Thess (i.e., 2.6-7), Howell rightly declares: "To be honest, Paul's reference to the restrainer has perplexed even most able Bible commentators" (228). However, as he continues, we get the sense that such perplexities do not stall his own attempts at reading the text successfully. Thus, he asserts: "While identifying the restrainer is no easy task, a careful reading of the passage does provide some clues" (*ibid*). Howell then summarizes the usual options (i.e., Rome, Israel, gospel-preaching, Satan), yet he implicitly dismisses them, before presenting what he sees as the "obvious" candidate: "God is ultimately the one responsible for holding back the antichrist" (229). Not only does this claim require a significant amount of nuancing that Howell does not provide, but he also ropes in G.K. Beale's argument to support the idea that the Holy Spirit is the one who restrains. Three key problems:

1. The entire argument about identifying the (so-called) "restrainer" is predicated on a single interpretative decision—i.e., translating κατέχω as "restrain(er)". Moreover, while Howell refers to Marshall's summary of the discussion, which is slightly dated, he does not interact with Wannamaker's summary of the same discussion—a summary that reveals the problems with the interpretative decision noted above.²¹ Wannamaker advocates for a reading of "prevail" for κατέχω, which not only is more in line with the grammar and syntax but also makes better sense of the whole of Paul's argument. But Howell does not even engage with this possibility; he merely adopts the other reading without question.
2. Howell, without explanation or justification, has interpolated the idea of antichrist into the passage. "Antichrist" is not a Pauline term or concept; that belongs solely to John. For Paul, and as the text clearly, plainly, and obviously states, the person in question is the "man of lawlessness". If Howell wants to make a case for the two being one-in-the-same, he should have done that. But he doesn't. He just says it, and in a rather definitive or conclusive way.
3. While he is confident in his "careful reading of the passage", Howell's use of Beale betrays a lack of a careful reading of Beale. This is indicated in two interrelated ways. First, and contrary to how Howell presents it, Beale's argument **does not** support the conclusion that the "restrainer" is the Holy Spirit. The claim Howell quotes is only a portion of what Beale says in an effort to make a different point. (This is called: not being fair with one's source, or treating the source's arguments fairly). And second, two pages before the quote Howell uses, Beale makes it quite clear that he does not think the Holy Spirit is the best (or only) candidate for the restrainer.²² Thus, Howell is giving readers the impression of Beale's support for his argument, but Beale (in reality) disagrees with Howell's conclusion. To say this differently: Howell has made Beale say something he did not say.

Near the end of his treatment on 2 Thess 2.13–3.5, Howell is speaking about the assurance the Thessalonians are to have concerning their salvation—in particular, their rescue from the day of wrath. (The nuances of this particular theological conclusion will be dealt with in the next section). Here Howell boldly states: "Because their names were etched **indelibly** in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 13:8), they were in no danger of experiencing God's wrath" (236—emphasis added). Three problems:

²⁰ Specifically, Howell overlooks the fact that both παρουσία and ἀποκάλυψις are used in 2 Thess 2 when Paul speaks of Christ's **final** coming.

²¹ See C. Wannamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 250-57. Howell is not ignorant of Wannamaker's commentary, for he cites it on p.170.

²² See G.K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 215-16.

1. The Revelation text that Howell uses never says anything about names being indelibly written, or etched. The same goes for other key places in Revelation where the book of life is mentioned (cf. Rev 17.8; 20.12, 15; 21.27).
2. Howell ignores a key text in Revelation that indicates that names are not only *not* indelibly written but can also be removed (see Rev 3.5).
3. And two OT texts not only support the non-indelible idea expressed in Rev 3.5 but also undermine Howell's claim, since both state the possibility of names being removed—see Exod 32.32-33; Ps 69.28.

Thus, Howell has imposed his own theological perspective onto the text and interpreted its claims according to that perspective. That's not exegesis; that's eisegesis.

When referring to Paul's teaching in Thessalonica, Howell rightly alludes to the fact that Paul called such teaching "traditions". But then Howell says: "The word *traditions* refers to a body of truth 'handed down' (Mark 7:13; Acts 6:14)" (238—emphasis original). What strikes me as odd is the scriptural support provided. Why these two? The Mark passage, in context, is categorically negative in tone, and the Acts passage, also in context, is implicitly negative. In fact, the Mark text would clearly demonstrate that Jesus does not see traditions as "a body of truth." Howell would have done well to state the definition and leave off the references, or find better references.

Near the end of the commentary, Howell off-handedly denounces the pursuit of church growth gimmicks when he says: "The proclivity of many Christians is to be constantly on the look out for some new thing to breathe life into the church. But according to Paul, the answer will not come by finding something new" (239). Yet, at the start of the commentary, Howell declares: "During my 25 years of ministry I have witnessed dozens of programs, campaigns, and initiatives that have promised *to bring new life to the church*. Many of these have been commendable and have provided valuable resources and offered helpful insights..." (9—emphasis added).²³ Does "some new thing" include Batterson's lamentable contribution to Christian spirituality—i.e., the circle maker?²⁴ And would "25 years" of doing this sort of thing qualify as "constantly"? And why was Paul's "answer" only true and relevant at the end of the commentary and not the start?

The last item/concern to mention in this section of the review is admittedly minor, but it reflects a larger and more significant issue that has witnessed throughout the commentary. On 249, Howell says, "Aristotle described the *preacher's* trustworthiness..." (emphasis added). That is

²³ To be fair, Howell does say: "Many of these have been commendable and have provided valuable resources and offered helpful insights to and for pastors like me as I have sought to lead the church. Yet even a cursory survey of the ecclesiastical landscape reveals that despite the implementation of new programs and strategies, an alarming number of churches are plateaued or declining.... New life does not always accompany new programs. Perhaps the most helpful thing that a pastor can do to breath new life into his church is not to introduce a new church growth model or to implement the latest church growth strategy. Rather, the most important thing a pastor can do may be to recall what the church really is and refocus his energy into what the gospel really does" (9-10). While I might quibble with a few things in this claim (esp. the ideas of the church belong to the pastor [sorry dude: the church belongs to Christ]), Howell is generally correct in this. However, where I have problems is the potential double-standard. On the one hand: Howell seems to reject implementing church growth models and strategies. On the other hand: Howell admits to 25 years of surveying and adopting various church growth models and strategies. I guess his "out" would be: well, after 25 years of doing that, I've learned my lesson and the lesson learned is what I've written here in this commentary. If that's the case, then I'll back off my criticism. But it must be said: the potential double-standard does not end with what he writes in this commentary. It very easily extends to his own ecclesiastical landscape—i.e., his own church and how he does church. A cursory read through First Baptist's website reveals that he has in fact adopted (and relies on) a particular model or strategy for how to do church and thus bring about growth. And a lot of the language used to describe things at First Baptist is rather gimmicky-sounding, not to mention catchy merely for effect (rather than fact)—e.g., "It's DIFFERENT...A Worship Service Without Walls. It's Church Unusual" (www.firstbaptist.org/churchoutside [accessed 3-Nov-16]). Yeah, it might "different" and "unusual" for isolated suburban Americans, but it's not different or unusual either in terms of Christian history or for those in less developed countries around the world. For them, "church" in the open (i.e., without walls) is normal.

²⁴ After all, Batterson is quoted approvingly a couple of times in the commentary (see 144, 161).

being too specific (and lexically incorrect) with Aristotle's focus and meaning, for he simply uses the generic terms, "speaker" or "orators". The *only* time Aristotle uses the Greek term for "preacher" (as used in the NT) is found in *Rhetoric* 3.8.1. But it should be noted that Aristotle's usage is not entirely synonymous with the NT use.

3.2.3. Major Concerns

We come now to the final area of concern. With all due respect to Howell, the most problematic feature of the commentary is the insistence and advocacy of a particular Dispensational reading of key eschatological texts in both letters—i.e., 1 Thess 4.13-18; 5.1-11; and 2 Thess 2.1-12. On the surface, the problem is not so much that Howell's presentation overlooks the wealth and insight of *more recent* scholarship (though he does overlook/ignore it), presumably because such insight has overturned much of what is argued in this commentary. The problem is also that Howell's argument contends for a Dispensational reading that is no longer the consensus view among Dispensationalist scholars. The eschatological views espoused by Howell read like the (old) Dispensationalism of Darby, Scofield, Chafer, and Ryrie, though with some modifications of his own.

But the problems do not stop there. It's not simply that Howell gives us a throwback to old-school Dispensationalism, and it's not simply that Howell makes a few modifications to it along the way (presumably trying to repackage the older views in new garb);²⁵ there is the problem with Howell's case in particular. In other words, there are some serious concerns with the ways in which he argues for the particular Dispensationalist view he holds, and these concerns range from the logical, to the exegetical, and to the theological—all of which will be examined in what follows.

In some cases, Howell will skew the focus and overlook (or downplay) the context of a given text so that he can make the argument he wants to make. For example, Howell declares that the Thessalonians "were convinced that **they had missed the rapture** and **were now experiencing the Day of the Lord**" (108—emphasis added). Three problems with this claim:

1. Without offering any justification or support, Howell parrots the (older) Dispensationalist view that "the rapture" and "Day of the Lord" are two distinct events, separated by the seven-year period of great tribulation. Thus, in this claim, Howell implicitly endorses a two-stage return of Christ, and that in itself is logically and theologically problematic. To be blunt: no exegesis will yield such a reading, but eisegesis will (and has, regrettably).
2. We encounter the same problem as mentioned earlier: the specific "issue" that Howell states as bothering the Thessalonians is the occasion for the **second** letter (cf. 2 Thess 2.1-2), not the first. Yet the focus of Howell's discussion, at this point in the commentary, is 1 Thess 4.13-18! Thus, and for reasons not given, Howell has (wrongly) conflated the otherwise unique occasions for the two distinct letters.
3. There is nothing in the text—let alone nascent Christianity—that would lead to the conclusion that the Thessalonians "were convinced they had missed the rapture". Not only is "the rapture" a later theological notion thrown back onto the text and (historical) context, but also it is simply not the stated concern of the believers in Thessalonica. On a plain, literal, straightforward reading of the text (i.e., one of the core tenets of Dispensational hermeneutics), it is clear that the Thessalonians are concerned about their deceased loved ones remaining dead when Christ returns. Thus, their concern is not with any so-called rapture; their concern is related to the question of resurrection.

This above example points to another problem in Howell's argument: he will sometimes confuse the (presupposed) timetable and/or sequence of eschatological events as understood within (older) Dispensationalism. To stay with the same example, Howell states: in the light of the

²⁵ I'm quite tempted to ask: would this repackaging also be exempt from the tendency of churches (and church leaders) being "on the look out for some new thing to breathe life into the church" (239)?

Thessalonians' fear about missing the rapture and enduring the Day of Lord, Paul does two things: "on the one hand, he [points] them back to the historical fact of the cross and the resurrection; on the other hand, he [points] them forward to the promise of the *glorious return of Christ*" (108—emphasis added). Then Howell contends: "Paul [seeks] to quell their doubts by unveiling one of the greatest promises of the Christian faith—the return of Christ for His church" (108-09). There are some basic problems here:

1. On the Dispensationalist timeline, the so-called rapture is distinct from the "glorious return of Christ"—the former refers to Christ's initial, non-terrestrial-touchdown-snatch-believers-away coming while the latter refers to Christ's final, terrestrial-establish-the-millennial-kingdom coming. This is obviously a throwback to Classical Dispensationalism, especially its emphasis on a twofold notion of Christ's return, for which there is no scriptural basis.
2. The context of Howell's argument is 1 Thess 4.13-18, which, according to him (and nearly all Dispensationalists), is primarily about the rapture of the church. Yet he specifically states that Paul seeks to direct the Thessalonians' attention to "the glorious return of Christ", which, again, is a different eschatological event in the Dispensationalist scheme. Thus, either Howell confuses the two events or he (inexplicably) conflates them into one—a move that Dispensationalists of the Classical and Revised/Modified variety would vociferously reject.²⁶
3. But then, Howell falls back into the (older) Dispensationalist rut by making the distinction not only between the types of comings (i.e., the two-stage return) but also the recipients or participants involved. By this I mean: the otherwise benign phrase, "the return of Christ for His church", in the older Dispensationalist reading, serves as a reference to Christ's initial return and rapture of only the saints—hence, "*for* His church" (emphasis added). This then is distinguished from the so-called true final return when, after the seven-year tribulation, Christ comes in full glory "*with* the saints" (see 122)—a notion that is also tied to particular readings of Rev 19-20,²⁷ and sometimes with Jude 14.²⁸

Not only is the back-and-forth (or possible conflation) problematic; so is Howell's reliance on and advocacy of the supposed two-stage return of Christ. Such a view of eschatological events is built on the notions of a particular theological system (i.e., Classical Dispensationalism), fathered by John Nelson Darby, and not the foundations of Scripture. Or said more directly: despite what some might

²⁶ For Dispensationalists who maintain the categorical distinction between the rapture and the glorious return of Christ, separated by the seven-year tribulation period, see e.g., Lewis S. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93.372 (1936): 405; Lewis S. Chafer and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 77, 83, 259, 333, (though cf. 81, where they seem to conflate the two events *for the Christian*); Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times* (Eugene: Harvest House, 2001), 37-38, 43, 46, 57, 65-66, 107 (cf. esp. 112); Stanley D. Toussaint, "Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist," in Darrell L. Bock, et al, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 249; cf. Robert Saucy, *A Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 272; Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (3 vols. in 1; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 1354; Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament. The Prophets: Isaiah–Malachi* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 313.

²⁷ For a brief summary (and critique) of this distinction, see G.E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 89-92. Some of the key proponents of the idea include: J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings of J.N. Darby* (ed. W. Kelly; Sunbury: Believer's Bookshelf, 1971-72), 11:115; L.S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 76-86; W. Kelly, *Pamphlets* (Sunbury: Believer's Bookshelf, 1971), 413; G.N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 318; H.A. Ironside, *Not Wrath But Rapture: Or, Will the Church Participate in the Great Tribulation?* (Neptune: Loizeaux Bros, 1941), 43; J.F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 93-95 (cf. also 193-94).

²⁸ H.A. Ironside, *The Epistles of John and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 1949), 175. J. MacArthur, *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ's Return and the End of the Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 87.

think,²⁹ careful exegesis of the biblical texts will not yield the two-stage return of Christ—as described by either Classical and Revised/Modified Dispensationalists (points 1 and 3 above) or Howell (points 1–3). Only eisegesis will do that.

Another example³⁰ where we find confusion in the (assumed) eschatological timetable is Howell's further discussion on the so-called rapture. In 1 Thess 4.13-18, he adheres (in the main) to the usual Dispensationalist line concerning the so-called rapture of the church (see 116-24). Specifically, as noted before, he follows the view as espoused by Classical and Revised/Modified Dispensationalism: Christ returns—but never touches down on the earth (so it's not the real second coming; that happens later)—raptures the church (i.e., true believers), they all head off to heaven for seven years while all hell breaks loose upon the world and the unlucky sods left behind.

However, in his discussion on 2 Thess 1.6-12 and 2.1-12, Howell appears to depart from the usual Dispensationalist line when he speaks about those who will both experience or witness the revelation of the "man of lawlessness" and be present at the final (real) coming of Christ (see 198-206 and 216-32). Howell says it will be the church, the believers, the faithful, etc. who experience this. In some cases, Howell makes certain we understand that Paul is saying these things directly and specifically to the Thessalonian believers—i.e., the church. But "the church" is the audience who was earlier promised a rapture away from this world at Christ's (not-really-the-)second coming.

This is odd not only because most Dispensationalists see the description of 2 Thess 2.1-12 as that which occurs at the end of the tribulation period (i.e., seven years post-rapture) and thus involving only those *not* raptured (i.e., *not the church*), but also because Howell has already said the church will be raptured *prior* to the tribulation—à la 1 Thess 4.13-18. But now he appears to argue that the church will be present on earth *post*-tribulation. How are we to account for this?

Moreover, it should be noted, Howell does revert back to the usual Dispensationalist line by seeing the "restrainer" in 2 Thess 2.6-7 as the Holy Spirit (see 228-29), which is occasionally taken as justification for situating the rapture of 1 Thess 4.13-18 in 2 Thess 2. I'm thinking of David Dean's argument in particular, who makes a similar claim.³¹ The problem remains, however: how can there be believers, faithful followers of Jesus (or a "church") post-rapture when the Holy Spirit is out of the way³²—since, theologically speaking, the Spirit is means by which one is sanctified before God (i.e., a status given to the people of God)—and the church (i.e., that which is comprised of the people of God) is already in heaven waiting for the seven years of hell-on-earth to end?

Howell attempts to account for this by dropping in a random and unsubstantiated assertion: "Since the Holy Spirit is God, His removal from the scene does not indicate His complete absence. Rather, it points to a deliberate lessening of His suppression of evil" (229). From this, I get the impression that Howell is not only explicitly engaging in interpretative gymnastics but also implicitly following a line of reasoning similar to what Gleason Archer uses for his mid-tribulation rapture view.³³ Specifically, Archer declares:

²⁹ See e.g., J. MacArthur, whose argument in favor of a two-stage return is not only circular but also a feeble attempt at proving the case: "Scripture suggests that the Second Coming occurs in two stages—first the Rapture, when He comes *for* the saints and they are caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:14-17), and second, His return to earth, when He comes *with* His saints (Jude 14) to execute judgment against His enemies. Daniel's seventieth week must fall *between* those two events. That is the only scenario that reconciles the imminency of Christ's coming *for* His saints with the yet-unfulfilled signs that signal His final glorious return *with* the saints" (*Second Coming*, 87—emphasis original).

³⁰ What follows is a slight adaption of a blog post I wrote in May 2015—see <http://wp.me/pgP5B-zQ>.

³¹ See "Does 2 Thessalonians 2.1-3 Exclude the Pretribulation Rapture?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168.670 (2011): 196-216.

³² This is all the more problematic when we take into consideration the notion of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, where the possibility of receiving forgiveness (e.g., salvation) has a definitive end-point—either at the person's life or the end of the age.

³³ See Gleason L. Archer, "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth Week Rapture Position," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation* (ed. Stanley N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115-45. I say "implicitly" because Howell does not indicate any knowledge of Archer's essay.

It is argued by most advocates of the pre-seventieth-week Rapture theory that the reference in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 to the restraining power of the Holy Spirit as being removed from the world empire of the Beast points to a total removal of the church as well. That is to say, the Holy Spirit resides within the church as the spiritual temple of the Lord (1 Peter 2:5), a status that pertains to each individual believer as well (1 Cor 6:19). If therefore the Holy Spirit is removed from the earthly scene, it necessarily follows that the church will be removed likewise. But a more careful examination of the text and of related passages make it clear that this was not the meaning intended by the biblical author. In the first place, 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 does not say that the Holy Spirit will be removed from the world scene during the seventieth week. What it does say is that His restraining influence will be removed.³⁴

Notice how Archer makes sure that this distinction (i.e., removal of "restraining influence" but not removal of [divine] presence) is the explanation for how those left behind are able to accept the gospel during the tribulation period (see Archer, 127). In the light of what Howell argues, it might be (something like)³⁵ Archer's distinction that allows him to speak of faithful believers on earth during a post-rapture but pre-Millennial reign (i.e., period before the real second coming of Christ). While there are a multitude of issues with Archer's argument and the possibility of Howell following or relying on it, let me point out four of the more problematic:

1. The arguments of both Archer and Howell are predicated on the assumption (one that is never proven, by the way) that "restrain" is the appropriate translation of the Greek term, κατέχω; the failure to acknowledge—let alone interact with—the more likely translation, "prevail" is unfortunate and unfair.³⁶ Or said bluntly: it's not indicative of careful exegesis.
2. Contrary to both Archer and Howell, it is never (nor can it be) proven that the Holy Spirit is the (so-called) "restrainer" in 2 Thess 2.6-7; to claim that it is is nothing but conjecture—and protecting such conjecture with phrases like, "But a more careful examination of the text and of related passages make it clear", when the evidence does not support the claim made, is irresponsible and transparent.
3. Moreover, a careful examination of the text makes one thing abundantly clear: Paul, in 2 Thess 2.6-7, never names the Holy Spirit and never says anything about a "restraining influence" (*contra* Archer); to read the text as though it did is nothing but an interpretative translational gloss that smacks of eisegesis. All Paul says is: καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ. τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας· **μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται** (emphasis added). Even if we accept "restrainer" as the subject, the focus of the final clause is on the removal of *him* as an entity (or person) and not some *abstraction* associated with him (i.e., "restraining influence").
4. But the most glaring problem with the arguments of Archer and Howell is this: from a careful examination of the claims made, it becomes quite clear that the arguments presented are not given in service (let alone obedience) to the text; they are expressions of an advocacy for a particular (and rather idiosyncratic) theological position. In other words: they are letting (or allowing) their theology to influence—if not determine—their exegesis. And that's never a good thing.

A final example of Howell's problematic advocacy of certain Dispensational ideas is the (typically) twinned concept of the so-called "great tribulation" and the church's "rescue from the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126-27.

³⁵ Again: I say "something like" because Howell does not indicate any awareness of Archer's essay.

³⁶ See the earlier mention of this issue (p.13), as well as my brief critique here: <http://wp.me/pgP5B-yp>.

day of the Lord" or "the day of wrath" and how this applies to Christians, Jews, and the rest of the world (i.e., Gentiles, unbelievers). To call these things "twinned" is done on purpose, for, when reading the claims of Dispensationalists, one is hard-pressed to find these two topics discussed in isolation. They are intimately joined, and they are joined for one simple reason: their combined existence is dependent upon the validity of their interrelationship, which is then used as a means for formulating a theological hypothesis (that otherwise does not exist), which is itself dependent upon a separate and unsubstantiated assumption—i.e., there is a clear distinction in how God unfolds his salvation plan with regard to Jews, Christians, and Gentiles. But things are often a bit more involved than this simple explanation. Let me address two points related to this involvement, the first requiring a little time to unfold.

As already mentioned, Dispensationalism operates on the assumption that the church will be raptured away from the earth prior to the so-called "great tribulation"—a period also referred to as "the day of the Lord" or "the day of wrath." One of the (many) key problems with this assumption is that nowhere in the NT are these concepts held together as a single claim or teaching. In other words: when Paul talks about the so-called "rapture" (only once, by the way), one is hard-pressed to find any discussion about a so-called "great tribulation" that follows. Moreover, when both Jesus and John speak about the so-called "great tribulation" (cf. Mt 24.21-28; Rev 7.9-17), not once is there any mention of a so-called "rapture" of believers that precedes it. While not substantial or definitive on its own, that fact raises rather basic concerns about the decision to join the topics in a necessarily sequential manner and present it as a biblical truth (as do Dispensationalists—Howell included).

Where the concern becomes more pronounced is not only when the two topics are joined but also when the underlying assumption about them is given legitimacy. And the underlying assumption is: the church (i.e., [true] believers) will be exempt from the "great tribulation", "the day of the Lord", or "the day of wrath" while the rest (i.e., Jews, Gentiles, unbelievers) will be "left behind" (to borrow LaHaye's ridiculous notion) to endure such things. This assumption operates on another assumption, which states: this will happen because God has promised to keep his church from such things, and God always keeps his promises. And when one asks: Where exactly does God promise that keeping? Where does it explicitly state that the church will not endure the "great tribulation?", the typical response is the verse that uses those words and ideas: Rev 3.10.³⁷ This text declares: "Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, ***I also will keep you from the hour of trial***—that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (emphasis added). And Dispensationalist, especially of the Classical and Revised/Modified variety, categorically see this promise for (only) Christians as exemption ***from*** the "great tribulation", which here gets a new variant: "the hour of trial". And by being "kept from" it is meant: taken away, not involved, removed from, etc. Raptured.

In an attempt to substantiate this understanding of Rev 3.10, appeal is often made to Jn 17.15 which is said to use the exact same terminology—i.e., to be "kept from". The problems with this sort of conclusion are many, but the chief issue is the usual mishandling of what is exactly said in both texts when they use the specific terminology. In other words: if we accept the reading of Dispensationalist for Rev 3.10 (taken away, not involved, removed from, etc.) and apply it to what Jesus says in Jn 17.15, we run into a problem. And that problem is this: when Jesus prays to the Father, "***keep them from*** the evil one" (17.15b—emphasis added), he is not asking that believers will be ***removed from*** the world (or, "the evil one"), and we know that because that's how he clearly begins his request—i.e., "I do not ask you [Father] to take them out of the world" (17.15a). But if we apply the Dispensationalist reading of Rev 3.10 to this entire verse in John, we not only misconstrue

³⁷ And, it is worth mentioning, Howell uses this passage in this way several times in his commentary—see 121, 129, 141, 224.

its meaning but also ignore (if not subvert) the very claims of Jesus.³⁸ **Nothing** in what Jesus says in Jn 17 indicates that a removal is in store for believers when all hell breaks loose on the world at the "great tribulation", "the day of the Lord", "the day of wrath", "the hour of trial", etc. Instead, what he desires/prays for is the Father's **protection for** believers during such times—a protection implicitly desired and promised in Jn 17 and explicitly promised in Rev 3. In other words: the hope is not for a divine removal (i.e., a "rapture") but a divine shield or fortification.

Moreover, not only is there a failure to recognize a disconnect in the logic when dealing with John 17 and Rev 3, Howell too fails to see how his reading ultimately creates problems for other truths he advocates. Or said differently: Howell fails to see how the truths he proclaims elsewhere make better sense (exegetically and theological speaking) of the texts that he seeks to use in an effort to uphold his commitment to Dispensationalist readings. To be less vague, and to sight a basic example: earlier it was noted that Howell stated, "The person who has a genuine faith in God will view affliction and suffering through the lens of an enduring hope—not the kind of endurance that waits to thank God when trials pass, but the kind of endurance that thanks God even if the trial does not pass" (189). It should be obvious that claim is in complete harmony with the better reading of Jn 17.15 (i.e., the promise of divine protection, not divine removal). But what Howell does with Rev 3.10 (i.e., seeing it as a text that promises divine removal) not only undermines what he says about a person with genuine faith but also questions the legitimacy of God's promise of protection during trying times.³⁹ Another example: Howell boldly states: "Because their names were etched indelibly in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 13:8), they were in no danger of experiencing God's wrath" (236). If there is no danger, then there is no need for a divine removal.

And that brings me to the second point needing to be addressed, and that is: we encounter these kinds of readings and conflicting ideas because the commitment is not to a fair exegesis of the key passages but to a theological framework that is used for interpreting those passages. And that theological framework operates on the basis of a commitment to certain (unproven and unjustified) theological presuppositions. This latter commitment is played when we consider the underlying assumption concerning the so-called "great tribulation" and who takes part in it—as well as who is (supposedly) exempt. By that I mean: the need for making the kinds of arguments about the "great tribulation" is predicated on an pre-existing belief that asserts two things: 1) the church is separate from the Jews and Gentiles and will not endure the time of God's wrath, as poured out on the earth for seven years during the "great tribulation"—the Jews and Gentiles are the one who must endure these things, and 2) Christ's return comes in two stages—i.e., once to remove the church, thus "keeping them from the day of wrath", and once at the start of the so-called "millennial kingdom."

³⁸ Thomas Ice tries (but fails) to weasel out of this by seeing Jesus prayer in John 17 as having two parts: "Even though the first half of the verse says that Christ will not take believers out of the world, the second half says that they will be totally protected from the evil one (Satan). The meaning of *tereo ek* is that 'Christ is praying that His disciples would be kept away from and out of the power of the evil one and it is not implying that 'the evil one had power over them' (which is a self-evident truth)," notes John Sproule. Such a statement by our Lord is in concert with what John says in Revelation 3:10 ("Kept from the Hour", <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/lce-KeptFromTheHour.pdf> [accessed 14-Dec-16]). Sorry, but this type of reasoning reminds me of the exchange between Lt Daniel Kaffee and Col Nathan Jessup in the film, "A Few Good Men". Jessup, on the one hand, issues an order for one Marine (Santiago) not to be touched by the other Marines, who would love to beat Santiago because of their feelings of betrayal by him. But, on the other hand, Jessup issues another order for Santiago to be transferred because his life will be in danger once the other Marines know that they have in fact been betrayed. But if Jessup's orders are always followed, as he vehemently declares, then (as Kaffee points out) there is no need for two separate orders—especially when the first would alleviate the need for the second.

³⁹ What's a touch odd is that when Howell quotes John 17.14-15, he uses a translation that emphasizes the idea of "protection" rather than removal and then states: "There are two very sobering revelations in His request: that Jesus knows how much the world hates His disciples, and that Jesus would desire for his disciples **to remain in an antagonistic world**" (241—emphasis added). So if it is Jesus' desire that the disciples **remain** in the world, and that God will protect them during that remaining, why would there be a need to **remove** them when God pours out his wrath on the world?

With regard to the first thing: one flaw in the assumption is that if God's wrath is poured out on the world (Jews and Gentiles) and the church has not been raptured, then it will necessarily be the recipients of God's wrath—but that doesn't make theological sense (so say Dispensationalists). No, what doesn't make theological sense is the (very bad) assumption itself. If God promises to protect his people (i.e., believers) during his time of judgment, and if his wrath is poured out on the world (i.e., non-believers), then believers—by virtue of their identity (i.e., not the world) and divine protection (per Jn 17.15 and Rev 3.10)—are not the recipients of that wrath; thus, there is no need to remove them. With regard to the second thing: there is not one shred of textual support that tells or even supports the idea of a two-fold return of Christ. The only reason such an idea exists—and is promoted—is to sustain the belief that Christians are exempt from the "great tribulation", which is to last seven years upon the earth, and the only way to sustain *that* belief is to say: in order for Christians to be exempt from the "great tribulation", they must be "raptured" off the earth, and that "rapture" is what happens when Christ comes *for* his saints, but does not come fully to earth; the full and final coming happens when he comes *with* the saint at the second stage of his return. That's not exegesis; that's eisegesis and circular.

3.2.4. Enough for Now

Because a critique of the eschatological perspectives espoused in this commentary could continue for quite some time, and because this review is long enough already, I will end the critique here. Suffice it to say: Howell's eschatological conclusions are not rooted in a fair and honest exegesis of the relevant texts (and that's not referring only to the Thessalonian letters); they are contingent upon and ultimately devoted to a particular theological approach or system of interpretation (i.e., Dispensationalism) that is concerned with sustaining itself, and then boasting in its ability to do so.

4. ASSESSMENT

One of the commendations inside the cover applauds Howell for "bring[ing] fresh insight and application to" the Thessalonians letters. However, and with all due respect, after reading this commentary (twice), I struggled to find where the accolade "fresh insight" would apply. By and large, the bulk of Howell presentation is fairly standard material and arguments—i.e., it, in some respects, reflects the general consensus of scholarship on these letters from the past century. Moreover, as indicated above, Howell's discussions on the eschatological portions of the letters were hardly new or even groundbreaking. In fact, they are theories and theological speculations that come from a past Dispensational era and one that is no longer considered (theologically) viable among NT scholars—even Dispensational. Thus, in these cases, the arguments are not "fresh"; they are in fact rather stale.

So that brings me to the final question (or set of questions), one related to the usefulness or value of the commentary as a resource for biblical study—either for the student, the pastor, or the interested/educated church-goer. A way to answer this question (or set of questions) is to run through the specific items identified as the aims of the Series in general as well as Howell's aims in particular.

- Does the commentary provide pastors and interested/educated churchgoers with an exposition of the Thessalonian letters that is:
 - Christocentric: for the most part, yes.
 - Exegetically based—i.e., faithful to the text: hardly (despite, or contrary to the praise given by the endorsers of the book—e.g., "powerfully exegeted", "stellar expositions" and "tight exegetical work").
 - Missional in its application: not explicitly (but then again, "missional" is not clearly defined—especially by Howell).
- Does the commentary achieve:

- (Relative) conciseness: not comparably so. NT Wright's commentary on the same letters achieves a better relative conciseness, as do the commentaries of William Barclay, Vincent Smiles, Beverly Gaventa, and especially Robert Gundry.
- Relevant discussions of the arguments in the text: for pastors and interested/educated churchgoers, possibly; for anyone else, sketchy at best.
- Accessibility without burdening the commentary with overly detailed or technical treatments of the passages: in general, yes; when entertaining occasional theological idiosyncrasies (i.e., Dispensationalism), no.
- Is the commentary:
 - "not academic": yes (but that's not a good thing).
 - Presented in an easy-reaching, practical, and friendly way: for the most part, yes.
- Does Howell:
 - Show the relevancy of the Thessalonians letters for the church in its current context: for the most part, yes.
 - Give sound pastoral and logical advice: "pastoral", yes; "logical", not always.
 - Provide reasonable interpretations of the text related to key topics, such as "end times": for the most part, yes; for eschatological discussions, no.
- Would I recommend this particular commentary to pastors and interested/educated churchgoers: not without a disclaimer.

APPENDIX: LIST OF MINOR ISSUES

An earlier attempt at compiling the following list tried to separate the issues into various types or categories. It quickly became clear that such an attempt would encounter too many obstacles and too much overlap in the proposed types. Thus, I opted for a sequential approach, whereby I note the issues as they appear from cover to cover.

- On 6, Howell incorrectly ends a sentence in his quotation of Bonhoeffer. Howell's version reads: "They turn their living into dying.... Whenever Christ calls us...". Bonhoeffer's version reads: "They turn their living into dying;" (emphasis added). Howell should have used a normal ellipsis, which he does correctly in other places (see e.g., 17, 31, 78, 95, 164, 248), or simply quoted the rest of Bonhoeffer's remarks.
- On 12 (cf. also 257), Howell names David as the author of Psalm 121, but that particular Psalm is not one normally attributed to David. In fact, it is classified as one of the anonymous Psalms. Howell appears to be aware of this type of classification, because when he later quotes from Ps 1, which is also anonymous, he prefaces it with: "The psalmist writes..." (86).⁴⁰
- On 13, Howell misses a punctuation mark when quoting from MacArthur. Howell's version reads: "back to Thessalonica in person he could write...". MacArthur's version reads: "back to Thessalonica in person, he could write..." (emphasis added).
- On 13, Howell's quotation of MacArthur begins: "The Holy Spirit showed Paul...". However, in MacArthur, it reads: "Shortly afterwards, the Holy Spirit showed Paul...". Two options were available here, neither of which was taken. First, Howell could (and should) have used square brackets to indicate the change he made to the text—i.e., either "[T]he Holy Spirit" or even "[The] Holy Spirit". It is clear that Howell is aware of the practice of using square brackets when changes are made, because he correctly uses them in other places—see e.g., 17 (x2), 45, 59, 65, 69, 133, 135, 143, 157, 159, 165, 172, 219, 238, 240. Second, Howell could (and should) have left the capitalization alone. It's also clear that Howell is aware of this because in other places he begins the quotation without capitalizing the initial word—see e.g., 42, 86, 91, 103, 189.
- On 17, Howell inserts a word in his quotation of MacArthur but does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "Faith does not come by *merely* hearing those words of truth..." (emphasis added). MacArthur's version simply reads, "Faith does not come by hearing those words of truth...". Again, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change or quoted MacArthur exactly.
- On 18, when quoting MacArthur, Howell (strangely) omits three words without indicating that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "was much more than an religious designation." MacArthur's version reads: "was much more than *just a general* religious designation" (emphasis added). Howell should have either used ellipses to signal the omission or quoted it exactly.
- On 20-21, when quoting 1 Cor 13.1-3, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁴¹—twelve in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. This is odd because, in other places, where poetic (or hymnic) lines are used in the HCSB, Howell retains the formatting—see e.g., 86, 109-10, cf. 132, 198-

⁴⁰ Howell does the same when he quotes from Ps 119—i.e., "The psalmist says..." (46).

⁴¹ For the record, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way. Paul's argument in this passage is neither poetic nor hymnic; it's logical.

99, 199,⁴² 201, 212, 213, 257. Thus, the question is: why the unexplained alteration here with 1 Cor 13.1-3?

- On 21, Howell supplies an incorrect page number for his Barclay quotation. He gives "218", but it needs to be 215—but only if Howell is using the 2003 edition of Barclay, which would be odd (and a bit of a surprise) since he does not list that edition in his Works Cited page. If, however, he is using the 1975 edition (cf. note on 261 below), page 218 is the final portion of Barclay's analysis of 2 Thess 3.6-18. Thus, if using the 1975 edition, the citation needs to be 186-87.
- On 25, Howell misses a letter/word when quoting from Marshall. Howell's version reads: "We shall never build utopia..." Marshall's version reads: "We shall never build **a** utopia..." (emphasis added).
- On 25, Howell's quotation of Stott begins: " 'Serving' and 'waiting' go together...". However, in Stott, it reads: "It is immediately noteworthy that 'serving' and 'waiting' go together...". Again, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change or left the capitalization alone.
- On 25, Howell alters the original wording of Stott. Howell's version reads: "Thus, working and waiting **go** together" (emphasis added). Stott's version reads: "Thus working and waiting **belong** together" (emphasis added). Once again, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change or quoted it correctly.
- On 25, the second ellipses indicate an omission from Stott's original argument. Not only is the omission a single sentence (i.e., not lengthy) but also the omitted sentence would have helped Howell's focus a bit more. Thus, its absence is strange.
- On 25, Howell strangely (and inconsistently) retains the paragraph break found in the original source he quotes. It is strange and inconsistent because he does not always do this—see e.g., 39, 40, 46, 154.
- On 28, when quoting Phil 2.5-8, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁴³—twelve in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. Same question as before: why the unexplained alteration to Phil 2.5-8?
- On 30, when quoting an OT text, Howell writes: "he fearlessly declared, 'As the Lord lives, I will say whatever the Lord says to me' (1 Kgs 22:1-14)." Since the quoted material only comes from a single verse, and *not the entire passage* (as Howell's citation indicates), he would have been better served to cite things more appropriately—i.e., "(1 Kgs 22:14)" or even "(1 Kgs 22:14; cf. 22:1-14)".
- On 32, Howell's quotation of Stott reads: "and merciful judge **that** any human..." (emphasis added). Stott's version reads: "and merciful judge **than** any human..." (emphasis added).
- On 35, Howell alters the quotation of Mark 10.45, but does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "The Son of Man did not come..." Mark's version reads: "**For even the** Son of Man did not come..." (emphasis added).
- On 37, since Howell removes the emphasis placed on key phrases found in Finzel's book, he should have indicated that he did so—i.e., "emphasis removed".
- On 37, Howell removes two words from Finzel's remarks. Howell's version reads: "must be willing to live with submission...". Finzel's version reads: "must be willing to live **lives filled** with submission..." (emphasis added). Howell either needs to insert an ellipsis to indicate the alteration or he needs to quote it accurately.

⁴² This seemingly repeated reference refers to a second passage found on 199—i.e., Ps 13.1-4.

⁴³ Again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way, especially in this case.

- On 39, following the first ellipses, Howell's quotation of Carson reads: "Even some of us...". In Carson, it reads: "Worse, even some of us..." (108). Again, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change or left the capitalization alone.
- On 39, Carson's point begins with, "Worse, even some of us...", which is predicated on his arguments preceding that point, yet Howell oddly omits that preceding information.
- On 39-41, Howell cites two chunks of material from Carson: the first containing 14 lines of text and the second having 30 lines. But for whatever reason, Howell provides the exact same page-references for both chunks—i.e., "106-9". However, the first quotation is made up of details from *only* 106 and 108 of Carson, and the second is taken *only* from 108-09. *Nothing* comes from 107.
- On 40, Howell alters the capitalization of two words in Carson's quote: "Evangelicals" and "the Fall"—both of which are not capitalized in Carson. This is either a typo on Howell's part or he needs to use square brackets to indicate the change he made, or he needs to quote it correctly.
- On 43, Howell cites Heb 2.1-3, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 3. Thus, the reference should be: 2.1-3a. Howell is certainly familiar with this type of specificity in quoting from Scripture because he uses it in other places—see e.g., 5, 6, 10, 96, 99, 100, 101, 116, 159, 160, 170, 205 (x2), 222, **224**,⁴⁴ 228; cf. 31, 69, 153, 184.
- On 45, Howell cites Heb 1.1-3, but, technically, his quotation only uses material from 1.1-2a and 3c. Thus, he needs to cite it appropriately.
- On 45, when quoting Chapell, Howell's version reads: "The question to ask is:...". However Chapell's version is: "That is the macro approach. I think the micro approach is to identify:...". Either Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the (substantial) change or, given the substantial difference, not bothered with putting the initial portion in quotation marks.
- On 49, Howell capitalizes a pronoun incorrectly when quoting from Phillips. Howell's version reads: "When He spoke, they heard...". This gives the impression that Jesus is the antecedent. However, Phillips' version reads: "When he spoke, they heard...", and the context clearly indicates that the antecedent is **Paul**, not Jesus.
- On 50, Howell's syntax is inconsistent when he says: "Like Paul, **they** no longer counted **their life** to be of any value to themselves..." (50—emphasis added). It should read: "...counted their lives..." (unless he's seeing the reference as a collective).
- On 54, Howell misses a punctuation mark when quoting from MacDonald. Howell's version reads: "each week unsatisfied, even frustrated or grieved by their church...". MacDonald's version reads: "each week unsatisfied, even frustrated or grieved, by their church..." (emphasis added).
- On 54 (cf. 102), when quoting 1 Peter 2.9, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁴⁵—five in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. Again, the question is: why the unexplained alteration to 1 Peter 2.9?
- On 61, Howell cites 1 Thess 3.1-3, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 3. Thus, the reference should be: 3.1-3a.

⁴⁴ This instance is emphasized because it shows that Howell quotes a span of verses (i.e., 2 Thess 2.9-10a) and indicates that he is only using the first part of the final verse quoted. In other words, it suggests that the misstep with the Hebrews reference on 43 should not have happened. Although, for whatever reason, Howell, on 227, quotes 2 Thess 2.9-10a exactly as he does on 224 but only identifies it as "2:9-10".

⁴⁵ Once again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way.

- On 63, Howell cites John 15.18-20, but, technically, his quotation ends with the third part of verse 20. Thus, the reference should be: 15.18-20c.
- On 68, Howell misquotes Bounds by one word. Howell's version reads: "must be in the body, and form **the** blood and bones" (emphasis added). Bounds' version reads: "must be in the body, and form **and** blood and bones" (emphasis added).
- On 72, Howell's quotation of Fee begins: "Only the Lord himself...". Fee's version begins: "But only the Lord himself...". Once again, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change, left the capitalization alone, or quoted Fee exactly.
- On 74, Howell's (terrible) analogy of Paul being "a master at putting the theological cookies on the bottom shelf so that everyone could reach them" is surprisingly close to a remark made by Jerry Jenkins when reviewing a book by John Koessler. Jenkins says: "Koessler comes at it with his remarkable ability to put the theological cookies on the lower shelf where laypeople like me can reach them". But no mention of Jenkins is given.
- On 76, Howell's quotation of Lambert begins: "Pornography has now chewed...". Lambert's version reads: "Regardless, pornography has now chewed...". Again, square brackets are needed, left the capitalization alone, or quoted Lambert exactly.
- On 79, Howell names David as the author of Psalm 42, but that particular Psalm is not one normally attributed to David. In fact, not only is it traditionally linked with the Sons of Korah, it is also plainly and clearly identified as such in the HCSB.
- On 79, Howell declares: "Thessalonica was a sex-saturated city." This phrase does not appear to be original with Howell—Paul Felix used almost the exact same wording in 2008⁴⁶—yet no attribution is given by Howell.
- On 86, Howell cites Ps 1.1-2, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 2. Thus, the reference should be: 1.1-2a. (And why Howell would leave off 2b is rather odd).
- On 92, Howell cites Phil 2.14, but, technically, his quotation also includes all of verse 15. Thus, the reference should be: 2.14-15. (And Howell is apparently aware of this because he quotes a portion of verse 15 earlier on pages 54 and 82, and cites it appropriately).
- On 94, Howell cites 1 John 3.14, 16-19, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first half of the clause that makes up verse 19. Thus, the reference should be: 3.14, 16-19a.
- On 95, Howell refers to Warren Wiersbe twice, but in the second instance (six lines down from the first) the name is misspelled: "Weirsbe".
- On 95, Howell could have avoided two problems if he stuck to basic citation practices. When quoting Wiersbe, Howell's version reads: "to learn how to swim.... And birds by nature...". Problem 1: the period before the ellipsis is unnecessary—not to mention not original to Wiersbe. Problem 2: the "and" following the ellipsis is wrongly capitalized. Howell should have written, "to learn how to swim...and birds by nature...".
- On 95, Howell removes an emphasis found in Wiersbe, but he does not indicate that he has done so.
- On 95, Howell's reference for Wiersbe is technically incorrect (cf. note on 264 below).
- On 98, Howell truncates Bruce's words but does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "adorned the gospel with their lives as well as their lips." Bruce's version reads: "adorned the gospel with their lives as well as **proclaiming it with** their lips" (emphasis added).

⁴⁶ Felix says: "Paul's letter to the young believers who lived in **the sex-saturated city of Thessalonica** provides the ancient battle plan for how a brother can be pure in a dirty world"—see "Living According to the Will of God: An Ancient Battle Plan for Purity," in *Secret Sex Wars: A Battle Cry for Purity* (ed. Robert Scott Sr.; Chicago: Moody, 2008), 66—emphasis added.

- On 101, Howell alters Keller's words when quoting him. Howell's version reads: "Work was a barrier...". Keller's version reads: "Work, **then**, was a barrier..." (emphasis added). Howell needs to indicate that he has made the change, or simply retain Keller's wording.
- On 103, while Howell attributes the observations in the final block quotation to Marshall, he fails to recognize that Marshall—in that particular case—is summarizing Ernest Best.
- On 112, when quoting Morris, Howell alters the capitalization of a pronoun but does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "...for those who are in Him." Morris' version reads: "...for those who are in him." I am assuming that Howell mistyped because in other instances where the lower-case spelling is used by the quoted source, he retains it—see e.g., 6, 10, 31, 72, 162, 186, 206, 229.
- On 118, when quoting 1 Cor 15.51-52, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁴⁷—eight in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. Same question as before: why the unexplained alteration to 1 Cor 15.51-52?
- On 120 n.14, Howell alters Morris' quote without indicating that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "the Bible was not written to **satisfy** our curiosity" (emphasis added). Morris' version reads: "the Bible was not written to **gratify** our curiosity" (emphasis added).
- On 123, Howell forgets to capitalize the start of a new sentence. It reads: "...and not eschatological. **we** may wish..." (emphasis added).
- On 131, and similar to the Wiersbe example, Howell refers to John MacArthur twice, but in the second instance (five lines down from the first) the name reads: "Macarthur". In every other use of MacArthur's name, Howell spells it correctly.
- On 131, when quoting from MacArthur, Howell overlooks a hyphen. Howell's version reads: "date setting, clock watching, or sign seeking." MacArthur's version reads: "date setting, **clock-watching**, or sign seeking" (emphasis added).
- On 132, Howell mistakenly capitalizes a pronoun intended to refer to Paul, not God—i.e., "quite similar to what we say in chapter 4 where **He** told them..." needs to be "where **he** told them" (emphasis added). Paul is not God.
- On 132, when quoting Amos 5.18-20, Howell appears to use his own formatting vis-à-vis the one found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB arranges the passage as ten poetic lines, yet Howell's quotation seems to be arranged according to verse-numbers and it reads like an ordinary text. In other words: the poetic structuring of the original is skewed in Howell's quotation of it.
- On 137, when quoting Matt 25.37-39, Howell alters the final punctuation of verse 39, as given in the HCSB. His version reads: "So this is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be." However, by including verse 40, Matthew's version (in the HCSB) reads: "So this is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be: Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one left." While I side with Howell's decision to make the alteration (mainly because it follows the Greek better in this case), he still should have indicated the change, or at least quoted the rest of the passage.
- On 138, when quoting Rom 13.11-14, Howell makes changes to the passage but does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "Knowing the time,...". The original version reads: "**Besides this, knowing** the time,..." (emphasis added).
- On 139, Howell begins his quotation of Calvin with: "Casting off the cares...". Calvin's version reads: "That is, casting off the cares...". Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change he made or left the capitalization alone.

⁴⁷ Again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way.

- On 148, Howell cites 1 Cor 6.9-11, but, technically, his quotation begins with the second part of verse 9. Thus, the reference should be: 6.9b-11.
- On 148, "flounder" need to be changed to "founder".
- On 150, Howell cites 1 Peter 5.1-3, but, technically, his quotation begins with the final part of verse 1. Thus, the reference should be: 5.1c-3.
- On 150, following the ellipses, Howell's quotation of Beale reads: "Church leaders...". In Beale, it reads: "**Similarly**, church leaders..." (emphasis added). Thus, Howell should have used square brackets to indicate the change he made or left the capitalization alone.
- On 150, in the original, Beale supplies emphasis to key words, yet Howell removes it. That too should have been noted as a change—i.e., "emphasis removed".
- On 150, similar to the Carson issue noted above, Howell cites 7 lines from Beale and identifies it as coming from page "160". However, in Beale, the material that Howell quotes spans 160-61.
- On 151, Howell strangely uses Bruce's initials in the in-text citation—i.e., "F.F. Bruce". This is done right after the mention of "F.F. Bruce" preceding the quotation. In nearly every other case (though cf. notes on 154, 231 below), Howell only uses last names in the parentheses. The issue is not simply one of consistency, but why the inconsistency?
- On 153, Howell alters two things from Barnes' remarks, but did not indicate that he did so. Following the ellipsis, Howell's version reads: "They are to 'know' and regard him...". Barnes' version reads: "**And they** are to 'know' **or** regard him..." (emphasis added).
- On 154, Howell again uses first and last names in the in-text citation—i.e., "Richard DeHaan"—rather than simply the last name.
- On 161, Howell incorrectly ends a sentence in his quotation of Batterson—i.e., "We have not because we ask not. . . . The greatest tragedy...". In the original, it reads: "We have not because we ask not,..." (emphasis added). Howell should have used a normal ellipsis or simply quoted the rest of Batterson's remarks.⁴⁸
- On 162, Howell cites "Calvin, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 297" for the source of his quotation. However, the specific source he mentions—i.e., the one edited by McGrath and Packer—does not contain page 297. In fact, that edition is barely over 110 pages. However, the other commentary for Thessalonians that Howell cites—i.e., the one edited by Pringle—is considerably longer. Thus, it would seem that Howell mistakenly cited the McGrath-Packer edition, when he meant to cite the edition by Pringle.
- On 164 (cf. also 262), Howell misses an emphasis in Kaiser's (first) title. Howell's version reads: *The Christian and the Old Testament*. Kaiser's version of the title reads: *The Christian and the "Old" Testament* (emphasis added).
- On 165, Howell (oddly) provides an unnecessary alteration to his quotation of Calvin. Howell's version reads: "first examining it...[and] he admonishes them...". Calvin's version reads: "first examining it; and, on the other hand, he admonishes...". In fact, Howell would have been better served to quote the entire argument from Calvin, which is really not that long, rather than truncate it and providing unnecessary alterations.
- On 172, when quoting Morris, Howell alters the capitalization of one word. Howell's version reads: "stand before the eternal judge." Morris' version reads: "stand before the eternal **J**udge" (emphasis added). Either Howell mistyped or he needs to use square brackets to indicate the change.

⁴⁸ Personally, I would have left Batterson's idiosyncratic views out of the equation all together and simply referred to (or quoted) James 4.2, which is clearly Batterson's inspiration (even though he doesn't say so). However, it might be good that Howell chose not to quote the rest of Batterson's words, because what Batterson says next—i.e., "or maybe I should say, we have not because we circle not"—is both ridiculous and self-promoting.

- On 174, Howell cites Phil 3.20-21, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 21. Thus, the reference should be: 3.20-21a.
- On 174, when quoting Polhill, Howell oddly alters the capitalization of the first two out of five pronouns for God—i.e., he makes them upper-case. In Polhill's version, all of them are lower-case. However, Howell gives no indication that he made such changes.
- On 178-79, when quoting Rom 8.35-39, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁴⁹—fifteen in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. Same question as before: why the unexplained alteration to Rom 8.35-39?
- On 187, Howell supplies an incorrect page number for his Barclay quotation. He gives "243", but it needs to be 244—but only if Howell is using the 2003 edition of Barclay, which would be odd (and a bit of a surprise) since he does not have that edition listed in his Works Cited page. If, however, he is using the 1975 edition (cf. note on 261 below), there is no page 244, for the commentary in that edition ends on page 219. Thus, if using the 1975 edition, the citation needs to be 209.
- On 187, Howell quotation of Barclay is poorly done. Here are the two together, with Howell's version given first (with highlighted points to notice) and Barclay's (1975 version) coming second (with differences emphasized):
 - "Paul's answer was not to push them into the slough of despond by agreeing with them; **it was** to pick out their virtues and **their** achievements in such a way, that these despondent, frightened Christians **would** square their shoulders **and fling back their heads** and say, 'Well if Paul thinks that of us, we'll make a fight of it.' "
 - "Paul's answer was not to push them **further** into the slough of despond by **pessimistically** agreeing with them but to pick out their virtues and achievements in such a way that these despondent, frightened Christians **might** square their shoulders and say, 'Well, if Paul thinks that of us we'll make a fight of it **yet.**' "⁵⁰
- On 187-88, when quoting James 2.14-18, for whatever reason, Howell does not retain the paragraph breaks as assigned by the translation he uses (i.e., HCSB). Up to this point (and excluding the poetic [or hymnic] instances already noted), he has followed the paragraph divisions of the HCSB without fail—see e.g., 58, 75, 84-85, 94, 127. Why the change now?
- On 189, Howell again supplies an incorrect page number for his Barclay quotation. He gives "244", but it needs to be 245—but only if Howell is using the 2003 edition of Barclay, which would be odd (and a bit of a surprise) since he does not have that edition listed in his Works Cited page. If, however, he is using the 1975 edition (cf. note on 261 below), there is no page 244, for the commentary in that edition ends on page 219. Thus, if using the 1975 edition, the citation needs to be 210.
- On 189, Howell once again quotes Barclay in a poor fashion. Here are the two together, with Howell's version given first (with highlighted points to notice) and Barclay's (1975 version) coming second (with differences emphasized):
 - "describes the spirit which **does** not only **patiently** endure [*sic*] the circumstances in which it finds itself; but **which** masters them **and uses them to strengthen its own**

⁴⁹ Again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way.

⁵⁰ The 2003 edition is only slightly different from the 1975 version: "Paul's answer was not to push them further into **a state of despair** by pessimistically agreeing with them but to highlight their virtues and achievements in such a way that these despondent, frightened Christians might square their shoulders and say, 'Well, if Paul thinks that of us, we'll make a fight of it yet.' " (244—emphasis added). Where Howell got his version, with its particular (and peculiar) wording is a mystery.

nerve and sinew. It accepts the blows of life, but in accepting them it transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement."

- "describes the spirit which not only endures the circumstances in which it finds itself but masters them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement."⁵¹
- On 190, Howell cites 2 Cor 12.9-10, but, technically, he begins the quotation with the fourth part of verse 9. Thus, the reference should be: 12.9d-10.
- On 191, Howell alters Stott's words when quoting him. Howell's version reads: "It takes spiritual discernment...". Stott's version reads: "Of course it takes spiritual discernment...". Howell should have either used square brackets to indicate the change or retained the capitalization of the original.
- On 192, Howell removes a word from Stott's remarks, but he does not indicate that he has done so. Howell's version reads: "inveigh against God and the miscarriage of justice...". Stott's version reads: "inveigh against God and **against** the miscarriage of justice..." (emphasis added).
- On 192, when quoting Stott, on line 6 Howell (oddly) alters the capitalization of the first pronoun for God—i.e., he makes it upper-case—but does not indicate that he has done so. In Stott, and the rest of Howell's quotation of him, all of the pronouns are lower-case.
- On 192-93, when quoting from Philippians, Howell cites it as "Phil 1:27-29". However, technically, Howell barely uses verse 27—i.e., only the opening clause.⁵² Thus, the passage needs to be cited as: "Phil 1.27a, 28-29".
- On 193, when quoting Morris, Howell alters the wording. Howell's version reads: "...lives of His people as He **'uses** tribulations to bring His own people to perfection' " (emphasis added). Morris' version reads: "It is part of God's *righteous judgment to use* tribulations to bring His own people to perfection" (first emphasis original; second emphasis added).
- On 193, Howell (oddly) inserts a hard return after "Grant" and before "*1 and 2 Thessalonians*". There does not appear to be any reason or need for this. Howell might say this was done to keep the title of the book on one line rather than separating it. If that is the case, then Howell is inconsistent in following this practice, for he separates similar references to a similar title in other places—see e.g., 16, 158, 206, 210, 231 (x2), 254; cf. 24, 62, 82, 91, 142, 204, 209, 231, 237, 252.
- On 194, when quoting Keller, Howell removes the quotation marks original to Keller. Howell's version reads: "some suffering is given not to correct past wrongs but to prevent future ones (as in the case...)". Keller's version reads: "some suffering is given **not** to correct past wrongs but to prevent future ones" (as in the case...)" (emphasis added).
- On 198-99, when quoting Hab 1.2-3, Howell appears to use his own formatting vis-à-vis the one found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB arranges the passage as eight poetic lines, yet Howell's quotation seems to be arranged according to verse-numbers (but not entirely so) and it reads like an ordinary text. In other words: the poetic structuring of the original is skewed in Howell's quotation of it. Oddly enough: Howell follows the HCSB structuring for Ps 13.1-4, which comes right after Hab 1.2-3.

⁵¹ The 2003 edition is only marginally different from the 1975 version: "describes the spirit which not only endures the circumstances in which it finds itself over **overcomes** them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement." From further research, it appears as though Howell obtained his rendition of Barclay's quotation from Mark Dunagan's online commentary, for both his and Dunagan's version of the quote contain the exact same words and errors—see www.study-light.org/commentaries/dun/view.cgi?bk=2th&ch=1 (accessed 27-May-2015).

⁵² Thankfully, and rightly, Howell leaves off the HCSB's odd introductory phrase: "Just one thing:".

- On 201, Howell cites Isa 46.9-10, but, technically, his quotation begins with the second part of verse 9. Thus, the reference should be: 46.9b-10.
- On 203, when quoting Rev 21.3-4, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁵³—nine in all—yet Howell’s quotation reads like an ordinary text. Same question as before: why the unexplained alteration to Rev 21.3-4?
- On 203, Howell cites Rev 21.3-4, but, technically, his quotation begins with the second part of verse 3. Thus, the reference should be: 21.3a-4.
- On 204, when quoting Stott, on line 3 Howell (oddly) alters the capitalization of the first pronoun for God—i.e., he makes it upper-case—but does not indicate that he has done so. In Stott, and the rest of Howell’s quotation of him, all of the pronouns are lower-case.
- On 204, Howell incorrectly ends a sentence when quoting Stott. Howell’s version reads: “which glows temporarily.... We will be...”. Stott’s version reads: “which glows temporarily, only to become dark...” (emphasis added).
- On 204, Howell alters and truncates Stott’s words when quoting him. Howell’s version reads: “into his likeness.... **We** will glow forever...” (emphasis added). Stott’s version reads: “into his likeness. And in our transformation his glory will be seen in us, **for we** will glow forever...” (emphasis added).
- On 204, Howell overlooks a punctuation mark found in Calvin. Howell’s version reads: “glory for himself alone but it will...”. Calvin’s version reads: “glory for himself alone, but it will...” (emphasis added).
- On 204, Howell alters Calvin’s quote without indicating that he has done so. Howell’s version reads: “all the saints.... When the Son of God...”. Calvin’s version reads: “all the saints.... **will be that when** the Son of God...” (emphasis added).
- On 204, when quoting Calvin, on line 3 Howell (oddly) alters the capitalization of first pronoun for God—i.e., he makes it upper-case—but does not indicate that he has made the change. In Calvin, and the rest of Howell’s quotation of him, all of the pronouns are lower-case.
- On 210, Howell wrongly punctuated Phillips’ final sentence. Howell (oddly) uses a period when it (clearly) should be a question mark.
- On 212, when quoting 1 Peter 2.21-23, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁵⁴—eleven in all—yet Howell’s quotation reads like an ordinary text. Same question as before: why the unexplained alteration to 1 Peter 2.21-23?
- On 213, when quoting Ps 16.9-11, for whatever reason, Howell adds paragraph breaks where they do not exist in the HCSB rendering.
- On 216, Howell cites 2 Thess 2.4, 9-10, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 10. Thus, the reference should be: 2.4, 9-10a.
- On 218, Howell cites 2 Thess 2.1-3, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 3. Thus, the reference should be: 2.1-3a.
- On 229, Howell alters Beale’s quote without indicating that he has done so. Howell’s version begins: “It is clear that God...”. Beale’s version begins: “Additionally, it is clear that God...”.
- On 229, Howell removes two points of emphasis in Beale’s quotations, but he does not indicate that he has done so.

⁵³ Again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way.

⁵⁴ Again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way, especially in this case.

- On 231, Howell strangely uses Mayhue's first name in the in-text citation—this right after the mention of the first name preceding the quotation. In nearly every other case (*sans* 151 and 154, as noted above), Howell only uses last names.
- On 232, when quoting Morris, Howell (oddly) alters the capitalization of all the pronouns for God—i.e., he makes them upper-case—and does not indicate that he has made that change. In Morris, all of them are lower-case. (This is not counting the one that begins a sentence).
- On 237, when quoting Stott, Howell alters the capitalization of "antichrist"—i.e., he makes it lower-case—but he does not indicate that he has made that change. In Stott, it reads, "Antichrist." This seems to be done out of Howell's preference to use lower-case spelling for this title, because that is how he consistently does it—see e.g., 215, 227, 228, 229, 230 (*sans* the heading), 235, 256. Although, for whatever reason, Howell retains the upper-case spelling when he quotes from MacArthur on 227.
- On 241, when quoting John 17.14-15, Howell removes the formatting found in the translation he uses (i.e., the HCSB). By this I mean: the HCSB has, for whatever reason, decided to arrange the passage in poetic (or hymnic) lines⁵⁵—seven in all—yet Howell's quotation reads like an ordinary text. Again, the question is: why the unexplained alteration to John 17.14-15?
- On 241, "an ubiquitous foe" needs to be "a ubiquitous foe" (emphasis added)
- On 244-45, Howell cites 2 Cor 1.8-11, but, technically, his quotation ends with the first part of verse 11. Thus, the reference should be: 1.8-11a.
- On 247, when quoting Fee, Howell misses two punctuation marks. Howell's version reads: "the case with the letter as a whole and there would be...". Fee's version reads: "the case with the letter, as a whole, and there would be..." (emphasis added).
- On 248, Howell cites 1 Thess 4.10-12, but, technically, his quotation begins with the second part of verse 10. Thus, the reference should be: 4.10b-12.
- On 249, Howell alters the Morris quote without indicating that he has done so. Howell's version begins: "No preaching of the gospel...". Morris' version reads: "**yet it remains true that** no preaching of the gospel..." (emphasis added).
- On 252, when citing Wills' article, Howell supplies the wrong page reference. He gives "270", but the quotation comes from p.155. (Page 270 is right near the end of the Scripture Index in the book). Howell is aware of the original page-range because he (correctly) supplies it in the Works Cited page.
- On 253, a similar occurrence happens when Howell cites Schreiner's article—which appears in the same book as Wills' article. For Schreiner's, Howell supplies the page reference as "225" (which, in the book, is the start of the Name Index). It needs to be "129." Howell knows this because, in the Works Cited page, he supplies the correct page-range for Schreiner's article.
- On 254, Howell incorrectly cites his reference as "Green, *Letters*, 355". The quotation he uses begins on page 354.
- On 255, same problem as the Schreiner reference on 253. Howell cites "220-21" as his reference, but it needs to be "126-27".
- On 256, when quoting Fee, Howell (incorrectly) alters the capitalization of a word, but does not indicate that he has made the change. Howell's version reads: "the overall Christological focus...". Fee's version reads: "the overall christological focus...". When used adjectively, "christological" is lower-case.

⁵⁵ Once again, I think the HCSB is incorrect in this case for structuring the passage in this way.

- On 261, Howell is missing a key bibliographic detail for the Aristotle entry. Only W. Rhys Roberts is listed as the translator. However, the specific book Howell cites is translated by **both** Roberts and "Ingram Bywater" (with an introduction by Edward P.J. Corbett). Since Howell is referencing the entire book, and not just the *Rhetoric* portion (which is translated by Roberts), **full** details need to be supplied.
- On 261, Howell supplies incorrect information about Barclay's book. Howell lists it as, "Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.*" Instead of "Philemon" it needs to be "Thessalonians." (Philemon was linked with the Pastoral Epistles). Moreover, Howell supplies an incorrect publication date for the commentary. In the Library of Congress catalogue, there are five entries for Barclay in 1957; not one of them is the work Howell cites. The British Library catalogue lists three books published in 1957; once again, not one of them is what Howell cites. There is, however, a revised 1975 edition of *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. But that revision is the result of pulling three otherwise separately published volumes together and making them a single volume.
- On 261, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Barnes entry—e.g., specific title, volume, edition.
- On 261, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Beale entry. It lacks: "The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Book 13." In similar entries (e.g., Bruce, Fee, Grant, Green, MacArthur, Martin, Mayhue, Morris [x2], Patterson, Phillips, Ryrie, Wiersbe), where series details are needed, Howell supplies them.
- On 261, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Bonhoeffer entry. Following the title, it lacks: "Vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works.*" Howell is not unaware of this, for he supplies similar information in other places—see e.g., the entries for Phillips (the second one) and Wiersbe.
- On 261, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Bounds entry—e.g., edition/reprint (since the book was originally published in 1906!).
- On 261, for whatever reason Howell switches the order of the two entries for Calvin—i.e., he places the older book second. In every other instance (*sans* Kaiser, Phillips) where multiple entries appear for a given author, Howell (rightly) arranges them in ascending order—see the entries for Barclay, Keller, Lewis, MacArthur, Morris.
- On 262, Howell need to provide correct publisher identification for the Finzel entry. Howell cites it as: "Thomas Nelson", but the front matter in Finzel's book clearly says, "W Publishing Group" (which is "a Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc").
- On 262, for whatever reason Howell uses the informal "Stan" for the (second) Gundry entry, whereas the book clearly identifies him as, "Stanley N." Rules of citation specify that an author's name needs to be quoted as it appears on the book.
- On 262, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Hiebert entry—i.e., he fails to indicate that the book is a second revised edition of the 1971 edition. Howell is not unaware of this need, for he supplies similar information in other places—see e.g., the entries for Erickson and Ryrie.
- On 262, Howell (strangely) leaves off the "Jr." in Kaiser's name, which is ordinarily found on Kaiser's books. This is strange because Howell includes it when he refers to James H. Grant, Jr.
- On 262, Howell misses an emphasis in Kaiser's (first) title. Howell's version reads: *The Christian and the Old Testament*. Kaiser's version reads: *The Christian and the "Old" Testament* (emphasis added).
- On 262, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the second Kaiser entry—i.e., he fails to indicate that the book in question is a reprint.

- On 262, for whatever reason Howell switches the order of the two entries for Kaiser—i.e., he places the older book second. In every other instance (*sans* Calvin, Phillips) where multiple entries appear for a given author, Howell (rightly) arranges them in ascending order—see the entries for Barclay, Keller, Lewis, MacArthur, Morris.
- On 262, Howell oddly supplies the middle initial for Keller's name. This is odd because not only is the initial missing on the book (though it is supplied in the front matter) but also because Keller almost always does not include it on his books.
- On 262, Howell strangely abbreviates the publisher for the Lawlor entry—i.e., he gives it as, "P&R"—when the book clearly states it as, "Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company". Howell also fails to supply the series details for this book, which are: "An International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Biblical and Theological Studies."
- On 263, Howell leaves off the second half of the title for the (first) Lewis entry. It needs to say: *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*. In other places where a tagline is used in the title, Howell retains it—see e.g., the entries for Barclay (the second one), Batterson, Finzel, Grant, R. Gundry, S. Gundry, Kaiser (the second one), Keller (the first two), Lambert, MacArthur (the third one), MacDonald, Mayhue, Morris (the first one), Paton, Phillips, Schreiner, Stott, Swindoll, Tozer, Wiersbe, Wills.
- On 263, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the (second) Lewis entry—i.e., he fails to indicate which edition/reprint he is using, seeing that the original was published in 1944.
- On 263, Howell punctuates the tagline to MacDonald's book incorrectly. Howell's version reads: *What Every Heart Longs For, What Every Church Needs*. MacDonald's version reads: *What Every Heart Longs For, What Every Church Needs* (emphasis added).
- On 263, Howell leaves off the second half of the title for the Martin entry. It needs to say: *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*.
- On 263, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Mayhue entry—i.e., he fails to indicate the book is a reprint of the 1999 edition.
- On 263, Howell strangely decides to spell out Moreland's first and middle name—i.e., "James Porter". Not only is this at odds with how his name is cited on the book that Howell mentions, it is also inconsistent with how Moreland prefers to cite his own name.
- On 263, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the (first) Morris entry—i.e., he fails to indicate the book is a new printing/edition of the 1956 edition.
- On 263, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the (second) Morris entry—i.e., he fails to indicate the book is a revised edition of the 1959 edition.
- On 263, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Paton entry—i.e., he fails to indicate that he is using the 12th edition.
- On 264, for whatever reason Howell switches the order of the two entries for Phillips—i.e., he places the older book second. In every other instance (*sans* Calvin, Kaiser) where multiple entries appear for a given author, Howell (rightly) arranges them in ascending order—see the entries for Barclay, Keller, Lewis, MacArthur, Morris.
- On 264, Howell needs to supply better (and more accurate) bibliographic details for the Rienecker and Rogers entry—e.g., number of volumes (or which one used), translation and editorial mention, the addition of "Jr." to Rogers' name.

- On 264, for the Schreiner entry: while the back cover of the Hemmett-Merkle book says, B&H Academic (though not specifically),⁵⁶ the front matter indicates that the publisher is "B&H Publishing Group." Thus, Howell needs to cite things appropriately and correctly.
- On 264, Howell punctuates Tozer's book title incorrectly. Howell's version reads: *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God, Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (emphasis added). Tozer's version reads: *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God; Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (emphasis added).
- On 264, Howell provides no mention of Wannamaker's commentary in the Works Cited, yet his commentary is cited on 170.
- On 264, Howell's formatting for the Wiersbe entry is incorrect. The title that Howell provides—i.e., *Be Ready: Living in Light of Christ's Return*—is not found in the 2-volume work he cites. That specific title is used only when Wiersbe commentary on 1-2Thess appears as its own publication. In the 2-volume work that Howell mentions, that title is non-existent. Thus, if he's going to use the 2-volume work as his source, the entry needs to read: "1, 2 Thessalonians." Pages 155–208 in volume 2 of *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton: Victor, 1989.
- On 264, for the Wills entry, Howell does the same thing as with the Schreiner entry.
- On 266, the page number for Ps 24:4-5 is not italicized.
- On 271, the page number for 1 Thess 1:9-10 is not italicized.
- On 272, the page number for 1 Thess 3:2-5 is not italicized.

Final Thought

In the opening pages of the commentary, where a sampling of praise for it can be found, one person writes: "I am confident that after reading this exposition you, like the Thessalonians themselves, will welcome it 'not as a human message, but as it truly is, the message of God' (1 Thess 2:13)." With all due respect, not only is this unnecessary flattery, it is also a poor comparison and an untruth. The gospel message that Paul proclaimed to the Thessalonians was divinely inspired and revealed; Howell's treatment is neither. The letters that Paul wrote were also divinely inspired and revealed, and most certainly inerrant; Howell's commentary is none of those. Moreover, both the gospel message and Paul's letters are free from the amount, kind, and degree of speculation, inconsistencies, and errors that one easily finds in this commentary. Thus, one cannot welcome this commentary as "the message of God"; it is merely the message of a man. To suggest otherwise is patently absurd. So, O.S. Hawkins: shame on you.

⁵⁶ In fact, the only mention of B&H Academic is the website provided, which, oddly enough, appears in small print below the considerably larger B&H Publishing Group logo.