

Alex Kocman: Today on the show: the gospel is for all times and places, so how do we communicate a single gospel message that transcends every culture?

E.D. Burns: Whether or not we want to admit it, all cultures to some degree have a moral code or some sort of inherent code in which they operate. They may not have a list of ten laws necessarily, but they're all operating on some sort of code of enoughness. And so I use a method, what I call teaching evangelism and I show where the root problem goes back to Adam, and that's the problem, and we're all Adam's progeny, and we all act like Adam. And then jump forward to the last Adam and show how he fixed the problem of the first Adam.

Alex Kocman: E.D. Burns, author and missionary, returns to the show. Stay tuned. Welcome to The Missions Podcast, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help goers think, and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Advancement and Communication with ABWE, joined again by Scott Dunford, our good friend, West Coast Advancement Coordinator with ABWE, Pastor of Redeemer Church in Fremont, California. Now Scott, we've got a return guest to the show this week. However you did share with me offline that you'd like me not to make you do the introduction, because I always throw those at you real quick at the beginning of the show. I say, "Hey, introduce our guest," and of course, you fumble through your notes a little bit and make sure that you're ready. So maybe I'll just take that one for the team this week, how's that sound?

Scott Dunford: Well, I, even how you framed it, I feel like you kinda threw me under the bus. So I'm not sure how to feel about that. I feel like I'm ready for you to say, "Here's our guest," and I'm waiting for you to do it, and then all of a sudden, I'm thrown a curveball with, "Hey," suddenly, "Scott, come up with something on the fly." So hey, however you wanna frame it, Alex –

Alex Kocman: Right.

Scott Dunford: I want you to look good, man, I want you to feel good about yourself.

Alex Kocman: No, no, no.

Scott Dunford: So.

Alex Kocman: No, I, you're right, it reflects more on my poor, my lack of ability as a broadcaster throwing you those curveballs, not setting you up for success.

Scott Dunford: I want the –

Alex Kocman: I'm sorry.

Scott Dunford: fast ball, I want the middle, down the plate.

Alex Kocman: And before everyone –

Scott Dunford: You know, I'm not a great hitter so I need it simple and straight.

Alex Kocman: I'm not, it's me, it's not you, it's me.

Scott Dunford: Wow.

Alex Kocman: But we are excited that we not only have exciting guests every week, but several return guests, one that I've had the privilege of getting to know even more since our last conversation with him, I don't even know, at least a year or two ago now. And that individual is E.D. Burns, who is the author of multiple helpful things, most recently "The Transcultural Gospel" put out by Founders Ministries. And I've got my copy here in my hands, and oh, look, there's this quote on the back of it from this guy named Alex Kocman. That's so weird, that's –

Scott Dunford: Yeah, I want our listeners not to judge the book by the guys that he could scrounge up to approve, to recommend it.

Alex Kocman: Honestly, they couldn't have found a much better person to put on the back cover. But, but there's other good, there's other very good names and very good endorsements. E.D. has been a missionary in the Middle East, east Asia, Alaska, and currently southeast Asia where he develops theological resources and trains indigenous pastors and missionaries. From his international location he also directs the MA in global leadership program at Western Seminary. He's also the author of a western, excuse me, I've got western culture on the mind. He's the author of "A Supreme Desire to Please Him: the Spirituality of Adoniram Judson" which we spoke with him about last time we had him on the show, and also "The Missionary-Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word." And also his paths do cross with some of our own missionaries with the agency that you and both serve with, Scott. And so we're excited to have you back on, E.D. Anything we missed with the bio?

E.D. Burns: No, it was better than what I could've done. But thank you, it's great to be back with you guys, looking forward to this.

Alex Kocman: So tell us why this book, "The Transcultural Gospel," that title is loaded with claims that you're making about contextualization, about the way we communicate it, why this book?

E.D. Burns: All right, well a number of things, I think the main thing that made me actually write it was back in June or, of 2019 or 2018, I was teaching some of my students in the MA program and going through the, what is now the contents of this book. And got a lot of really great feedback from them, they're missionaries from around the world, and just kept encouraging me to put it down in a book. So after years of working through these, finally put it down because so many people found it helpful. So that was probably anecdotally what made me actually write it.

But philosophically, I think I've noticed over the years how noble-hearted, good intended missionaries tend to maybe not be as precise with language, especially if they don't know the target language very well and they can

overstate the gospel, they can maybe underdefine or misdefine the gospel. And I started seeing lots of problems with the locals I work with because most of my work is teaching pastors or training missionaries, and started seeing lots of confusion in terms. And so I thought some issues really need to be clarified when it comes to defining the gospel, the implications of the gospel, and the goals of the gospel in kind of parsing terms and not just lumping everything into a gospel issue.

Scott Dunford: Mm.

Alex Kocman: Mm.

Scott Dunford: So it feels like you're responding to something in the book. Can you define what is it that you were responding to specifically?

E.D. Burns: Yeah, it's what I call, and this is another book for the future probably on, but the issue is what I call karmic Christianity and there's, as far as I know that's original to me. But that's the idea, not that Christians are secretly practicing some sort of Buddhist or Hindu worship practices, but the idea that as human beings we are all wired to abide by some sort of karmic system. And that doesn't mean, you know, eastern religions, but it's basically kind of cause and effect, or reciprocity based on relationships, something where if you do this, then this will be the outcome. And for a lot of Christians around the world, including ourselves, I mean as westerners I think we are primed for this too, we seem to think okay, well I get saved in such and such way, but somehow I have to maintain God's blessings by doing enough. And so I call it the enoughness test. You have to ask the question "What are you, what's the problem?" And a lot of times people don't even know the problem, but they know what they need to do enough of to bring about a certain blessing or a benefit. And then when you can identify what they're trying to bring about, you can then identify what is the problem they're trying to solve. And so I think it's a problem with discipleship and it's a problem with evangelism as people try to figure out what is the thing I have to do enough of in order to secure God's blessings and maintain God's blessings. And so I call that karmic Christianity, that's essentially what it is, it's a karmic system and it's, so I'm responding to patterns of that I've seen in so many cultures around the world.

Alex Kocman: To put it a different way, we're all kind of hardwired for the covenant of works.

E.D. Burns: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: And what's unique about the gospel is grace, but it takes a lot to unlearn that as Christians. But we also see that works orientation expressed in a number of different ways in cultures across the world. And so that's really what your book is responding to. For those who have been a part of this conversation in missiology over the last many years, the critique comes at

traditional western missions that we're making too much of, perhaps, perhaps we're making too much of these ideas of guilt, innocence, righteousness, you're standing before God in that final judgment, that legal sense. And perhaps we need to separate our tradition from the text of scripture a little bit, and look at the scripture a little bit more through perhaps the eyes of an eastern culture, some other cultures that are less individualistic than ours, more collectivists. And so out of that has come a lot of conversation about hey maybe it's not just guilt and innocence, maybe it's also honor and shame, and the goal of receiving honor and glory and attaining that status versus being shamed by your community. That's maybe a different set of values than the ones that we typically articulate the gospel through.

Another orientation would be fear and power, the way it's typically presented. If you're dealing in more tribalist, animistic cultures where there is regular interaction with ideas of the supernatural sometimes interaction with the supernatural itself on a frequent basis, you're living in power, excuse me, you're living in fear and you need to be delivered from that and you need to overcome that. Again a different set of values. And of course, nothing that, I think I articulated there, nothing there is overly controversial. I think the controversy comes with the beginning of that, which is, you know, are these different sets of cultural orientations replacements of or things that are in tension or conflict with those central gospel themes of guilt, of atonement, of righteousness, of salvation in that sense. And that's where a lot of the controversy has come. You respond to that, you reframe some of these, you also add a fourth. I listed three, you add a fourth, and then you argue that one of those value systems is at the top. And this book is basically you looking at a kind of all of global cultures through that lens. So unpack that for us if you would.

E.D. Burns:

Yeah, so I, first of all, the whole guilt, innocence approach on, I don't, I don't even hold to that, I kind of reframe that to make it guilt, righteousness. And I do that on purpose and that's not a, that's not just a synonymous idea because what you have to do is, okay so we can use cultural language in so far that it represents biblical meaning. But then you sometimes have to stop using certain terms and then start defining terms biblically speaking, or upload them with theological meaning. And so around about way of explaining it so I'm just gonna explain kind of the process of getting to where I got. You think about the word redemption, and a lot of times it's not unpopular to hear people say, "Well in the New Testament, that was the idea of a Greek slave market. People would be redeemed out of it by being purchased out of it." That's, so Paul's, Paul and the New Testament writers are just using cultural words and in ways that people understand. Well, yeah, they're using cultural words that people understand but it's actually arching back to redemption from the exodus, in the exodus from Egypt. And it's, there's theological language underneath the surface of common cultural usage. And so it's for the same

reason we wouldn't today we wouldn't say, "Well, when we're redeemed, we're, it's not like redeeming a coupon at the store." We might use that word but there's whole theological baggage to it. So in some ways you have to, you have to look at the surface level of language, how it's being used, and then think biblically how do I not necessarily reinterpret it, but how do I reorient it around the lordship of Christ and make it fit a theological hole that has the patterns of which the Holy Spirit been pleased to illumine throughout church history. So you wanna look for those top tier level, primary doctrines that the Spirit seems to have illumined across languages, across generations, across cultures that permeate the witness of church history.

And so you look at the creeds and the confessions. And you look at how the Holy Spirit has led the people of God in the community, global community to affirm say just the Apostle's Creed. And then you start keying in on those and so then that comes to the issue of guilt, innocence. Is guilt, innocence a western paradigm? Well, maybe, but then you have to ask the question where did the west get it from? It wasn't, you know I, it's kind of tongue and cheek, but before the gospel entered Europe, I mean the northern barbarian tribes were just a bunch of naked, blue painted savages just running around worshipping trees. You know, to put it kind of bluntly.

Alex Kocman: Right –

E.D. Burns: But the gospel reformed people.

Alex Kocman: and E.D., if I could hop in real quick.

E.D. Burns: Yeah.

Alex Kocman: You mentioned something a few times that I just think is important that I don't want our listeners to miss, which is to a certain degree, and this is not to say that the church is incapable of getting it wrong, we absolutely can, right? That's why we had a whole reformation. But looking at and trusting the way the Holy Spirit has worked through history, I think that's important. I think it's recognizing that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church, he is in control, and he hasn't been absent from church history. Things that have popped up sometimes pop up in error in Christian history, of course, but the Holy Spirit is guiding the ship. And so things that have developed, you know we all adopt, we all really embrace globally the Apostle's Creed, that's not really controversial among Christians, right? So let's see the Holy Spirit's activity behind that and we can say yeah, that's providential. I think that's important not to miss. Continue, though.

E.D. Burns: Yeah, so I mean the issue of guilt, well, okay in western post-enlightenment democracies, let's just say, in a sense is it's logical corollary. You, okay, we have laws and the government mandates that you

do not murder or do not steal, or whatever. But it doesn't, it does not mandate that you love your neighbor as yourself. It does not mandate that you give compassionately to the poor, or whatever. But the Bible does. The Bible has laws against, you know, committing guilt, or committing things that would make you guilty, but it also has proactive laws that mandate righteousness. And so that's part of the human problem is not just that we can't remain unguilty, but we can't earn righteousness. And so when you are justified, it's not that you're declared innocent, that's what happens when you're forgiven, but you're declared righteous, that means you are a law keeper, not just a law breaker. And so that's where the biblical paradigm takes maybe what is commonly used in western language, guilt, innocence, and it reorients it under the word of Christ and takes it up a step and shows that no, your problem is not just that you can't stay unguilty, but your problem is that you can't earn righteousness. And so through faith you're imputed with Christ's righteousness, an alien righteousness and all its benefits, and that's what I'm pointing out is that faith alone is the instrument that lays hold of the benefits and the blessings that Christ has earned and legally made yours through his righteousness by faith alone. And those would be things like the strength of Christ, Christ our power, Christ our strength, he is, you know his grace is sufficient for us. Christ is our freedom. Christ is our peace. And Christ is our honor, he is our name, he's our reputation, he's our big brother in whom, to whom we're united.

Alex Kocman: And that's also helpful, you're talking about union with Christ is at the center of this.

E.D. Burns: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: So we're debating these different paradigms and maybe some of the controversy, not goes away, not that it's insignificant, but a lot of the tension and the rough edges are resolved in recognizing yeah, all of Christ's benefits are ours through union with him. His honor is our honor, his righteousness is our righteousness, we're seated with him in the heavenlies over all of these principalities and powers that afflict cultures in less developed and developed parts of the world. Right? So we have power with Christ in a certain sense spiritually as well.

Scott, I see your furrowed brow deep in thought; I don't know if that's just a contemplative furrowed brow or if that's a question brewing. What are your thoughts, Mr. Dunford?

Scott Dunford: Well yeah, thanks, that wasn't a curveball, that was just a fast ball. So yeah, no, as you were talking –

Alex Kocman: You said you wanted them fast.

Scott Dunford: No, that's good. As you were talking, I was just questioning in my mind, is that, I'm not sure that anything you just said, Alex, is controversial. I –

Alex Kocman: I should hope not.

Scott Dunford: That's kind of the way I hear it class, is classically understood, you know is that the gospel as it's fully explained does understand our honor is in Christ, our freedom is in Christ, our, Christ has the power to free us from fear and guilt.

Alex Kocman: Oh yeah.

Scott Dunford: So that's kind of more what I was thinking is that I'm not sure that even in the classic honor, shame discussions that that's what's, that's what's at stake. I think one of the questions, and I'd like to maybe get to this a little bit later, is I'd like to kind of dig a little deeper on some of the things that you were saying there, E.D., is it one presentation to the exclusion of others or one have to be predominate over the others? Or do they all have a, do they all have a part of making sure that we're fully explaining gospel, not just from a perspective that makes the most sense to us as westerners, but as the gospel that makes the most sense to the whole world. I don't know if I'm making, I don't even know if I'm making sense.

Alex Kocman: Well, the title of the book is "The Transcultural Gospel," so maybe, Scott, the question is like what is that transcultural gospel? Is it a combination of all of these, or is it one at the expense of some of the others, right?

Scott Dunford: Yeah, no, I was just trying to, I was trying to understand what you felt like the controversy was there. And that, so my furrowing wasn't really for you, it was more just contemplation. But I would love to hear you, as we go deeper into this, E.D., I'd love to hear you explain a little bit more. So you don't just reframe from idea of guilt and how you're framing as righteousness, which I really appreciate. But how do you reframe some of these other dynamics?

E.D. Burns: Yeah, so I guess the issue that I've responded to is what I've observed on the field, like I'm gonna just give a very generic anecdote. In a conversation with a missionary working in a Buddhist context, where a lot of my work is, and we were just talking about a particular people group in a country north of us that we've both had similar desires to reach. And he's a really good brother, I really actually have learned a lot from him. But one time in a conversation I said, "So how do you explain the gospel to such-and-such group?" And he went through, and he talked about a variety of things that weren't really gospel related. He kind of just gave examples of how he talked. And then I said, "So how do they respond?" And he said, "They must keep covenant with God, that's how they respond."

And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, they're, they come from an honor, shame culture and they, they abide in community, and they know what it means to be loyal to their community, and so they need to be

loyal to God.” And I said, “So what about faith alone?” He said, “Well, that’s just a western construct, they need to be faithful to God to be saved.” And –

Scott Dunford:

Wow.

E.D. Burns:

And so I’ve, how many times I’ve had this conversation in a variety of scenarios. He’s a westerner, but he’s not American, he was from another country. Good guy, he’s just, again it’s just kind of, it’s sloppy language and then if you push back and they say, “Well, faith, *pistos, pistuo*, can be translated as faithfulness,” and then they kind of go down that road. And say well, in their culture, that’s how they understand it. And so you’re creating, what it is is there’s people who are used to law, codes, rules, rituals.

Alex Kocman:

Yeah.

E.D. Burns:

And then Christianity’s introduced and it’s a lateral move from one works-based orientation to another and it makes sense to them. But that’s why it’s attractive to some missionaries is because it makes sense, is there’s no scandal, it’s just an alternative way of doing things, especially in a Buddhist or Hindu background where’s there’s a variety of ways of doing things. It’s just another wise way of doing things, it’s proverbial works. And so –

Scott Dunford:

Well, just a, just to go along with that, I do think this happens a lot with missionaries as well where they get a whiff of an idea, or they get exposed to an idea in a training seminar. You know they sit through a seminar –

Alex Kocman:

Yeah.

Scott Dunford:

and I mean I’ve seen it ‘cause I’ve taught some of these seminars. And then they take that nugget of understanding and then apply it like in all sorts –

Alex Kocman:

All the nuance is lost.

Scott Dunford:

of ways and just run down that road without really having dug into, you know, what the author that was being presented really meant by it or digging it, dig deep enough to actually use it in a meaningful way. It just gets applied as, “Hey, I got a new toy,” and, or, “I got a new hammer and now I’m hammering all the nails that I see even though some of them aren’t nails.” Do you think that’s part of this problem? Is maybe like a lack of understanding of what’s being meant by some of these terms?

E.D. Burns:

Yeah, and I mean it’s for that reason and even the reason that you kind of mentioned in side, in passing there about the author, not really knowing what he meant. Well, sometimes that’s just their problem is they’re not clear enough. Sometimes they, and maybe they are trying to make a big enough impression to change course and they overstate the case. And you

know we're all creatures of extremes and we're all reacting to something in some way, shape, or form. And we're just, the fact that God uses any of us is pretty amazing. But you know we all have our blind spots and some of those we –

Scott Dunford: True.

E.D. Burns: we're not even aware of. But I think it's a combination of some of those authors are trying to emphasize something to the exclusion of not emphasizing something enough. And then the really impressionable, enthusiastic young missionaries get in there, they hear it, and they run with it, and there's no quality control in the field. It's a high trust, low accountability area when you're on, among the front lines, unreached. And you know one of the best ways to create an unreached people group is to inoculate them with just enough Jesus –

Scott Dunford: Whew.

E.D. Burns: so that they think they know the Jesus –

Scott Dunford: Yeah.

E.D. Burns: of the Bible, but they don't. And it's just a syncretistic religion and then it's generations –

Scott Dunford: Right.

E.D. Burns: before you can actually pull out those weeds.

Alex Kocman: So here's a question for you, let's speak to that missionary.

E.D. Burns: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: Hopefully not the one who's in grave error, they exist, but the missionary who heard something at a training, found it useful, "Oh yeah, honor and shame," right?

E.D. Burns: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: But maybe things go a little bit out of proportion when you sort of run with something and put it into practice and some of the nuance is lost of that, as Scott was saying.

E.D. Burns: Mm-hmm.

Alex Kocman: Help that person understand, 'cause you're not denying that there's different cultural systems, and different ways in which we can categorize cultural, that's the premise of your whole book. And you're saying, "Hey, the gospel speaks transculturally to all of them. So help that person understand the ordering and ranking of priority, prioritization of those systems. Are all five of those systems, or four, are they all four even in priority? Is guilt, innocence at the center? Is union with Christ at the center

and then all of them, including guilt, righteousness are kind of in orbit around it? Or is it like, if you pardon the really long question, but is union with Christ at the center and then in orbit around that is guilt, righteousness? But then in orbit around guilt, righteousness are all of the other ones? So is it near to the center –

Scott Dunford: Got a lot of orbits.

Alex Kocman: But the, right, but which one is central and which one is really driving?

Scott Dunford: Yeah, that's a great question.

E.D. Burns: Yeah, so union with Christ, we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world so you know in some way we are united to him even before our creation. And so that's part of our story, if we are saints, or will be saints, we are, is we've been united with Christ. But the effect, the benefits, the blessings of Christ are ours since the cross and the resurrection because he earned all righteousness for us, and imputes us legally with his right standing and all its derivative blessings. So that's the legal linchpin.

And whether or not we want to admit it, all cultures to some degree have a moral code or some sort of inherent code in which they operate. They may not have a list of ten laws necessarily, but they're all operating on some sort of code of enoughness. And so I mean even in Islam there may be familial cultural codes that they follow to honor their parents or whatever, but it comes down to the fact that they want to be obedient to Sharia, that's the main issue, is Sharia law drives them. Now culturally, in their familial, communal relationships, they want to honor their parents but it comes down to that's the most righteous, honorable thing they can do in obedience to the laws of Islam if they're working to earn paradise. And so even atheists have their own internal moral code, and sometimes it's, sometimes it's a moral code in and of themselves, and that's where you get the individualistic paradigm. And people have, they create their own internal codes by which they follow in order to earn some level of experiential narcissistic freedom because they're running from bondage to external pressures or external authorities. But it is a code that if you do enough of this, then this will be your outcome.

And so what I do is I listen for, what I would say to these young missionaries or just, you know, missionaries who're still quite teachable, who're just kind of struggling with how do I make this work, is I listen for language of enoughness. I ask them, let's say they go to temple. And they're spinning the prayer wheels or something, and they just do it because this is what they've always done. But I'll ask them, "So what's, why do you do that?" And you know it drills down to, "Well, I need to earn righteousness so that my family's business doesn't go under, or we don't have another flood, because last time Uncle so-and-so, he did all these terrible things and then we had a terrible flood in our village, and we

know that he brought bad karma on the village. And so I have to go to temple and spin the prayer wheel,” or whatever, burn the incense to maintain blessing for the village.

And they live in fear and the alternative is not power, but peace, and so they’re doing what they gotta do to secure peace for their village and their family. And so then I ask, “Well, when do you know you’ve done enough?” And then they say, “Well, I don’t know, but I know that I’m doing enough now because we’re not living under a curse,” or whatever. And then I start with the, what they feel to be the problem and I work backwards to the problem in Adam. I use a method what I call just like teaching evangelism. And I have to create biblical categories, you know, unpack the biblical paradigm and the biblical story and show where the root problem goes back to Adam. And I don’t even, I don’t even end with the root problem is in themselves, I, because we all have a corporate head, I talk about our corporate identity in Adam and that that’s the problem and we’re all Adam’s progeny and we all act like our grandfather, Adam.

And then I, so I start with their experience and I move back to Adam, and then jump forward to the last Adam and show how he fixed the problem of the first Adam. And I use their felts, experiences to go back to the theological group. And that’s typically how I do it. Validating the human experience of weakness, bondage, fear, shame, but showing how the problem is solved by the last Adam fixing the first Adam’s problem.

Scott Dunford: Yeah, I like that.

Alex Kocman: I like that, that’s beautiful. What’s the biggest thing that you hope your readers walk away with with this volume? And there’s also a companion volume, right?

E.D. Burns: Yeah, the longer one, so this one has no footnotes, no bibliography. It’s really, it’s just over 100 pages, I guess, just a bit over. I hope this one will be really useful for people, that they can read it in a short week, or read it on a retreat, and just put into practice. I have a lot of conversations and scenarios in there of when you’re talking to a person from this kind of a culture, maybe how do you lead the conversation, how do you follow the trajectory of what they believe to be their problem, and how do you show them what the real problem is, carefully, cautiously, but theologically, you know, with precision. And so I hope this is really practical, and I give some practical discipleship ideas for people who are stuck in their system, and they just feel like they’re afraid that God isn’t blessing them and so they feel like they gotta do enough to make God happy with them again. Or you know, they’re struggling with why am I still weak when I’m supposed to be strong in Christ? What does it mean to be strong in Christ? Or what does this and that, freedom in Christ? So I hope it’s practical.

The longer one, “Ancient Gospel, Brave New World” that should be out here in the next month or so, month or two maybe. It’s just, we’re just

waiting on the foreword right now. But that is the academic unpacking of this, so that's a pretty heavy version. That does all the background work that people are wondering, "Oh, I'd like to explore that more." Well, probably the "Ancient Gospel, Brave New World" book will be much more helpful for the curious mind. But this one is intentionally short just to get into the hands of people.

Alex Kocman: Curious minds like Scott's, right? No, I, one of the things that I like about the book, that I find helpful –

Scott Dunford: And empathetic minds like yours, Alex.

Alex Kocman: Yes. I like the practicality of it, the fact that, you know, if I've got a Buddhist friend, I may not be able to understand Buddhism in one sitting, one could argue how much I need to. But what I can do is I can take some of those guiding questions and use that as a template for a conversation of all right, how do I spot those patterns, of like you call it, enoughness in that person and then point them to the one who's done it all for us. And that I think is something beautiful. Scott, do you wanna last, ask the last question.

Scott Dunford: Well, yeah, and I, I kind of do. I'm still trying to think through how we can help this to be most useful because I think you've clarified a lot of the concerns that I think a lot of people would have. But I still am wondering about the, you know, how do we encourage the missionary who's hearing some of these ideas, they may, you know, we need to encourage them to sit down and really read and dissect and understand the whole, the whole aspect of the gospel. What would you say to someone who's saying, "Well, some of these ideas, they seem to emphasize too much of like Paul's theology. They don't really bring into full understanding, you know maybe," this is a common criticism that I've heard is you know they don't, our proclamation of the gospel so heavily relies on Paul and Paul's use of the legal system and doesn't fully appreciate John's writing or the gospels and how Jesus is teaching, or even the Old Testament and how it points you to the gospel. Or maybe even fully understanding all of the orb of the way Paul's describing the gospel. How do we, to try to narrow it down here, how do we put a check on our own cultural bias as we're trying to find like what is the scripture really teaching about the gospel? What would you encourage maybe to a missionary who's wrestling with that?

E.D. Burns: Yeah, no, it's a valid question. Well, first of all I would say read chapter four and five of my "Ancient Gospel, Brave New World." That should settle the score on that, on those types of questions because what I do is I, I go back to Jewish writings, pre-Messiah Jewish writings and show how the language of imputation and guilt, righteousness merges out of the Jewish tradition, and is pervasive throughout the Old Testament but even extra-biblical, pre-New Testament writings. And the apostles carrying that along into the early church, the Gentile fathers, Latin fathers, Greek

fathers, really borrowing those old Jewish paradigms. And you know Roman Empire being transformed in some ways by the church who was introducing these transcultural paradigms that have been around for thousands of years. So it's not a Greco Roman paradigm, it's, it really is rooted in the Hebraic scriptures, and I belabor the point and go out of my way to show – even the early church how, I mean so many testimonies of the early church to the doctrine of justification and imputation, that the Reformation recovered, Reformation didn't define, it just recovered what was already pervasive in the early church. So both I do a lot of legwork showing that.

Another thing I would like to say is that I wrote this not, I mean I started writing it more with like a pastoral bent in it, and in some ways I had to write the “Ancient Gospel, Brave New World” more as an apologetic just to academically buttress what I'm trying to apply in “The Transcultural Gospel.” But I wrote it with compassion because of how many missionaries, myself included in so many seasons, go through times of barrenness and you cry out to God and you're asking God for help, and for blessing, and just for sustenance, and the only thing you hear is silence from, for year after year after year. And all of a sudden, your family loses their visa and your, you have to leave the country in three days, and you've left everything behind, and you're back in your passport country, and everybody thinks you're home, but you feel like you're a foreigner in your passport country.

And then there's that family that just, everything's going well, ministry is going great, kids love the Lord, the support's coming in, health is really good, it's just everything is a blessing. And then the missionary sits in his room at night just in the dark wondering, “What am I not doing enough of? Am I not, am I not sincere enough? Have I not surrendered all? Have I, am I not praying rightly?” I mean what, “Did I go to the wrong Bible school? Did I go to Bible school? Am I, what is wrong? Did I marry the wrong person? Is it that person that's slowing me down? Why is God doing this to me?” And it comes down to, it's the issue of karmic Christianity. A lot of missionaries operate in this paradigm of just they got to do enough or more or better so that God will really bless the ministry like those that we write biographies about who supposedly are those people who really surrendered all, that God really blesses those people and I wanna be like those people. Well, welcome to the normal Christian life, it's not like that for everybody. Some people put foreign armies to flight, some people receive their children back from the dead, some people triumph, and then some people are tortured for Christ by faith.

And so the book is hopefully an encouragement to people to press on and be okay with never doing enough and knowing that everything you do is going to be riddled with sin, but you can sleep like God loves you and is sovereign.

Alex Kocman:

That'll preach, wow, yeah. We are all taken captive by these systems of enoughness, right? I mean we can talk about Paul, and we can talk about Leviticus, and the guilt, innocence thing is happening in Leviticus, too. I mean we can talk about the theological side of it. But wow, we all do fall into those patterns of works, righteousness, and we need to gospel to deliver us from that. E.D., thank you for joining us. And you can get a copy of the book, should be available wherever find books on theology, missions, and practice are sold. I think founders.org would have it, and we're thankful for you having it, and contributing to this conversation. To get more content in that vein, go to missionspodcast.com, subscribe to this show, and while you're here, remember to review and leave a five-star rating, that helps us get this content in front of others. If you have a question or a comment, alex@missionspodcast.com. And you can support us as well on our website. Until next week, thank you for listening.

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