

Sunday, January 25, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 159
Sonship Edification: Precursors to Sonship, Part 5

Introduction

- Since halfway through Lesson 155, we have been discussing the precursors to Sonship Edification (SE). In Lesson 155 we provided the following non-exhaustive list of doctrinal forerunners to SE:
 - 1884—*The Theocratic Kingdom* by George N.H. Peters—3 Volumes
 - 1935—*The Berean Expositor, Volume XXV* by Charles Welch
 - 1936—*Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks* by G.H. Lang
 - 1972—*Edification Complex of the Soul* by R. B. Thieme, Jr.
 - 1981—*The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension* by Zane Hodges
- Further research and study since Lesson 155 reveals that at least one additional title (perhaps more in the future, especially additional titles by Hodges as well as others associated with the Grace Evangelical Society) should be added to this list.
 - 1992—*The Reign of the Servant Kings* by Joseph Dillow
- At this point in our survey of the forerunners of SE, we have covered the writings of Peters, Welch, and Lang from our original list presented in Lesson 155. In this lesson we want to briefly consider the precursory nature of Thieme’s *Edification Complex of the Soul*.

Precursors to Sonship, Continued

R.B. Thieme Jr.

- According to the back cover of *Edification Complex of the Soul*, Thieme grew up in Beverly Hills, CA and attended the University of Arizona, majoring in Greek. After graduation he was commissioned as an officer in the Cavalry. Prior to Pearl Harbor, Thieme transferred to the Army Air Force where he served in WWII and was placed on Reserve Status in 1946 as a Lieutenant Colonel. Following the war, Thieme attended Dallas Theological Seminary where he graduated Summa Cum Laude and learned of the science of textual criticism and furthered his studies of the original languages. According to Wikipedia, Thieme was “pastor of [Berachah Church](#), a nondenominational Christian church in Houston, Texas from 1950-2003. Affectionately called "the Colonel" by his congregation, he was a dispensationalist theologian who wrote over a hundred books and conducted over 10,000 sermons on various theological topics during his 55 years as a pastor.” (Click here to visit [R.B. Thieme Jr. Bible Ministries](#))

- Thieme shares in common with SE an inclination towards developing his own extensive vocabulary of non-biblical terminology. “Thieme’s doctrinal study and unique vocabulary were based on a methodology he called **ICE**: Isagogics, Categories, and Exegesis. **Isagogics** is the study of the Bible in its historical context, including the human writer, the recipients, and the time in which they lived. **Categories** refers to a topical compilation of doctrine, so that one can approach the Bible on a line-by-line-precept-by-precept basis, and cross-reference Scripture effectively. **Exegesis** as defined by Thieme involves studying the grammar, syntax, and etymology of the original languages of Scripture, so that one is not relying on intermediate translations which may obscure or lose meanings. Through the ICE method, Thieme sought to accurately communicate the truths of the Bible.” ([Wikipedia Entry](#))
- There are two primary reasons for my inclusion of R.B. Thieme as a forerunner of SE. The first is alluded to above; Thieme’s practice of developing his own specified non-scriptural vocabulary. Much like we observed at the beginning of our studies of SE (see [Lesson 145](#)), one must decode the meaning of Thieme’s lexicon of terminology before being able to follow/process his teaching. This practice on the part of SE teachers speaks to having been influenced by Thieme’s study/teaching methods. For example, we observed Newbold using/referring to the term ICE teaching in [Lesson 153](#) (see page 7). This allusion by Newbold, even though it is ultimately unfavorable, speaks to an awareness of Thieme’s methodology/terminology.
- The second reason for including Thieme as a precursor to SE is on account of his teachings regarding “edification” set forth in his 1972 book *Edification Complex of the Soul*. Thieme views edification in very hierarchical terms and utilizes much of the same terminology as SE to describe what he calls the “edification complex.” For example, Thieme’s system includes multiple “levels” and “phases” and possesses “checkpoints” that one must pass through as they advance through the various “levels” and “phases.” While Thieme’s system is ultimately different from the SE system of Blades, Newbold, McDaniel, and others; it bears many terminological and some conceptual similarities.
- On page one, Thieme makes a distinction between the believers positional completeness in Christ in Colossians 2:10 and his experiential reality. A believer’s soul possesses a deficiency, according to Thieme and for this reason believers are instructed to “grow or to progress toward maturity” in II Peter 3:18 and Ephesians 4:14-15. (Thieme, 1) Herein lies the “ultimate goal of the Christian life,” to “become a mature, stabilized believer with the capacity for maximum product for the Lord (i.e., labor with him in his business).” (Thieme, 1) Advancing in maturity is the function of what Thieme calls the “grace apparatus for perception” or GAP. GAP is the “provision of God whereby EVERY believer can understand EVERY doctrine in the Word, regardless of education or IQ (Eph. 3:18).” (Thieme, 1) The GAP assists the believer with Phase 1 of their Christian life set forth in Ephesians 3:19, TO KNOW. (Thieme, 1)
- According to Thieme, the GAP forms the basis for the “Edification Complex in the Soul” (ECS).

- “To know” is “ginosko” in the Greek. This word indicates the whole process of the GAP. When you are exposed to doctrine through the communication of a pastor-teacher, doctrine is inhaled through the filling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10) into the perceptive (left) lobe of the mind (“nous” in the Greek). If you understand what is taught, it becomes “gnosis,” or knowledge understood. “Gnosis” cannot be exhaled; that is, it has no application. It cannot build the EDIFICATION COMPLEX in the soul (ECS), which is the completed soul and fulfillment of our relationship with God.

“Gnosis” does not give eyes to the soul—in fact, it can do nothing for a person spiritually; it is simply intellectual comprehension of a point of doctrine. You can understand any human knowledge in your left lobe; but if you are going to understand God, you must have something that surpasses “gnosis.” It must become “epignosis” . . . In order for doctrine to become “epignosis,” it must be transferred BY FAITH from the perceptive lobe to the human spirit. In other words, doctrine must be believed to be anything more than mere intellectual comprehension.

. . . But once doctrine has been transferred by faith into the human spirit, it becomes residual doctrine, stored for cycling back into the right lobe’s frame of reference. Here it forms vocabulary, changes human norms and standards to divine norms and standards and gives divine viewpoint (i.e., it allows one to think like God thinks). The doctrine is then exhaled out the left bank of the soul toward God: you love God, and you exercise prayer and faith-rest toward Him. You also exhale out of the right bank of the soul toward people and produce divine good, love toward right man or woman and friends (i.e., you act like God acts). Everything depends upon “epignosis.” That is your spiritual IQ.

The result of “epignosis” is “that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.” The “fullness of God” is the ECS, a term which will be demonstrated to perfectly describe a mature believer. The only way to erect an ECS is to have building material, and this building material is “epignosis.” You cannot build an ECS with “gnosis”; so Bible doctrine has to become “epignosis.” (Thieme, 3-5)

- The implication is clear, only those believers that erect an ECS are mature and “filled with all the fullness of God.” Furthermore, the glorification spoken of in Ephesians 3:21 is potential for all believers but can only be accomplished or actualized by the using the GAP to build an ECS. The glorification spoken of in Ephesians 3:21:
 - “. . . depends upon the function of the grace apparatus in the church, which leads to the erection of the ECS; and the EC is reflected glory of God. . . The glory of the EC lasts through all eternity. The production of divine good and the EC—the “gold, silver and precious stones” (I Cor. 3:12-14), rewards which we will reflect in eternity—act as an eternal ECS. They will reflect the glory of God throughout all eternity just as the EC reflects the glory of God now.” (Thieme, 7)

- The ECS possesses the following five floors, according to Thieme.
 - “The reason for describing it as a “complex” is that the building in the soul is composed of five “floors:” 1) grace orientation (the understanding of God’s plan and the believer’s proper place in it); 2) mastery of the details of life (putting material things in their right perspective); 3) a relaxed mental attitude (the freedom from mental attitude sins); 4) capacity to love in all three categories (one-toward God; two-toward right man or right women; three—toward friends); and 5) the penthouse, “plus-H” or inner happiness (God’s happiness, which doesn’t depend on people, circumstances or things).” (Thieme, 9)

- Only those believers who have erected an ECS can understand the Bible on their own. This is on account of the fact that while a believer’s soul is saved at salvation, it needs proper stabilization through an ECS, according to Thieme. (19) Because being filled with “epignosis” is contingent upon the individual believer’s attitude, not all believers have what it takes to be filled with “epignosis” and thereby erect an ECS. (23) Given that believers will have to endure all sorts of pressures, tests, and distractions, it is natural for despondency and discouragement to set in. Consequently, only those who persist day after day will succeed in erecting an ECS (this is very similar to SE’s notion of whole heartedly committing to the curriculum and seeking one’s Sonship Education more than anything else). (23-24)
 - “That goal (the goal of Ephesians 4:13) is stated in the previous verse as EDIFCIATON and amplified in this verse as MATURITY. Whether a believer ever arrives at maturity or not depends on his faithfulness in functioning under GAP. “The unity of the faith” does mean an experience of everyone agreeing with everyone else. It is actually “the oneness of the doctrine” and connotes an objective. The objective is the maturity of the believer who has a consistent system of doctrine by which he orients, produces and lives. . . Unto (the objective) a perfect man,” actually, the “completed man.” The ECS is the “new man” or the “completed man.” He is a believer who has an EC, who is mature and therefore has reached the point of becoming spiritually self-sustaining (though he will never become spiritually independent). It means that he can meet the problems of divine guidance, he can orient to God’s grace in time of adversity or in time of prosperity, he can produce maximum divine good in Phase Two. So the “perfect man” is not a person who does not sin, but one who is a mature believer. . . Until you have an EC you cannot fulfill the purpose of your life in the angelic conflict (Unseen conflict in which the forces of Satan are warring against the forces of God.)” (Thieme, 36-38)

- The ECS is a hierarchical construct; one must build each one of the five floors of the complex in order. One must properly build the first floor before moving on to the second, and the second before the third and so on. Consequently, it is important to have “check points” along the way to ensure that each floor has been properly built before moving on to the next.
 - “. . . if you don’t operate on the basis of grace, it is pretty clear that you don’t have the first floor; and you can’t have the top floor if you don’t have the first floor. You can’t build floors two, three, four, or five unless you have the first one. The EC is not a house

built on stilts! All the floors have to be filled in. So it's important to have check points along the way." (Thieme, 55-56)

- As a general rule, *Edification Complex of the Soul* (the book) is very redundant and hard to follow in places. Thieme makes great jumps in his logic through his unique functional vocabulary that he does not prove with verses; a practice we have already observed in our investigation of SE. While Thieme's ECS system is different from SE, there are many concepts that carry over. Some of these include:
 - The use of a highly unique and specified unbiblical terminology: ICE, Grace Apparatus for Perception, ECS
 - Hierarchical system of levels and phases.
 - One must pass each "check point" to properly progress and build the ECS
 - Only those who erect an ECS as Thieme has described it are mature and filled with all the fullness of God.
 - One must commit and persist in the process in order for an ECS to be built
 - Reward at the judgment seat of Christ and participation in the "angelic conflict" is contingent upon properly erecting an ECS.
 - Future glorification is potential for all believers but is only accomplished or actualized by the using the GAP to build an ECS.
- For the record, I have checked into Thieme's teaching on joint-heirship in Romans 8:17. Thieme does not appear to have argued for a difference between "heirs" and "joint-heirs" in Romans 8:17. Consequently, Thieme's primary contribution to the development of SE resides in his hierarchical understanding of edification.
- Thieme's complex of levels, phases, and check points was picked up by early SE teachers and adapted to fit with a mid-Acts Pauline understanding of the Scriptures. As I stated at the end of Lesson 158, Thieme's EC provided the structural framework for what has been termed SE in our day. Doctrines gleaned from Lang, Hodges, Dillow and others were hung upon Thieme's framework like sheet rock secured to its framing.
- Using our illustration of SE as a river formed of many smaller tributaries, Thieme's *Edification Complex of the Soul* is one such contributor to the modern theological system of Sonship Edification.

Thieme, Blades, and Newbold: Establishing a Connection

- Proving a point of connection between Thieme, Blades, and Newbold is important to establishing the validity of my hypothesis.
- A few years back a member of Grace Life Bible Church gave me an entire box of R.B. Thieme booklets. At the time, I had no interest in reading them so I just boxed them up and kept them in my basement. Last fall when Thieme's name came up in class as possibly significant in the development of SE, I pulled out the booklets, organized them, and began reading.
- As I read, I encountered some familiar terminology that I had heard Brother Jordan use in Grace School of the Bible and/or in his other teachings. Some examples include:
 - The definition of Grace: "All that God is free to do for man on the basis of the cross."
 - Divine Institutions: "Principals set up by God for the perpetuation of the human race; viz., volition, marriage, family, and nationalism."
- This common vocabulary prompted me to write Brother Jordan and ask him about his exposure to the writings of Thieme. On January 7, 2015 Richard offered the following response:
 - I first heard of him (Thieme) thru Art Sims in the early 80s. He gave me several of his booklets. It took me a while to get a handle on his terminology but I actually liked some of it. "Rebound," for instance is a great term but his definition for it makes it unusable. "Edification Complex of the Soul" was another one, but I never really figured out what he meant by it. He is rather traditional Acts 2/Chafer type doctrine just put into new and strange wrappings, along with some peculiarities of his own added to the mix. I never found him that compelling and he is more often than not rather difficult to read." (Jordan, Facebook PM—1/7/15)
- Two days later on January 9, 2015, after asking some further clarification questions, Brother Jordan offered the following extended reply.
 - "Art was an Independent Baptist pastor (grad of Florida Bible College) in Naples, FL who in the late 70s came to see the "no water" view point before he ever met anyone in the "grace movement." When he came in contact with g-m (Grace Movement) preachers-GGFers at first--he had problems with their Lordship Salvation tendencies. I met him in the late 70s at the Cedar Lake BBF conference (while I still lived in AL), when Marvin Duncan taught the Daily Bible Hour and presented at least two strong Lordship messages. He and I had met at that meeting and together complained to the powers that be about the issue. Mr. Stam was very sympathetic and also took up the cause, resulting in its diminishing. Because so many in BBF and GGF are such strong Calvinists, this issue was always in the shadows (Lordship is rooted in Calvinism/Arminianism).

Through the years Art became disenchanted with both BBF and GGF and has long since gone his own way. He was always his own man/thinker.

I was in his church for a meeting in 80 or 81 (can't remember exactly off the top of my head) and he introduced me to Thieme, who he had once followed rather closely. At that time Art had been training Keith Blades, whose parents attended Art's church--this was when I met Keith. Keith had moved to Fort Myers and started a church there under Art's oversight. Not too long after this, Keith moved to Canada. . .

On the Thieme front, he (Sims) had moved on from him (Thieme) by the time we became acquainted due to his mid-acts understanding. Blades was with Art during this transition (away from Thieme to mid-Acts) and was very familiar with Thieme. As I mentioned, I got several booklets from Art and a couple of tapes. They were hard to read/listen to, so I didn't do much with them. Art had attended his Pastor's Conference in TX and I listened to a couple of those tapes, but wasn't really interested in all the Greek parsing and categorical type teaching he did.” (Jordan, Facebook PM—1/9/15)

- Since Richard heard of Thieme via Art Sims and Keith Blades trained under Sims, it is reasonable to assume (Richard says as much) that Blades also would have been familiar with Thieme’s work through his mentor, Sims.
- We have already demonstrated above, via his awareness of the acronym ICE, that Newbold is familiar with the teachings of R.B. Thieme. I am not the only one who has reached this conclusion regarding Newbold. Some time back (2011, I think the website is a bit unclear.), internetmonk.com ran a story by Chaplain Mike titled “[Whatever Happened to...R.B. Thieme, Jr.?](#)” While this article is largely critical of Thieme, it does contain an interesting list of ministries that are carrying on Thieme’s “legacy.” Included within this list is a link to [Triangle Bible Church](#) in Raleigh North Carolina. Triangle Bible Church is of course that assembly pastored by Mark Newbold. Observers of Triangle Bible Church, independent of myself, have noted the Thiemite influence and style associated with Newbold’s ministry.
- Given that Blades and Newbold both possessed an awareness of Thieme’s ministry and that these two brothers were the ones primarily responsible for the emergence of SE within the Grace Movement, it is reasonable to conclude that Thieme’s book *Edification Complex of the Soul* influenced their thinking on the subject of edification. This is further demonstrated by considering the hierarchical systems of edification developed by both Thieme and SE as well as by their shared terminology of: levels, phases, and checkpoints.
- Thieme’s concepts regarding edification provided the structural framework to which the rest of the SE doctrines were affixed. *Edification Complex of the Soul* is a tributary to the formation of SE.

Works Cited

Thieme, R.B. *Edification Complex of the Soul*. 1972.