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We Believe In:

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

ZANE C. HODGES

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
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It is a pleasure to be asked to write a guest article in Arthur Farstad's fine series, "We Believe In." Those readers who miss finding Dr. Farstad here will be glad to read his review of the New RSV elsewhere in this issue of the GES Journal.

I. Introduction

It is also a privilege to write about the subject of assurance of salvation. In today's evangelical world the doctrine of assurance is the subject of vigorous debate. Naturally, those who hold that a person can lose his salvation teach that assurance must be qualified by the fact that a true believer could be eternally lost. But, equally, those who hold to "Lordship Salvation" must qualify assurance as well.

Many advocates of Lordship Salvation believe in eternal security, yet lack personal assurance about *their own* eternal destiny. The reason is that, according to "lordship" thought, all born-again Christians will live generally holy lives and will persevere to the end in godly conduct. A person is not a Christian at all if these things are not true of him. But this view just means that one cannot tell for sure that he is saved until he has persisted in holiness to the conclusion of his life. Some "lordship" teachers are not very candid in telling people that they cannot actually have assurance until shortly before death—if, in fact, it is even possible then!

In sharp contrast with both Arminian and "lordship" thought stands the biblical doctrine of assurance. In his First Epistle, the Apostle John states:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may *know* that you have eternal life . . . (1 John 5:13a; italics added).

Clearly the inspired author believed that assurance was possible. His readers could *know* that they had eternal life!

Let us consider, then, this great biblical truth. For convenience we may do this under three headings. Each heading represents a fundamental facet of, or affirmation about, the NT doctrine of assurance.

Our three affirmations are these: (1) Assurance is based on the promises in God's Word; (2) Assurance must not be based on our works; and (3) Assurance is an inseparable part of saving faith.

II. Assurance is Based on the Promises in God's Word

The well-known text quoted above—1 John 5:13—teaches us that assurance of salvation is based on the *testimony of God*. That is to say, assurance is founded on *God's Word*.

Regrettably, however, this obvious fact is often overlooked. A very large number of commentators regard the words "these things I have written to you" as a statement about the purpose of the entire epistle.¹ They then often go on to take ideas like "abiding in him" (1 John 2:6, 24, etc.) and "keeping His commandments" (1 John 2:3, 7-10, etc.) as intended to be "tests" to determine whether we are saved or not.²

This view is a serious misreading of John's letter. It is also a dead end street. If "keeping His commandments," for example, is the way we can know we have eternal life, how long must this obedience continue before we are sure? Clearly, the logic of this view requires the answer to be: "to the end of life." No matter how well I may be doing right now, if I stopped "keeping His commandments" at some point in the future, I would prove myself to be without eternal life. In that case, one might say either that I had lost eternal life or that I never really had it at all.

Of course, the Arminian theologian is free to say that we do *know* that we have eternal life *as long as* we are "keeping His commandments." When we stop doing this we *lose* eternal life. Thus an Arminian can hold to *present* assurance but must reject any assurance about our final destiny in heaven or hell. The objection to this view is

¹ Many but by no means all. Indeed, Raymond E. Brown (*The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982], p. 608) writes: "What is the reference for . . . 'these things'? Many scholars (Alexander, Brooke, Klöpper, Schnackenburg, Schneider) refer it to 5:1-12 or to the last verse of that unit." Brown himself takes the reference to be to the whole epistle, but obviously there is no consensus view among technical commentators.

² This approach to the epistle seems traceable to the work by Robert Law entitled, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909). At least, Law's work popularized this conception of 1 John.

based on the plain fact that the author of 1 John simply did not believe eternal life could be lost. In his Gospel he makes this unmistakably clear (John 4:13-14; 6:35-40, 50-51; 10:27-30; 11:25-26). Thus, the Arminian reading of 1 John 5:13 clashes directly with the Apostle's basic theology.

But if it is claimed that the true believer is eternally secure—yet must base his assurance on his obedience to God's commands—in that case 1 John 5:13 becomes a highly misleading statement! For even if I am living obediently right now, the possibility exists (as we have said) that I may cease to do so in the future. But if I did cease to do so, that would prove that I am not *now* a Christian despite my obedient lifestyle. Thus my present obedience does *not* prove my Christianity and thus, too, I cannot *know* at any time before the end of my earthly career that I possess eternal life. So if John had meant we must test our Christianity by our current or ongoing obedience, he could not have honestly said that we can *know* we have eternal life. But that is precisely what he does say!

The mistake made here is simple. It is wrong to read 1 John 5:13 as a statement of purpose for the entire epistle. The purpose for the epistle is given precisely where we would expect it to be—in the Prologue (1:1-4). There the inspired writer makes plain that his purpose for writing is “fellowship” between the apostolic circle and the readers (1:3a) and, beyond that, “fellowship . . . with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1:3b). There is not a word about “assurance”—however basic that may be to true fellowship with God.

But in 1 John 5:13 the phrase “these things I write to you” ought to be taken as a reference to the material immediately preceding it. This, in fact, is how this phrase is used elsewhere in the epistle (see 2:1 referring to 1:5-10; and 2:26 referring to 2:18-25). Here, in chapter five, the relevant passage is found in vv 9-12. In the NKJV the verses read as follows:

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:9-12).

From these words it is clear that John is insisting on the believability of the “witness (= testimony) of God.” This “testimony,” he asserts, can be either accepted or rejected. If we accept it, we have internalized that

testimony so that the believer has that testimony “in himself”—in his heart (v 10a). To reject this testimony is to make God out to be a liar (v 10b). Obviously the issue here is the truth or falsity of what God declares.

And what does God declare? What is His testimony about His Son? Simply this: that eternal life is God’s gift to us in Christ (v 11a). And since this kind of life is *in* God’s Son, there is no other qualification for possessing it than to possess God’s Son (vv 11b, 12). The believer in the Son may therefore *know* that he has eternal life (v 13a).

Upon reflection, the assumption which underlies the Apostle’s flow of thought is clearly this: *To believe in God’s Son as the Appointed Giver of eternal life (v 11) is to possess the Son and the life He gives (vv 12, 13)*. Thus the one who believes God’s testimony about His Son possesses within himself or herself the testimony, the Son, and eternal life all at once! Or, as James would say, “Of His own will He brought us forth with the *word of truth*” (Jas 1:18; italics added).

All of this is extremely simple. There is absolutely no effort on the Apostle’s part to add additional “checks,” “tests,” or “verifications.” The believer’s assurance that he possesses eternal life is directed totally and unambiguously toward the truth of what God says about His Son. In that truth he is invited to rest.

Notably absent from all this is the agonizing search which introspective believers often make in an effort to be sure that they have *really* believed. Such a search is misdirected. We are not called upon to “have faith in our faith.” We are called upon to have faith in what God says about His Son. All efforts to find assurance somewhere else than in the testimony of God are doomed ahead of time to dismal failure.

Thus, also, in such a simple salvation verse as John 5:24 we meet again the message of assurance:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

My own father found personal assurance of salvation through this verse. And why should he not? Its declarations are not in the least complex. If we hear Christ’s Word and believe the One who sent Him (the Greek has no word here for “in”)—that is, if we accept what God has to say through Christ!—*then* we possess eternal life, are safe from judgment, and have moved out of the sphere of spiritual death into the sphere of spiritual life. If anyone can read this verse and yet *not realize* that eternal life is his, he has either rejected the truth of the verse or has

failed to understand it.

Even more simple (if that is possible) is John 6:47:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).

One notices here the solemn affirmation, “Most assuredly, I say to you.” We might paraphrase these words like this: “You can certainly count on what I now say to you.” And what does He now say? This: “He who believes in Me has everlasting life.” If I take His Word for that, then I will know that in the very act of believing His Word I am guaranteed eternal life.

If a person cannot find assurance from so straightforward a declaration as this, then he is clearly looking for assurance in the wrong places. For here, beyond doubt, Jesus offers a guarantee to every believer in Him. “Take My Word for it!” He declares. “When you believe, you *have* eternal life.”

One is tempted to marvel that in the face of such direct, uncomplicated declarations, so many evangelicals continue to struggle with doubts and lack of assurance. But wherever this is the case, the struggling soul is looking for something *in his own experience*—even in his own experience of “believing”—rather than looking to Christ and the sufficiency of His Cross. To put it another way, such a person is not looking at God’s testimony about His Son, or to our Lord’s own words of promise to the believer.

If he were, he would be sure!

III. Assurance Must Not Be Based on Our Works

The reader of John’s Gospel will note how often it is mentioned that the one who believes in Jesus has eternal life. Not once, however, does the inspired writer suggest that this guarantee can be disallowed if there are no good works in a believer’s life.

Of course, there is every reason to believe that there *will* be good works in the life of each believer in Christ. The idea that one may believe in Him and live for years totally unaffected by the amazing miracle of regeneration, or by the instruction and/or discipline of God his heavenly Father, is a fantastic notion—even bizarre. *We reject it categorically.*

But this is not at all the point. The issue here is assurance. And with this, works can play no decisive role whatsoever.

We should have known this fact all along. After all, did not the Apostle Paul write:

But to him *who does not work* (italics added) but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness . . . (Rom 4:5)?

In the face of this assertion, how can anyone suppose that “works” must nevertheless be the real grounds on which I am assured of my salvation? That is, how can good works be indispensable to my certainty that I am justified *without works*?

What nonsense! It is as though God had said, “My justification is for the person who does *not* work, but *assurance* of my justification is only for someone who *does!*” Any form of theology that reduces to that stands self-condemned.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul declares that salvation is God’s free gift and that it is “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8, 9). But according to many teachers today—both of the Arminian and “lordship” persuasions—*assurance* IS “of works”! It is not surprising that such theology reinvigorates man’s latent desire to boast. For, on this view, my “good works” become the badge of my acceptance before God and they are the basis on which I can judge others as “unworthy” of the name of Christian. Let there be no mistake, where such views are held they are often accompanied by spiritual pride and by a harsh, judgmental spirit toward those who do not “measure up.”

Furthermore, Paul also wrote:

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace *but as debt* (Rom 4:4; italics added).

And later he said:

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; *otherwise grace is no longer grace*. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; *otherwise work is no longer work* (Rom 11:6; italics added).

“Grace and works,” says the Apostle, “are mutually antithetical. Works are rewardable endeavors, the pay they gain is a matter of obligation. Thus to say that a thing is by grace is to exclude works—or it is to so change the nature of grace that it is no longer grace at all!”³

³Commenting on Rom 4:4-5, Anders Nygren has written refreshingly: “With that [the statement of 4:3] Paul has reached a point which is of utmost importance in his interpretation. Here he can tolerate no mistiness. He must insist on clear and precise characterization. He tolerates no indecision between faith and works. He sets forth a clear either/or. *Either* it depends on works—and then boasting can continue, since it is not by

But despite these clear distinctions, many forms of theology hopelessly mix grace and works. This is precisely what is being done by “lordship” thought. Salvation, we are told, is by grace but assurance is impossible apart from works.⁴ Thus I can be sure that God has been gracious to me only if I work hard for Him! God’s *goodness* to me in Christ thus is held hostage to my *performance* for Him. In the process grace ceases to be grace, as Paul said.

It is pure sophistry to argue that what is meant in such theology is only that works are produced by grace and are simply its necessary results. On the contrary, if I cannot get to heaven apart from the regular performance of good works, those works become as much a *condition* for heaven as faith itself. Many theologians who hold to the kind of synthesis we are discussing, honestly admit that good works *are* a condition for heaven!⁵ But in so saying, they run their ship aground against Rom 4:4 and 11:6, and indeed against the whole biblical doctrine of grace.

We said earlier that we believe that all born-again Christians will do good works. We believe it, however, because it appears to be the only rational inference from the scriptural data. But, let it also be said clearly, it is an inference. No text of Scripture (certainly not Jas 2:14-26!) declares that all believers will perform good works, much less that they cannot be sure of heaven unless they do.⁶ *No text says that!*

grace but by his own merit that man is judged righteous. Or it depends on faith—and then all else is excluded, works, merit, wages, boasting; and then it is indeed the justification of the *sinner*. In other words, it is no longer a matter of *our* works, but of *God’s*. Faith always has the action of God as its correlative. Faith is what it is because of its dependence on God. When Paul speaks of faith, he never means, so to say, a mere psychological operation; for faith is always determined by its object. Thus he speaks, in this connection, of faith as ‘faith in him who justifies the ungodly.’ Only in this way, that God acts and we allow Him to act, can the righteousness of God come to us. Thus, by the nature of the case, the righteousness of *God* cannot be other than the righteousness of *faith*. Scripture testifies for Paul, in the passage cited, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” See Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 169-70.

⁴Cf. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 23: “Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit’s transforming work in one’s life. . . .” MacArthur means, of course, that assurance comes by seeing “good works” in our lives. Attributing such works to the Spirit does not change the fact that he is still talking about *our* “works”—i.e., what *we* do, rather than what *Christ* has done on the Cross.

⁵See, for example, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., “The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 26-52. Note the statement, on p. 43, that “evangelical obedience is an absolute necessity, a ‘condition’ in man’s justification.” Thus Logan bids farewell to Pauline theology!

⁶For an extended and documented discussion of Jas 2:14-26, see the author’s booklet, *Dead Faith—What Is It? A Study of James 2:14-26* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1987).

When the NT writers speak of eternal salvation they always use the language of John and Paul. That kind of language should be allowed to sink into our hearts most deeply: The *believer* has eternal life; the one who does *not* work but *believes* is justified; salvation is by *grace* through *faith* and is *not* of works; it is *not* by works of righteousness which *we* have done—the reader can add many texts of his own. It is inconceivable, in light of this scriptural teaching and terminology, that an experience so utterly divorced from our performance *must be verified* by our performance.

Indeed the only way to maintain such a position—apart from an unscriptural Arminianism—is to radically rewrite the biblical doctrine of saving faith. In the process, the whole concept of faith is shrouded in obscurity so that the introspective person is swallowed up into an abyss of fruitless self-examination. At the end there can be no assurance based on our works—only despair.

But there can be, of course, self-delusion based on our works. And anybody who believes he has verified the reality of his justification by his own good deeds has experienced that delusion in spades.⁷ In fact he has forgotten the searing words of our Lord to a self-righteous young ruler:

No one is good but One, that is, God (Luke 18:19).

If the Lord's words are true—and they are—how can my *lack of goodness* ever verify God's gracious justification by faith? The idea reduces to nonsense or to a pointless assertion that I am *better* than I was, or that I am *better* than most other people are. But does anyone really suppose that a man who must say of himself, "I am *not* good," can ever find verification of his personal salvation in his "good" works?

The "bottom line" is simple: If I seek assurance through examining my good deeds, one of two things must necessarily result: (1) I will minimize the depth of my own sinfulness and the extent to which—even as a Christian—I fall short of the glory of God, or (2) I will see my deep sinfulness as hopelessly contrary to any conviction that I am saved.

Those who travel the first route are traveling the highway of self-righteousness. They are utterly blind to the reality that they are evil people whose lives are still infinitely remote from the perfect holiness of God. The claim they make that their lives are "good enough" to verify their salvation clashes blatantly with our Lord's assertion: "No one is good but One, that is, God." Such claims are the very essence of

⁷I. e., "to the nth degree." Ed.

Pharisaism and are perfectly exemplified by the Pharisee who prayed:

God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector (Luke 18:11).

But he *was* like other men. He was *not* good!

Those, however, who follow the second route and decide that they are too sinful to claim to be saved are traveling a highway that leads to frustration and despair. In many such individuals the road also ends in depression.

No. Good works can never be a fundamental ground of assurance. It is logically and theologically absurd to claim that a salvation which is *apart from* works, is not recognizable *except by* works. God's Word teaches no such thing.

IV. Assurance Is an Inseparable Part of Saving Faith

The problem which modern evangelicals have with assurance is often a problem of focus. If a person focuses on himself—his own experiences, character, or good deeds—he will discover how shifting and uncertain are the matters he is examining. Indeed, all of us are in the process of change in the present and are subject to unanticipated change in the future. Even our own understanding of ourselves is notoriously fickle and subject to alteration. The self and its experiences can furnish no solid focus for assurance at all.

But Christ and His Cross can. And God's Word about these things can. It is only as we look beyond ourselves to God's unchanging truth that we can find firm ground for our personal assurance. Indeed, Christ Himself is the same at all times (Heb 13:8), the Cross is God's definitive and final solution to the problem of man's sin, and God's Word is the unchanging bedrock on which assurance may be grounded.

Thus, in the light of all we have said so far, it is the Word of God alone that can adequately meet man's need for certainty about his eternal destiny. But now we must add this: This need for certainty is met by the very offer of the Gospel itself so that assurance is necessarily a part of believing that Gospel.

Quite appropriately John Calvin stated this truth in his *Institutes*:

In short, no man is truly a believer unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him, . . . unless he depend on the promises of the Divine benevolence to him and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation (*Institutes* III.II.16).

For Calvin, therefore, assurance was of the very essence of saving faith. That is to say, assurance that I am saved is part and parcel of believing the Gospel message.⁸

⁸Long before the contemporary debate over the terms of salvation and over the grounds of assurance, a 19th century Reformed theologian, Robert L. Dabney, had strenuously objected to Calvin's view that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. He even goes so far as to charge Calvin (and Luther!) with overreacting to Roman Catholic dogma. Thus, in a treatise written against Plymouth Brethren theology, Dabney asserts: "The source of this error [of the Plymouth Brethren] is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin, were led to adopt from their opposition to the hateful and tyrannical teachings of Rome. This mother of abominations denies to Christians all true assurance of hope, teaching that it is neither edifying nor attainable. Her purpose is clear: the soul justified by free grace, and assured of its union to Christ, would no longer be a practicable subject for priestcraft and spiritual despotism. These noble Reformers, seeing the bondage and misery imposed by this teaching upon sincere souls, flew to the opposite extreme, and (to use the language of theology) asserted that the assurance of hope is of the essence of saving faith. Thus says Calvin in his Commentary on Romans: 'My faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has pardoned and accepted me.' According to these divines, it is not enough for a penitent soul to embrace with all its powers the gracious truth, 'Whosoever believeth shall be saved,' while yet its consciousness of exercising a full faith is confused, and remaining anxieties about its own salvation mar its peace. Such an act of soul is not admitted by them to be even a true yet weak faith; they hold that until the believer is assured that *Christ has saved HIM*, there is no exercise of saving faith at all. This old error is evidently the source of Dr. [César] Malan's view of faith, which, as visitors to Geneva twenty years ago remember, he was so sure to obtrude upon all comers. Now our Plymouth Brethren and their sympathizers have a contempt and mistrust for great ecclesiastical names and church authorities, which prevents their employing the recognized nomenclature of historical theology on this and many other subjects. Hence they prefer to express their peculiarities in terms of their own, less discriminating than the old. We do not find them indeed deciding that 'the assurance of hope is of the essence of a true saving faith;' but we find them in substance reviving *this extravagance of the first Reformers* [italics added here only], and pressing its corollaries."

Subsequent to the treatise from which we have just quoted, in a letter to the editor of the *South-Western Presbyterian*, Dabney vigorously defended his claim that both Luther and Calvin taught that assurance was of the essence of saving faith. His words (to an individual identified as M.N.) deserve somewhat extended quotation:

"Now, I assert that Calvin . . . was incautious enough to fall into the erroneous statement, that no faith was a living faith which did not include essentially both the assurance of faith and the assurance of hope. He is not satisfied that even the weak, new believer shall say, 'I believe, with head and heart both, that Christ saves *all who truly come to him*, and I accordingly try to trust him alone for my salvation, and so far as I have any hope, rest it on him alone.' He requires every one to say, in substance, I believe fully that *Christ has saved me*. Amidst all Calvin's verbal variations, this is always his meaning; for he is consistent in his error. What else is the meaning of that definition of which M. N. himself quotes from the *Institutes*: 'Our steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us.' But I will show, beyond all dispute, that the theological 'Homer nodded,' not once, but all the time, on this point. See then *Institutes*, Book III., Chap. II., Sec. 16. 'In short, no man is truly a believer, unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to *him*, . . . and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation.' *Commentary*, on Rom. viii. 16: 'The opinion consequently stands, that no one can be called a son of God *who does not know himself to be such*.' On Romans viii. 34: 'Because our faith is naught *unless we certainly persuade ourselves that Christ is ours*, and that the Father is

In so writing, of course, Calvin gave expression to a biblical truth. As we have already seen, anyone who believes verses like John 5:24 and 6:47 (to name only two) also believes that he has eternal life. If one does not believe that he has eternal life he does not believe these verses. "He who believes in Me has eternal life" necessitates the conclusion that I have eternal life at the moment of my faith.

But someone may ask: Is it not possible to believe in Christ and not find out until later that I have eternal life? The answer to this question

propitious to us in him.' On 1 Cor. ii. 12: 'Let us know, therefore, that this is the nature of faith, that the conscience has from the Holy Spirit a certain testimony of the divine benevolence towards itself.' On 2 Cor. xiii. 5: 'Paul here testifies, *that whoever doubt whether they possess Christ, are reprobate.*' Is M. N. satisfied? *Heidelberg Catechism* (not written by Calvin, but by two of his pupils): 'What is faith?' (Qu. 21) 'A certain trust,' 'by which I acquiesce in God, certainly concluding that remission of sins, and eternal righteousness and life, *have been bestowed*, not on others only, but *on me also*,' etc. *Genevan Catechism* (written by Calvin himself): It is 'a certain and stable knowledge of God's paternal benevolence towards us.'

"When I represented Calvin's view of faith, as substantially set forth in his *Commentary on Romans*, as amounting to this: 'My faith is a divine and spiritual belief that God has pardoned and accepted me,' M. N. said that if it were so (which he disputes), 'Homer must have been nodding when it slipped in.' Have I not showed that it is there, and everywhere in Calvin, and that it did not 'slip in,' but is his deliberate opinion? M. N. has *confessed that it is untenable*. Why then should there be any more difference between us, except that while I cherish a great, I do not feel an *indiscriminate* admiration for this Reformer?

"I will complete this part of my proof as to Luther also, who shared Calvin's error. The *Augsburg Confession*, written by Melancthon, but under Luther's eye, says, Art. IV., the Lutherans also teach that men are 'justified gratuitously on account of Christ by faith, *when they believe themselves* to be received into grace, and their sins to be pardoned on account of Christ.'" See (for the first quotation) "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren," in *Discussions by Robert L. Dabney, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Texas, and for Many Years Professor of Theology in Union Theological Seminary in Virginia*, ed. C. R. Vaughan, vol. 1: *Theological and Evangelical* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1890), 173, as well as 216-17 (for the second quotation, contained in a section also entitled "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren").

Obviously, by charging Calvin and Luther with "extravagance" in reacting to Roman Catholic teaching, Dabney is confessing that his own theology is closer, by so much, to Catholicism than the theology of the Reformers! His candor on this subject is refreshing compared to the "fudging" done by some contemporary theologians. What, in fact, could be more candid than this assertion: "1. That Calvin and Dr. Malan, and the Plymouth Brethren, hold a definition of the nature or essence of saving faith which is, in one respect, contrary to the Westminster Confession and to the Scriptures, as well as to the great body of the confessions of the Presbyterian Churches, and of their divines since Calvin's day. I said, by way of apology for the earliest Reformers, and most notably, Luther and Calvin, that they were betrayed into this partial error by a praiseworthy zeal against the opposite and mischievous error of Rome, who seeks to hold believers always in doubt of their salvation M. N. will not have it so; then he will needs have his admired leader discredited, for as sure as truth is in history, Luther and Calvin did fall into this error, which the Reformed churches, led by the Westminster Confession, have since corrected" (*Discussions*, 215). Thus Dabney *insists* on the gap that separates his theology from that of the Reformers!

is “no” if by “believe in Me” we mean the same thing as John meant by these words.

What did John mean by them? The answer is clearly given in the Evangelist’s theme statement in chapter 20:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

From this crucial declaration we may conclude that to “believe in Me” means to “believe that Jesus is the Christ.”

But what does that involve? Jesus’ words to Martha are instructive here:

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

The challenge of Jesus, “Do you believe this?”, is met by Martha as follows:

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (John 11:27).

What is striking in all this is that our Lord’s claim to be the Guarantor of resurrection and eternal life to every believer is met by Martha’s affirmation that Jesus is the “Christ.” Thus Martha’s declaration of faith is couched in precisely the terms used in the thematic statement of John 20:30-31. To believe that “Jesus is the Christ” is what it means to “believe in Me.”

But the words of our Lord also help us to comprehend what is intended by the term *Christ*. The term *Christ* is not, as so often in popular usage today, a mere additional name for Jesus. Instead, as John 11:25-26 make plain, the “Christ” is the very One who assures the believer that he will rise from the dead (if he dies) and that the believer possesses a life that can never be terminated by death—that is, he possesses eternal life. When Martha affirmed Jesus to be the “Christ” she was affirming Him to be precisely such a Person as He had just described Himself to be.

But Martha could not have believed this truth without realizing that she herself had eternal life. *If the “Christ” guaranteed resurrection and eternal life to the person who believed Him to be the “Christ,” then by believing this Martha knew that she had what He guaranteed!* In other

words, to believe in Him was to accept His guarantee of eternal salvation. To doubt the guarantee (for any reason whatever) was to doubt that Jesus was the "Christ."

The bottom line, therefore, is exactly what John states in his First Epistle:

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1; italics added).

There are *no* exceptions to this! "Whoever" is the pivotal word here. Belief that Jesus is the Christ—that is, the One who assures the believer of future resurrection and of eternal life—is *saving* belief. A faith which has as its content "Jesus is the Christ" (in the Johannine sense) is *saving* faith. But to believe this is to *know* that I am saved. Assurance, therefore, is inseparable from—and part of the essence of—saving faith.⁹

Consequently, the individual believer who knows that Jesus *is* the Christ, knows also that he himself *is* "born of God" (1 John 5:1). It's as simple as that.

How then did so many evangelicals become so badly confused? There is more than a single answer to this question, but one answer is this. When we begin to test our faith by our works, we actually begin to alter the very nature of faith. And we alter it radically and without biblical warrant.

In fact, once we have become preoccupied with what we imagine ought to be the "effects" of faith, we have destroyed the true focus of faith. We have withdrawn its gaze from the external and unchanging "testimony" of God and focused instead on the shifting "testimony" of our own hearts and lives.

Having done this, we try hard to turn faith into something "productive" and "effective." Faith, we decide, cannot be merely "receiving the witness of God." It cannot be, we tell ourselves, merely "standing on the promises" of His Word. Surely it is not, we think, simply "resting" in who Jesus is and in what He guarantees.

⁹We do not mean to imply that a person who has found assurance through faith in Christ can then never lose that assurance. We simply affirm that at the moment of saving faith assurance is a part of that faith. Yet Satan knows well how to attack a believer's faith and how to create doubts. But, of course, Satan cannot undo the regenerating work of God in the one who has already believed. For a discussion of this significant issue, see Dr. Charles Stanley's excellent chapter, "For Those Who Stop Believing," in *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990), 73-83. See also Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan, 1989), 103-13. Finally, see as well the extract from John Calvin's *Institutes* printed in this issue of *JOTGES*, pp. 47-51.

But then what is it? Many of the contemporary evangelical answers are filled with confusion and permeated by error. When faith ceases to be merely taking God's Word for things, it becomes something mysterious, imprecise, vague, and numinous. It can then be said to include such unrelated concepts as repentance, surrender, willingness to obey, devotion, a worshipful spirit, etc.—the list goes on and on. And the list is entirely unbiblical and without a shred of scriptural support.

When Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:25), His words mean exactly what they appear to mean. "I have just stated certain claims about My own Person," our Lord is saying, "Do you accept these claims?"

Martha did, and because she did she had assurance of eternal life.

V. Conclusion

Many excellent members of the Grace Evangelical Society like to define "faith" in terms of "trust." There is no problem with this so long as we are careful about how we say it.

We must be careful, for example, not to make "faith" and "trust" somehow essentially different. Faith *is* trust, and trust *is* faith. When I believe that any particular message is true (even a human one), I am "trusting" that message. I am also "trusting" the Person who gives me the message—I am accepting that person's veracity and reliability.

The scriptural message (from John's point of view) is very simple and direct:

Jesus is the Christ.

If I "receive the testimony of God" about this, then I am trusting this message. And I am also trusting the God who gives me that message.

Evangelicals must resist the seductive temptation to attach "riders" and "provisos" to our message about faith alone in Christ alone. We must resist the specious allurements of telling people that *saving* faith is a certain kind—or a special kind—of faith.

It is not. The faith that saves is not qualitatively distinct from faith exercised in other situations. What is distinctive about *saving* faith is that it has a particular message to believe. And that message *is* distinctive—indeed, it is even radical, unique, and life-begetting (Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23-25). And the radical message may be stated like this:

The one who believes that Jesus is the Christ possesses divine, unending life.

No one can believe this message without being saved (1 John 5:1). And no one can believe this message without being *sure* that he is saved! The message, in fact, is God's true, reliable, and unchanging "witness" to us.

It is "the testimony that God has given of His Son" (1 John 5:10). And by itself—altogether apart from the "help" of good works!—*God's* testimony furnishes a totally sufficient basis for our personal assurance of salvation. Furthermore, this testimony is permanently recorded for us in His holy Word. It is always there to be relied on.

So after all, if I have God's Word for something, what else do I need?

REPENTANCE AND SALVATION

Part 5:

New Testament Repentance: Repentance in the Epistles and Revelation

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I. Introduction

There is some disagreement among Bible scholars as to the intended readership of the NT books from Romans through Revelation. Two major schools of thought exist.

One school of thought suggests that the Epistles and Book of Revelation were addressed to *professing* Christians.¹ This group, they argue, contained both true and false professors. Hence they find many passages in Romans through Revelation which they interpret as warning professing believers that they will go to hell if they fail to live consistent, godly lives.

A second school of thought is that the Epistles and Revelation are addressed to believers in Jesus Christ. According to this view all of the people to *whom the books were specifically addressed* were genuine believers.

Within this group some argue that there are passages which warn believers (i.e., genuine believers) that they will end up going to hell if they fail to live consistent, godly lives.² This would be the Arminian

¹ See, for example, John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 22-23; James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 110-12, 166-67; Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 67-77.

² See, for example, Ray B. White, "Eternal Security" *Insecure or The Heresy of "Once In Grace Always in Grace"* (Zarephath, NJ: Pillar of Fire, 1939); C. J. McElligott, *The Crown of Life: A Study of Perseverance* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1963); Robert Shank, *Life in the Son*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1960, 1961); Guy Duty, *If Ye Continue* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship: 1966); I. Howard Marshall, *Kept By The Power of God: A Study of Perseverance And Falling Away* (London: Epworth Press, 1969).

understanding.

Others in this group argue that there are no passages which warn believers, professing or otherwise, that they will go to hell if they fail to live consistent, godly lives.³ This would be the Free Grace understanding.

How a person views the readership of these books greatly affects his or her understanding of the doctrine of repentance expressed within them.

This article will proceed with the understanding that the Epistles and Revelation are addressed to believers in Jesus Christ—not to a mixture of believers and unbelievers. While unbelievers surely have read these letters, the letters were addressed to actual believers in Jesus Christ, as the authors plainly indicated in their letters.⁴

We begin this study with a consideration of the condition of eternal salvation as found in the Epistles and Revelation.

II. The Gospel in the Epistles and Revelation

The Epistles and Revelation, while not evangelistic in purpose, affirm the truth of John 3:16: whoever believes in Jesus Christ, and Him alone, has eternal life. The following references give support to this point:

Romans 3:21-24: But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 4:5: But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Galatians 2:16a: Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:6-7: Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted

³See, for example, Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 47-49, 59-66, 135-44; Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids and Dallas: Zondervan Publishing House and Redención Viva, 1989), 47-88; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3: Soteriology (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 347-93.

⁴See, for example, Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:19-20; 2 Cor 1:1; 5:1-21; Gal 1:9; Eph 1:1; 2:8-9; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:2-4; 2 Thess 2:13-14; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:5; Titus 1:4; Phlmn 4-7; Heb 6:4-5; Jas 1:16-18; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 John 2:25; 5:9-13; 2 John 1; 3 John 1-3; Rev 1:5; 2:1-3:22.

to him for righteousness.” Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

1 John 5:1a: Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

1 John 5:10-13a: He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. . . .

I did not attempt to provide passages from First or Second Peter, James, or Hebrews, since to do so would require citing extended portions—and even then I would need to provide exegetical comments.

Needless to say, if the NT is consistent and does not contradict itself—if the Pauline and Johannine Epistles can be shown clearly to teach that the sole condition of salvation is faith in Christ alone—then the other books must agree.

It is clear from the passages cited above that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life. It logically follows from this that if repentance is also said to be a condition (a point which some question⁵), then it must either be a synonym for faith or else an essential precursor to it.

Let us now turn to a consideration of passages in the Epistles and Revelation in which repentance is given as a condition of eternal salvation. In my estimation, there are very few. I have identified only three.

III. Repentance as a Condition of Eternal Salvation

A. 1 Thessalonians 1:9

You *turned* to God from idols to serve the living and true God
(emphasis supplied).

The normal NT word for *repent*, *metanoeō* is not used here. Rather, the verb *epistrephō* is used. It means *to turn*. The Thessalonians *turned*

⁵See Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 143-63..

to God from idols. The question is, was this turning necessary for eternal salvation or was Paul merely reporting what the Thessalonians had done?

Since an idolator cannot obtain eternal salvation without giving up his faith in idols and then placing his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, this passage almost certainly is speaking of what the Thessalonians did to gain eternal life.

According to Luke, some in Thessalonica were persuaded by Paul's preaching about the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:1-4). The reference to being persuaded (*peithō*) about Christ is synonymous with coming to faith (*pisteuō*) in Him. The Thessalonians were saved when they turned from faith in idols to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some see this verse differently. They suggest that the Thessalonians were saved both because they turned to God from idols and also because they made a *commitment* to serve God.⁶ MacArthur uses this verse to suggest that to be saved one must make "a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead."⁷

The infinitival clause at the end of our verse is used by some to support this view. Paul indicates that the Thessalonians turned to God from idols "*to serve the living and true God.*"

This interpretation does not stand up under careful scrutiny.

Paul does not say that the Thessalonians made a commitment to serve God. Nor does he say that their serving God was a condition of salvation. What he does say is that they turned to God from idols *with the result that* or *for the purpose of* serving God. Whether we understand the infinitival clause as expressing purpose or result is inconsequential as far as the Gospel message is concerned. In either case their salvation was not contingent upon this action.

Note, too, that Paul does not say that all people who trust in Christ do so with the *result* that they serve God or for the *purpose* of serving God. He simply reports that this was true of the Thessalonians. This verse cannot even rightly be used to show that all believers will definitely begin the Christian life by serving God, although that is clearly God's desire.

⁶ See, for example, MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 162-63; James E. Rosscup, "The Relation of Repentance to Salvation and the Christian Life," Unpublished paper presented at the 1989 Annual Evangelical Theological Society meetings held in San Diego, California, 47-49.

⁷ MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 163.

B. Hebrews 6:1

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of *repentance* from dead works and of faith toward God (emphasis supplied).

Here we meet again the normal NT word for *repentance*—*metanoia*. The people being addressed were Jewish believers (cf. 3:1; 10:10, 19-25; 12:1-2; 13:22). According to the passage we are now considering, they had already laid the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

The word repentance (*metanoia*) literally means a change of mind or perspective.⁸ The readers had already come to change their perspective about human works. Formerly, before their salvation, they had thought that all good Jews would obtain kingdom entrance. They thought that good works were the ticket. Now, however, they understood well the error of such thinking. They now believed that the one and only ticket to the kingdom was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Good works, they came to understand, are dead—that is, they produce death. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life (Rom 6:23).

Repentance from dead works is the reverse side of faith in God and in His Messiah. In order to come to faith in Christ one must first recognize the bankruptcy of his own works. It is impossible to trust in Christ alone and cling to some confidence in one's own deeds.

C. 2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to *repentance* (emphasis supplied).

In this passage Peter is discussing the Lord's return to set up His kingdom. While some may scoff and suggest that He isn't coming ("Where is the promise of His coming?" 3:4), Peter is affirming that His return and kingdom are sure. No doubt about it.

Peter even gives a reason for the delay. God doesn't want anyone to perish. Rather, He wants all to come to repentance.

Zane Hodges suggests that *metanoia* here refers to turning from one's sinful ways with the result that one is in harmonious fellowship with God.⁹ This view certainly maintains a Free Grace view of the Gospel.

⁸ For documentation see a previous article by this writer: "New Testament Repentance: Lexical Considerations," *JOTGES* 2 (Autumn 1989): 13-21.

⁹ See Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 226.

Although it is a possible view, I find it unlikely.

Peter is contrasting two things: perishing and repentance. Clearly the latter is a metonymy of the cause for the effect. That is, repentance is a figure for whatever it produces. If the effect is eternal life there is a quite natural antithetical parallelism with the idea of perishing. The opposite of perishing eternally is being saved eternally. If Hodges's view is correct, and it may be, then the effect is eternal rewards. But rewards are not the opposite of *perishing*.

This same concept is found elsewhere in Scripture. In 1 Tim 2:4 we read that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Clearly eternal salvation is in view there.

I suggest that repentance in 2 Pet 3:9 refers to a change of mind about the Person and work of Christ. Those who come to a proper perspective regarding the Gospel, those who come to faith in it, will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Since Peter was writing to a believing readership, he did not give an extended discussion on this point. His topic was the seeming delay of the Second Coming and the Kingdom. His point is that one reason the Lord hasn't returned yet is because He is giving additional time for more people to be saved.

IV. Repentance as a Condition of Temporal Salvation

There are a number of passages in the Epistles and Revelation which present repentance as a condition of *temporal* salvation. I have chosen six representative passages.

A. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to *repentance*. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces *repentance* leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death (emphasis supplied).

This passage is taken by some to be referring to repentance as a condition of eternal salvation.¹⁰ However, the context is clearly not dealing with eternal salvation.

¹⁰ See, for example, Harold J. Ockenga, *The Comfort of God: Preaching in Second Corinthians* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1944), 203-206; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), 221-22. N.B. Plummer appears to see eternal salvation in view but is not so clear as to make this conclusion inescapable.

Those being addressed are believers, the Corinthian Christians (cf. 2 Cor 1:1, 24; 5:1-10; 6:14; 8:7; 13:11-14).

There is no mention of eternal life, the lake of fire, justification, condemnation, or terms which normally (or exclusively in the case of the lake of fire) deal with eternal salvation.

The difficulty to which Paul refers is the failure of the church to deal with overt sin in its midst (2 Cor 7:11-12). He rebuked the church for this; the result was that they were stung by it (vv 8-9). Paul was afraid that their indifference might lead to forfeiture of eternal rewards. He didn't want them to suffer such a loss (v 9).

The Corinthians changed their minds (i.e., repented) and stopped tolerating the sin in their midst (vv 9-10). Evidently they removed the offending person from their fellowship until he changed his ways (v 11).

Verse 10 is a summary statement on the value of godly sorrow in the lives of believers. Sorrow which is in accordance with God's will results in deliverance. Worldly sorrow, however, is grief unrelated to the will of God. Such sorrow results not in deliverance, but ultimately in death.

The fact that baseball legend Pete Rose, for example, is sorry for his gambling and tax evasion offenses is not necessarily a good sign. If he is only sorry because he was caught, banned from baseball, and sentenced to jail, and yet would do it all again if he thought he could get away with it, that is not helpful. Many are in prison today for the fourth or fifth time because, while they felt sorry upon getting caught and sentenced each time, they never had a fundamental change of heart and lifestyle.

If, however, Pete Rose is sorry that he gambled and cheated on his taxes because he now knows that it is wrong; and if he has taken steps never to do these things again (e.g., by seeking counseling for his gambling addiction), then his sorrow is a very positive thing. His sorrow will have led to a positive change in thinking and behavior.

The repentance of the world, then, is sorrow unaccompanied by a positive change in thinking and behavior. Judas experienced this. He was remorseful for betraying the Lord (Matt 27:3). Yet, rather than turning in faith to the Lord and crying out for His mercy, he committed another sin: he hanged himself.

As mentioned above, the salvation in view here is not eternal salvation. Since the context is dealing with believers and with a change of behavior as the condition for the deliverance, temporal salvation is in view. When believers experience godly sorrow, when they learn and turn from their sinful ways, they escape the many unpleasant correctives which God would have sent into their lives if they had continued in that lifestyle.

The Free Grace view of the Gospel believes in “turn or burn” *temporally*, not turn or burn *eternally*.

B. 2 Corinthians 12:21

[For I fear] lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and *have not repented* of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced” (emphasis supplied).

This passage is very similar to the one we just considered. Paul was afraid that many of the believers at Corinth were still indulging in sinful practices such as quarreling, backbiting, and immorality (2 Cor 12:20-21)—things about which he had previously rebuked and warned them (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-17; 5:1-6:20).

On the one hand some commentators suggest that Paul may have been wondering if unbelievers were in the church of Corinth.¹¹ They do not believe that a Christian is constitutionally *able* to fall into sin and fail (over any significant—but unspecified—length of time) to repent of it. On the other hand, however, many other commentators feel that Paul was not laying down conditions for eternal salvation.¹² They feel that he was simply challenging believers to godly living.

There is nothing in this verse to suggest that eternal salvation is in view—unless, of course one maintains a very strong view of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, something which is biblically unwarranted. Indeed, any unbiased reading of the other canonical book to the Corinthians shows clearly that genuine believers can fall into sin and fail to repent of it over an extended period of time (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3; 6:1-20).

¹¹ See, for example, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 470-73; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 331-32; Ockenga, *Second Corinthians*, 278.

¹² See, for example, Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (N.p.: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 297-98; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale NT Series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 185; H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1939), 276-79; David Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT edition, ed. by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 513-16, 584.

C. Hebrews 6:6

If they fall away [it is impossible] to renew them again to *repentance*, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame (emphasis supplied).

This much-discussed verse is talking about those who (1) "were once enlightened," (2) "have tasted the heavenly gift," (3) "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit," (4) "have tasted the good word of God," and (5) "[have tasted] the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:4-5). I. Howard Marshall notes that "the conclusion is irresistible that real Christians are meant."¹³ A person would be hard pressed to come up with a more unambiguous reference to believers.¹⁴ Regardless of what v 6 means, vv 4-5 are describing genuine believers.

The real question is what judgment believers who apostatize will receive. The author of the Book of Hebrews warns that a fiery judgment awaits such people (vv 7-8). While some understand this to be a reference to hell and the lake of fire,¹⁵ there are powerful reasons to suggest otherwise.

First, believers are in view, and believers cannot be sent to hell. Second, the author does not say that the *ground itself* (representing the believer) is destroyed. Rather, the ground remains. What is destroyed by fire is the *worthless production* of the ground. This suggests temporal judgment. Third, a good case can be made—but will not be made here due to space restrictions—that all of the other warning passages in Hebrews threaten genuine believers with temporal judgments and loss of eternal rewards—not with burning in the lake of fire.¹⁶ Fourth, there

¹³ Marshall, *Kept by the Power*, 138.

¹⁴ Some time ago while doing research on this passage I found a note to this effect by a commentator. I have been unable, however, to relocate the reference to give him credit. *Mea culpa*.

¹⁵ See, for example, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 122-25 (esp. 125n); Homer A. Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 115; Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), edited by W. Robertson Nicoll, 4:300; Robert Milligan, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1977), 225-26.

Kent takes the view that the falling away is only hypothetical, but that if it occurred, eternal condemnation would result. Milligan argues that regeneration and eternal life are forfeited if one apostatizes. However, he also argues that eternal security is true. He accomplishes this by suggesting that eternal security only applies to the elect. He believes that the non-elect sometimes are regenerated, only to lose their salvation later when they fall away. Thus the elect are eternally secure and the non-elect are not.

¹⁶ See, for example, Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT edition, 780-812.

seems to be a deliberate allusion to Genesis 3 and the cursing of the ground. Part of the curse of the fall was that the ground would yield thorns and thistles. The author of Hebrews indicates that if a believer's life yields thorns and thistles he will receive a curse. Just as the judgment upon the ground was temporal, so is the judgment upon the believer who falls away. Fifth and finally, other NT passages (e.g., 1 Cor 3:10-15; John 15:6) speak of the burning up of the unfruitful works of believers without any suggestion that they lose their salvation.

Therefore, even though the word *fiery* is used, the evidence suggests that temporal and not eternal judgment is in view.

The believer who falls away from the faith cannot humanly be renewed again to repentance—that is, to his recognition of his sinfulness and need of grace and forgiveness through Christ alone. If a Christian ever comes to the point where he stops trusting in Christ, no amount of reasoning with him can win him back. Temporal judgment is coming upon him from God. Only by a miracle of God can such a person be renewed to his former attitude and opinion. Of course, since eternal salvation is conditioned on faith *in Christ*, not on *eternal* faith, such a person would still be saved. Nothing can separate a believer from the love of God in Christ (Rom 8:38-39).

Some object to this view because they believe that a true believer could never depart from the faith.¹⁷ Such an objection, however, is both unbiblical and impractical.

Biblically speaking there are a number of other passages which clearly show that believers are not immune to falling from the faith. Luke 8:13 refers to those “*who believe for a while*” and in time of temptation fall away. The preceding verse clearly indicates that those who believe are saved. Thus those who fall are believers. In Acts 20:30 Paul warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would arise and would “draw away the disciples after themselves.” First Timothy 1:19 refers to those who suffered shipwreck concerning the faith. One can only experience shipwreck if he was at one time on board. Second Timothy 2:18 refers to men who “strayed concerning the truth.” Once again, one can only stray from somewhere he once was. Similarly, Peter warns his believing readers in 2 Pet 3:17 to “beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away by the error of the wicked.”

Practically speaking, anyone who has spent any time in pastoral ministry has dealt with genuine believers who fell away from the faith. My

¹⁷ E.g., Kent, *Hebrews*, 111-14; William R. Newell, *Hebrews Verse by Verse*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1947), 196-202; Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 110-11.

second year in seminary I remember a fourth year student saying that he doubted the existence of God. He dropped out of seminary, left his pregnant wife, moved in with another woman, and took to alcohol. This from a young man who as a college student had memorized two chapters of the Bible a week and who as a seminary student had majored in NT Greek.

Also in my second year in seminary I recall talking with a fellow student who told me about one of his former professors from college. The man was an agnostic who was teaching philosophy. However, he had an obvious knowledge of the Bible. After class one day my friend went to witness to him. To start the conversation along spiritual lines he told his prof that he was going to seminary the following year. "Oh, is that right?" the prof said. "Where are you going?" When my friend told him Dallas Theological Seminary the prof smiled and said, "I'm a graduate of DTS." Many today underestimate the persuasiveness of the arguments of liberal graduate schools such as the one which turned a Dallas Seminary graduate into an agnostic. The minds of Christians can be turned. Believers can be duped. Lay people know this well. That is one reason why some lay people wouldn't even think of going to seminary. They are actually afraid that they might lose their faith at seminary!

I could multiply examples, but there is no need. Nothing in Hebrews 6:4-8 even remotely hints at eternal condemnation for believers who apostatize. Fire is a normal biblical metaphor for *temporal* judgment.

D. Hebrews 12:17

For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for *repentance*, though he sought for it diligently with tears (emphasis supplied).

This passage deals with familial blessings, not eternal life. Whether Esau was a believer or not is not in question here. (Although I feel the example fits the context better if Esau is an example of a profane believer.) Esau is an example of one who set his priorities on fleshly pleasures rather than on lasting spiritual values.

Esau came to the place where he realized his error and sought to reverse the consequences of his former decision to sell his birthright for a meal. However, some things are irreversible. His father, Isaac, could not be moved. He couldn't be made to budge in his thinking.

So, too, the believer who sets his heart on earthly treasures will forfeit eternal treasures. No amount of tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ

will reverse the matter. The time for spiritual action is now. A modern motto catches this point well:

*Only one life , 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

E. Revelation 2:5

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; *repent* and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you *repent* (emphasis supplied).

This is part of the first of the seven letters in Revelation 2–3. These were letters from the Lord to seven local churches in Asia Minor.

Clearly the Lord wanted the members of the church at Ephesus to repent—to change their attitudes regarding their works. “You have left your first love” (v 4b). “Repent and do the first works” (v 5b). Works of love no longer characterized the church at Ephesus.

The preceding (vv 2-3) and following (v 6) verses make it clear that this church was not totally displeasing to the Lord. He commended the Ephesian church for maintaining doctrinal purity in the face of false teachers in the Ephesian church. However, as Ladd points out, “Doctrinal purity and loyalty can never be a substitute for love.”¹⁸

The question in the verse before us is the identification of the warning which follows the Lord’s command to repent. What did the Lord mean when He spoke of removing the church’s lampstand if it did not repent?

The removal of the lampstand is clearly figurative language. Does it refer to eternal damnation? Surely not. Nothing in the context supports this. Rather, what is in view is *temporal* in nature. If the church did not repent the Lord would remove the church’s ability to bear witness for Him. That is, the church at Ephesus would die out, would cease to exist, if the current members did not change their ways.¹⁹

The eternal salvation of the believers at Ephesus is not in view. That salvation they obtained once and for all when they placed their faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9). What was in view was their temporal well being. The

¹⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 39.

¹⁹ Cf. Ladd, *Revelation*, 39-40; John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT edition, 934; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 52; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1974), 75.

very existence of their church was at stake.

If a local church backslides today, it too will be in jeopardy of extinction. While eternal salvation is secure forever, local assemblies are not.

F. Revelation 9:20-21

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, *did not repent* of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor walk. And *they did not repent* of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (emphasis supplied).

These verses deal with the moral response of unbelievers during the Tribulation to the terrible events of the sixth trumpet judgment. Those who survived did not change their thinking about their sinful ways. That is, although the judgments were great and should have led people to abandon their transgressions, the people would not give up their sinful behavior.

These verses clearly imply that had a significant number of the surviving unbelievers repented of their wicked ways, the horrible judgments of the Tribulation might have been lessened.²⁰

Temporal judgments are in view. Eternal damnation is not. The passage does not suggest that turning from sins will be a condition of eternal salvation in the Tribulation.²¹

V. Conclusion

There are only three passages in the Epistles, and none in the Book of Revelation, which condition eternal salvation upon repentance. In those three passages repentance refers to a change of mind about Christ and

²⁰ Cf. Ladd, *Revelation*, 138; Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 221; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (reprint edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 569; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (reprint edition, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 126.

²¹ Indeed, many of the people in question will already be beyond hope of eternal salvation at this point since anyone who takes the mark of the beast will be sealed in a state of unbelief (Rev 14:9-11). It is thus evident that during the Tribulation there will be a special work of the Holy Spirit forbidding believers from taking the mark—since to do so would mean loss of salvation. Either God will not allow believers to give in to such a temptation by giving them a special measure of grace, or He will simply take the life of any believer who would, if left to himself, take the mark.

the Gospel. Thus repentance in those contexts is used as a synonym for faith.

There are a number of passages in the Epistles and Revelation which condition temporal salvation from God's discipline or judgment upon repentance. In those passages repentance refers to a change of mind about one's sinful behavior. People, both believers and unbelievers, must turn from their sins in order to escape the negative consequences which sin brings. The passing pleasures of sin (Heb 11:25) are far outweighed by the pain which is its constant companion (Heb 12:3-11; Jas 1:15).

This concludes the exegetical articles in this series on repentance and salvation. In the next article, the last of the series, I will discuss the practical matter of how one can clearly preach and teach about repentance.

THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION: A REVIEW

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I. Introduction

In May of this year the latest and most thoroughgoing revision of the RSV appeared, sponsored by the National Council of Churches.

I must confess that I have been having my morning devotions in the NRSV for the last several months.¹

The reason for this is that I have been asked by our Book and Periodical editor to write a review of the NRSV, and the associate editors agreed that this was probably a work of such influence as to merit a full article, not just a brief review. Also, I thought it only fair to read as much of the new version as time permitted between May and going to press with the Autumn Journal. I cannot say, to update the words of a 1952 *Eternity* Magazine title by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, that "I Have Read the NRSV," but I *have* read most books in the NT, several OT books, and selections from the others, including the Apocrypha.

In my boyhood, when the RSV first came out (1952), our daily paper, *The Washington Post*, printed several weeks' worth of two-column excerpts from the KJV and RSV (right on the front page, if I remember correctly). These I clipped out and compared in some detail. It gave me the incentive to buy the full text sometime later. I have read the complete RSV two or three times and the RSV NT several times.

At Bible school one of our most influential teachers, though extremely conservative in theology, used the RSV because he believed that the KJV was made from "corrupt" manuscripts. (At that time I was convinced he was right.)²

¹ My friends, former students, and colleagues on the NKJV committees will be relieved to know that I still preach from the NKJV, read the Greek text (Majority, of course!) before turning off the lamp at night, am reading through Numbers in Hebrew, Mark in the Vulgate on alternating Monday evenings, the Norwegian (the language of heaven, Papa said) on alternating Tuesday evenings, and the Lutherbibel on alternating Thursday evenings. So you can see that I am not wholly shut off from traditional texts.

² After receiving my Th.D. in NT I decided to study textual criticism carefully on my own. I came to embrace the Majority text position, which is closer to the KJV text than to that translated in most modern NT's.

When the NT of the RSV came out in 1946, knowledgeable Greek scholars generally said it was a good, linguistically conservative updating of the Tyndale-KJV-ASV tradition. Denominationally the translators were all Protestants, mostly of the liberal persuasion. Nevertheless some verses came out stronger for the deity of Christ than in the KJV, due to the translators' understanding of "Granville Sharp's rule." Examples of this are seen in the phrase "our (great) God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1).

Some conservatives objected to the RSV's use of "thee" and "thou" for God the Father and "you" and "your" for God the Son. The answer given was that "thee" and "thou" were used only in prayer and poetry, and no NT texts addressed to Christ fit this category.

Many remember the uproar caused in 1952 when the complete RSV came out. A southern minister publicly burned the page containing Isa 7:14: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive," where "young woman" replaced the KJV's "virgin." (By the way, the NRSV has a note there reading "Gk *the virgin*." Of course, it was this Greek OT version that Matthew quoted in Matt 1:23. It is worth noting that the Greek OT [Septuagint] was translated, not by evangelicals, but by Jews, centuries before Christ.)

By and large the RSV was accepted by the more liberal denominations, with a few conservative ones and many individuals using it because it was the only major modern version that they had at the time.

This reviewer can relate well to the announced NRSV standard: "as literal as possible, as free as necessary." For the Bible, the book on which we Christians seek to pattern our faith and conduct, it is important to be as close to the original as English allows. This is often quite close, since English and Greek are related languages, and even Hebrew goes rather easily into English. However, a literal translation, especially of idioms, can often be misleading, and at best, poor style. Hence the need for more freedom when necessary. Whether the NRSV meets these standards will be examined in this review, as well as important theological considerations.

II. Translation-Perspective and Style

The National Council of Churches used five Roman Catholics, one Greek Orthodox, one Jew, and the rest Protestants to work on the translation, all serving without pay. The chief translator is Dr. Bruce Metzger, a well-known Princeton scholar (and gentleman!).

The NRSV is available in editions with only the thirty-nine books of

the OT accepted by Jews and Protestants, and also in editions with those books added that are accepted only by Roman Catholics and/or Orthodox. (See below, under "Theological Perspectives.")

All of the passages that retained *thee* and *thou* in the RSV have been updated to eliminate these pronouns and their special verb forms. Also, the word "behold" has been everywhere changed or deleted.

The language of the NRSV is easier and more modern than the RSV. Oddly enough, the RSV employs the traditional use of "shall" and "will" only in the OT (classical literature) and only "will" in the NT (*koinē* style), except in quotations from the OT.

A handful of ambiguous expressions have now been clarified. For example, "I will accept no bull from your house" (Psalm 50) and "once I was stoned" (2 Cor 11:25) have slang connotations today that are better avoided, the translators felt. (Actually, the context would probably carry the day for most readers.)

The NRSV deserves high marks for its literary style as a whole, still largely following in the Tyndale-King James tradition.

The dust jacket of the Thomas Nelson edition of the NRSV reads:

Adhering to the motto "as literal as possible, as free as necessary," the New Revised Standard Version translation committee, after 15 years of careful work, has crafted a version of the Bible that is formal enough to convey the meaning of the original Scripture texts, yet contemporary enough to meet the needs of today's church.

The NRSV uses clear, up-to-date English. Difficult wordings and confusing sentence structures from the RSV are changed, and certain passages that were confusing or awkward are now reworded, making the NRSV an ideal translation for personal Bible reading.

Whether this version is ideal for personal Bible reading or not will depend largely on who is the reader, his (or her!) theological views (if any!), and other considerations.

III. Textual Perspectives

OT Textual Base

The RSV generally uses the Masoretic Text (traditional Hebrew). However, it has been widely criticized by conservatives for frequently revamping that text. Since the ancient text used only consonants, by *inserting different vowels* than the Masoretes wrote in, modern scholars are able to come up with some very striking variant readings—often strictly conjectural. These have often been labeled "Cn" for correction.

However, changes made *without* this warning have caused many to mistrust the RSV OT text in some places, especially where it impinges on conservative theology (e.g., Christology).

The NRSV follows the RSV in this. It also bases its text on the ancient versions in other languages much more than the NASB, NIV, or NKJV would, for example.

There are many footnotes referring to the Qumran mss. of Samuel (abbreviated "Q MS"). "Four sentences based upon one of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been tacked onto Chapter 10 of *I Samuel*, for instance."³

Many of the footnotes in the RSV are decidedly helpful to those who want to study the Bible in detail, but the liberal presuppositions of the NCC and its translators should be kept in mind by the Bible-believing reader.

NT Textual Base

The NRSV continues the RSV's usage of a critical text of the Greek similar to the old (1881) Westcott-Hort text but with more eclectic readings. It is not very different from the texts behind the NASB or NIV, but much less traditional than that behind the NKJV.

This reviewer does not favor the critical text,⁴ but even if he did, textual footnotes such as "*other ancient authorities omit (or read or add)*" are far too vague to him to be helpful. Sometimes this means one or two mss.—or a version that is just a translation. Sometimes—frequently, I fear—it refers to the *eighty to ninety-some percent* of the mss. supporting the Majority text!

I was pleasantly surprised to see that the note on Mark 16:9-20 was more factual than those in either the NASB or the NIV, both of which imply very weak support for that important resurrection account. The original RSV had this passage in small italics at the end of the book. Not that they now accept it! It's in double brackets to communicate that it's a later interpolation. However, the note states that "In most authorities verses 9-20 follow immediately after verse 8," which is a fairer representation of the majority status of the passage than "some of the oldest mss. omit" (NASB) or "the two most reliable early manuscripts do not have" (NIV).

However, putting the so-called "shorter ending" in the text (which doesn't even sound like the *Bible*, much less like John Mark) is not good.

³ Richard N. Ostling, "Farewell to Thee's and He's," *Time*, May 7, 1990, 117.

⁴ See the introduction to *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, Thomas Nelson, 2d ed., 1985.

(NASB makes the same mistake.) Even worse, the NRSV margin prints an unusual ending that has Greek support only from Codex W and from manuscripts known to Jerome. Its tone and content reflect Gnostic ideas.

Many of the NRSV footnotes on Greek words, literal renderings, and singular and plural words for *you* in texts where modern English can't show it, are truly helpful.

IV. Theological Perspectives

Liberalism

It is a well-known fact that evangelical believers had little input into the RSV and probably not a great deal more into the NRSV, though Dr. Metzger is himself fairly conservative by Princeton standards.

Evidences of liberal bias can be found throughout.

For example, while the Hebrew word *rûach* can mean wind or spirit, why should the Holy Spirit be edged out at the creation by a mere wind?

The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters (RSV)	A wind from God swept over the face of the water (NRSV)
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Was there perhaps a desire to eliminate another hint of the Trinity in the OT?

The critical text of John 7:8—"I am not going to this festival"—deleting the word *yet* (omitted by some mss.), seems to make Jesus tell a lie to His brothers—excuse me, His *family members*.⁵

The NRSV rendering of John 7:39 would be possible grammatically, but a contradiction of the rest of the Bible on the eternality of all the members of the Trinity:

"For as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

The understood (italicized) word *given* of the KJV's "not yet given" is certainly implied.

A major evangelical criticism of the RSV—and it carries weight with the NRSV as well—is that it plays down messianic passages in the OT even when these same passages are used by the apostles in the NT to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (such as Isa 7:14, parts of Isa 53, Ps 110:1 "lord" (lower case) in NRSV OT, capitalized in NT). After all, the earliest Christians were all *Jewish* and *they* were

⁵C. K. Barrett says that the "not yet" is almost certainly wrong, "an attempt to remove a superficial contradiction with v. 10." He feels John may not have seen any "moral obliquity on the part of Jesus"—it was not an absolute denial (*The Gospel According to St John* [London: S.P.C.K., 1962]), 258.

persuaded that Jesus was the Christ by these very OT texts, both in Hebrew and Greek.

No doubt some people overdo the messianic content of the OT. But this is preferable to the modern trend suggesting that the inspired NT apostles, prophets, and teachers were not sound expositors of the OT text. After all, Luke described our Lord's Emmaus road homily in these words:

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures (Luke 24:27 NRSV).

A Hebrew Christian girl named Esther sat next to this reviewer in a college speech class. Her great passion in life is to reach her people with her good news about Messiah. She gave a speech once decrying the difficulty of leading a Jewish person to Christ using the RSV OT. She summarized the problem in the words of her ancient ethnic and religious forebear, Mary Magdalene:

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:13 NRSV).

One fears that many Protestants today are doing much the same thing. Finally, advocates of *sola gratia*—salvation received by grace through faith alone—will be chagrined to read 1 Pet 2:2 in the NRSV:

"Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may *grow into salvation*" (emphasis supplied).

No footnote is given to indicate they have changed the Greek text underlying the verse. "Growing into salvation" surely sounds more like Horace Bushnell than the Apostle Peter.

Ecumenism

Supporters of the modern ecumenical movement will be pleased that the old Protestants-only committees of the RSV have been expanded to include Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Jewish representation. On the other hand, those who believe that modern ecumenism forces unions chiefly by hierarchical pressure from the top of main-line denominations down will be less than thrilled. (Generally these are a frustrated conservative and evangelical remnant, often large in some groups.)

A very major obstacle to uniting all the churches into one super-church is the fact that Protestants have generally accepted only the OT books that are in Hebrew and were part of the Jewish Canon. By adding books from the Apocrypha, the NRSV helps erode the historic Protestant

framework of the King James tradition, upon which the RSV and NRSV are largely built.

Generally speaking, the more biblically oriented in theology one is, the less likely one is to accept the Apocrypha. For example Jerome, knowing that the "OT" Apocrypha was never part of the Hebrew canon, translated it only under pressure from Pope Damasus of Rome. The position of the Westminster Confession against the Apocrypha is well known.

Many Protestants are surprised to learn that early editions of the Authorized or King James Version included the Apocrypha. However, since the translators did not believe these books were inspired, but only *useful*, they put them *between* the Testaments—not interspersed, as if they were a valid part of the OT, as in Roman Catholic versions. As Protestantism grew more and more enlightened through the canonical Scriptures, it gradually dropped the Apocrypha altogether. The fact that Roman Catholicism used some verses in the Apocrypha to support such doctrines and practices as prayers for the dead only served to encourage the move to delete them as an excrescence with no divine warrant to be in the Bible.

When the RSV first came out (1952) it did not include the Apocrypha. The Protestant climate in America was still strong enough to prevent this. It wasn't long, however, before a little separate volume, bound in red to match the RSV binding, appeared. Soon one could buy an RSV with or without the Apocrypha (between the OT and the NT). Other Bibles produced under liberal auspices, such as the New English Bible (NEB), generally include the Apocrypha, and of course, Roman Catholic versions such as the Jerusalem Bible, always do.

The move toward the Apocrypha is a move towards eventual merger with Rome—to have a "common" Bible. Strictly evangelical versions, such as the NASB, NIV, and NKJV, do not even make editions with the Apocrypha available.

The NRSV has gone even further than the others in blurring the distinction between canonical books and what they call "the Apocryphal/Deutero-canonical Books." At least they do admit that these books were always at least considered on a *secondary* (deutero-) level by Jews and Christians.

The NRSV Apocrypha does not merely include the usual books found in the Roman Catholic Bible—Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah (= Baruch chapter 6), Additions to Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), and

1 and 2 Maccabees—but several others as well.

Three other categories of Apocryphal books are included: (1) Books in the Greek Orthodox and Slavonic Bibles but not in the Roman Catholic Canon: 1 Esdras (= 2 Esdras in Slavonic = 3 Esdras in Appendix to the Vulgate), the Prayer of Manasseh (in Appendix to the Vulgate), "Psalm 151," and 3 Maccabees; (2) In the Slavonic Bible and the Appendix to the Latin Vulgate: 2 Esdras (= 3 Esdras in Slavonic = 4 Esdras in the Appendix to the Vulgate); (3) In an Appendix to the Greek Bible: 4 Maccabees.

In the edition of the NRSV used in this review (Thomas Nelson) all this material takes up 264 pages between the Testaments. The NT in this edition is just 261 pages long—or three pages shorter!

Feminism

It is in the area of feminist influence that the NRSV most stands out from other Bible versions. Since this is so, we will handle that issue in some detail.

The NRSV, in Dr. Metzger's words, circumvents the "inherent bias of the English language toward the masculine gender." (This can be debated, since the generic use of *he*, *his*, and *him* with no masculine denotation has long been recognized.) Let the *Time* reviewer introduce the issue for us:

During the 1980s the National Council of Churches, in response to insistent feminist demands, published three sets of highly controversial rewrites of certain Bible passages. The texts referred to God as "Father [and Mother]," inserted women's names that did not appear in the original, and refrained from calling God the King or Jesus the Son of God or Son of Man.⁶

I had a personal discussion with a very modern nun from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago on this controversy. We appeared together on a major Chicago talk show, which that night was about the Bible and related topics. I found that she was active in the radical rewriting of liturgies to exclude "sexist" language. She admitted that they were having real difficulties with the phrase "Son of Man." Only the little preposition *of* (in that expression) was inoffensive to radical feminists, since both "Son" and "Man" are tainted with masculinity. I

⁶ Ostling, "Farewell," 117.

believe the proposed liturgy went so far as to say "Our Father/Mother who are in heaven."⁷

The NRSV is not nearly that radical. No doubt Dr. Bruce Metzger would not stand for *that much* tampering with the sacred text. Hence in the NRSV you will find "Son of Man" for Christ in such passages as Mark 10:45. In Ezekiel, however, the same phrase is paraphrased as "mortal," which is perhaps implied by the phrase, though hardly a close translation.

We quote from the NRSV's own words on what they were seeking to do:

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture. As can be appreciated, more than once the Committee found that the several mandates stood in tension and even in conflict. The various concerns had to be balanced case by case in order to provide a faithful and acceptable rendering without using contrived English.⁸

Some of their "de-sexing" is acceptable in the light of the original, but the title of *Time* magazine's Review of the NRSV is at least suggestive: "Farewell to Thee's and He's."⁹

Only those who read the original, can use an interlinear, or are willing to carefully compare the old RSV (or some other *linguistically* conservative version) with the NRSV will notice the varied, clever, and subtle ways offending words, such as *he*, *his*, *him*, *man*, *men*, and *brethren*, are excised from the text. However, when referring to God, Christ, or male historical characters, the masculine pronouns are retained.

If I were giving a little talk to a group on this whole issue I would be tempted to call it "Six Ways to Emascuate the Word of God." Since many would take exception to such bluntness, I will merely list and illustrate six NRSV techniques that I have noticed.

⁷ Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy beat them to the draw on that one!

⁸ Introduction, 3d (unnumbered) page of "To the Reader."

⁹ Ostling, "Farewell," 117.

1. Valid Inclusivism

The exhortations to believers in the Bible are aimed at men, women, boys, and girls. For many centuries, the *generic* use of *he* as a pronoun referring back to any person of any age or sex has been part of our English usage, and is a handy tool with which to avoid odd, cumbersome, or tendentious style.

The NRSV dust jacket gives an example of a fairly innocuous change from the RSV's use of both "man" and a generic "his":

RSV	NRSV
Then every man will receive his ¹⁰ commendation from God.	Then each one will receive commendation from God.

The Greek here does not have a word for *man* (*anthrōpos*, human being or *anēr*, a male person or husband), but merely the word *hekastos* ("each one"). The NRSV publicists chose a very successful example for advertising purposes. Even the very conservative (*theologically* as well as linguistically) New King James Version reads "Then *each one's* praise will come from God."

Many other passages, especially in the Gospels, that read "if any man" in the KJV read simply "if anyone" in the original, and are worth changing. In 1611 "man" was a little more "generic" than it is today, though that venerable version is sometimes *unnecessarily* masculine in light of the original.

2. Pluralization

A common NRSV device to do away with *man* and *he* is pluralization:

RSV	NRSV
Blessed is <i>the man</i> . . . but <i>his</i> delight	Happy are <i>those</i> . . . <i>their</i> delight

The trouble with this is that the personal, individual aspect of obedience to God is blurred by a plural invented to please the feminists. Examples of this are abundant everywhere.

3. Additions to the Text

The addition of "and women" to 2 Pet 1:21 suggests that some Bible books were written by women. Perhaps. But Peter did not write that.

¹⁰ Notice, however, that this pronoun is omitted in the NRSV.

Did the four women on the NRSV translation team insist on this addition?

The word "brethren" (KJV, NKJV) or "brothers" (NIV) is the NT's most common word for Christians.¹¹ *Adelphos*, the Greek word for *brother*, comes from the alpha copulative (*a-*) and an old word for *womb*. I was taught that its origin stresses *equality* and *affection*. Many church groups use the term as part of their name, and most other conservatives use it at least on occasion in sermons.

First Thessalonians and 1 John use *brethren* frequently. Generally, the NRSV will put "brothers and sisters" in the text with a footnote "reading Gk *brothers(s)*". No one disputes that the term *brethren* includes both sexes and all ages, but whether it is valid to *add to the text* words that are not there is at best questionable.

The Roman Catholic edition of the RSV changed *brothers* to *brethren* in passages in the Gospels referring to our Lord's immediate family. They were seeking to support the dogma of the "perpetual virginity of Mary." In other words, they recognized that the older English form *brethren* had a broader, and less physical meaning than *brothers*, and might allow for cousins. In this I believe they were correct (not in their *reason* for the change, though!). The word *brethren* tends to include sisters more than *brothers* does, and in this reviewer's opinion is worth keeping in our permanent Christian vocabulary.

Is it a mere coincidence that in the very verse where Paul speaks of "nothing beyond what is written" the NRSV adds "and sisters" (as usual with no ms. evidence)?

4. Subtraction from the Text

In 1 Thess 5:27 the NRSV reads: "I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of *them*." RSV reads "I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all *the brethren*."

Romans 2:1 deletes "O man" entirely.

It is one thing to change an ambiguous pronoun "he" to *Jesus* where it's not clear¹² who is meant. To go the other way and change a clear noun *brethren* to a vague pronoun *them* so as not to offend the feminists with a somewhat masculine word is too obsequious, I believe.

¹¹ The word "Christian" occurs just thrice in the Greek NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16).

¹² On the other hand, the capitalization of the He in NASB and NKJV obviates that device.

Is there not also a *bias toward the feminine* in that the NRSV's Matt 24:40 *deletes* "men" in "Then two will be in the field"; and yet "women" is *added* (validly, the Greek form is feminine) in v 41: "Two *women* will be grinding meal"?

5. Paraphrase

Sometimes an expression, which if closely translated would use a male-oriented word, is loosely translated to make it more inclusive.

For example, Abraham is no longer a "father" in Rom 4:11, but an "ancestor."

"Married only once" (NKJV) for "the husband of one wife," if taken out of context, might allow for women bishops.¹³

Interestingly enough, in this same book (2:8) "men" is retained for requesting prayer "in every place." Since "men" is contrasted with "women" in the next verse (same sentence), perhaps it was felt it had to stay.

The dust jacket of the NRSV says that it "never changes the masculine gender of God." This is not quite accurate. God the Son not only became a human being but also a man. This is obscured by the NRSV:

There is one mediator
between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus
(1 Tim 2:5 RSV).

There is also one mediator
between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human
(1 Tim 2:5 NRSV).

Radical feminists seem angry that Christ was—and will remain through all eternity—a *man*, and in both senses of that word.

6. Incorrect or Very Loose Translation

Paraphrase and loose translation are one thing, but putting in words that are improper translations of the Greek is quite another.

In 1 Thess 4:10, "But we urge you *beloved* . . ." and 5:4, "But you, *beloved*" in both cases translate *adelphoi*, "brethren" (RSV). While brotherhood *implies* affection, by no stretch of the imagination are they anywhere near interchangeable terms.

Other less than accurate renderings of *brothers* include "students" (Matt 23:8), "members of my family" (Matt 26:40), "community" (John 21:23), "friends" (Rom 7:4), "believer(s)" (1 Cor 6:5, 7), "everyone" (1 Cor 10:13), and "comrades" (Rev 12:10).

¹³ The NRSV does use the masculine gender in this passage as a whole.

Another device to avoid the offending pronoun "he" is found in Col 3:25:

RSV
For the wrongdoer will be
paid back for
the wrong he has done,
and there is no partiality.

NRSV
For the wrongdoer will be
paid back for whatever
wrong has been done,
and there is no partiality.

English does not possess the middle voice, as Greek does (our loss), but we do have the passive and active. To change the active "the wrong he has done" to the unspecific "whatever wrong *has been* done" is a totally unnecessary change, neither dynamic nor exactly equivalent. The NIV, which frequently uses dynamic equivalency where some of us would rather they had not, was not afraid to let the wrongdoer be called "he." This generic usage allows for female thieves as well; after all, not all sinners are males!

All of us, especially those men (masculine usage!) who preach, should be sensitive to the importance of women in the church and their great contribution to Christ's work. But when it comes to restructuring and sometimes rewriting the divinely inspired Holy Scriptures to fit a movement largely run by those who despise the Bible's teaching on the Church and the home, we must say: "Thus far, and no further!"

V. Conclusion

The NRSV is well edited, smooth reading, and nicely produced. Those who will be presenting the Gospel to people in so-called "main-line" denominations will need to have a copy and be familiar with its good points as well as its bad.

For conservative evangelicals who believe in inerrancy and all the doctrines of the Bible—such as Christ in all the Scriptures (including the OT) and the essentially differing roles of men and women in home and church—this reviewer cannot recommend the NRSV as "A New Standard" for public or private reading.

Most of the NRSV is well-translated, but the many tendentious readings illustrated in this review render it severely marred.

A Voice from the Past:

ASSURANCE AND DOUBT*

JOHN CALVIN†

I. Section 16

The principal hinge on which faith turns is this—that we must not consider the promises of mercy, which the Lord offers, as true only to others, and not to ourselves; but rather make them our own, by embracing them in our hearts. Hence arises that confidence, which the same apostle in another place calls “peace”;¹ unless anyone would rather make peace the effect of confidence. It is a security, which makes the conscience calm and serene before the Divine tribunal, and without which it must necessarily be harassed and torn almost asunder with tumultuous trepidation, unless it happen to slumber for a moment in an oblivion of God and itself. And indeed it is but for a moment; for it does not long enjoy that wretched oblivion, but is most dreadfully wounded by the remembrance, which is perpetually recurring, of the Divine judgment. In short, no man is truly a believer unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him, and promise himself everything from his goodness; unless he depend on the promises of the Divine benevolence to him and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation; as the apostle shows in these words: “If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”² Here he supposes that no man has a good hope in the Lord who does not glory with confidence in being an heir of the kingdom of heaven. He is no

* This extract is taken from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter II, Sections 16–19. John Allen’s translation is from the original Latin and collated with Calvin’s last edition in French. The punctuation and spelling have been only slightly modernized. Ed.

† John Calvin (1509–1564) is one of the foremost Reformers and biblical exegetes in the history of the Church. Raised and reared a Roman Catholic in his native France, Calvin received an excellent classical education and became a master of Latin style as well as of French.

After his conversion to the evangelical faith of the Reformation, he eventually settled in Switzerland and carried on a widespread preaching, writing, and training ministry centered in Geneva. Ed.

¹ Rom 5:1.

² Heb 3:14.

believer, I say, who does not rely on the security of his salvation and confidently triumph over the devil and death, as Paul teaches us in this remarkable peroration:

I am persuaded [says he] that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.³

Thus the same apostle is of opinion that "the eyes of our understanding" are not truly "enlightened" unless we discover what is the hope of the eternal inheritance to which we are called.⁴ And he everywhere inculcates that we have no just apprehensions of the Divine goodness unless we derive from it a considerable degree of assurance.

II. Section 17

But someone will object that the experience of believers is very different from this; for that, in recognizing the grace of God towards them, they are not only disturbed with inquietude (which frequently befalls them), but sometimes also tremble with the most distressing terrors. The vehemence of temptations to agitate their minds is so great that it appears scarcely compatible with that assurance of faith of which we have been speaking. We must therefore solve this difficulty if we mean to support the doctrine we have advanced. When we inculcate that faith ought to be certain and secure, we conceive not of a certainty attended with no doubt, or of a security interrupted by no anxiety; but we rather affirm that believers have a perpetual conflict with their own diffidence, and are far from placing their consciences in a placid calm, never disturbed by any storms. Yet, on the other hand, we deny, however they may be afflicted, that they ever fall and depart from that certain confidence which they have conceived in the Divine mercy.

The Scripture proposes no example of faith more illustrious or memorable than David, especially if you consider the whole course of his life. Yet that his mind was not invariably serene, appears from his innumerable complaints, of which it will be sufficient to select a few. When he rebukes his soul for turbulent emotions, is he not angry with his unbelief? "Why [says he] art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God."⁵ And certainly, that

³ Rom 8:38.

⁴ Eph 1:18.

⁵ Ps 42:5.

consternation was an evident proof of diffidence, as though he supposed himself to be forsaken by God. In another place also, we find a more ample confession: "I said, in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes."⁶ In another place also, he debates with himself in anxious and miserable perplexity, and even raises a dispute concerning the nature of God: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Will the Lord cast off for ever?" What follows is still harsher: "And I said, I must fall; these are the changes of the right hand of the Most High."⁷ For, in a state of despair, he consigns himself to ruin; and not only confesses that he is agitated with doubts, but, as vanquished in the conflict, considers all as lost; because God has deserted him and turned to his destruction that hand which used to support him. Wherefore it is not without reason that he says, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul;"⁸ since he had experienced such fluctuations amidst the waves of trouble.

And yet, wonderful as it is, amidst these concussions, faith sustains the hearts of the pious, and truly resembles the palm-tree, rising with vigor undiminished by any burdens which may be laid upon it, but which can never retard its growth; as David, when he might appear to be overwhelmed, yet, chiding himself, ceased not to aspire towards God. Indeed, he who, contending with his own infirmity, strives in his anxieties to exercise faith, is already in a great measure victorious. Which we may infer from such passages as this: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."⁹ He reproves himself for timidity, and repeating the same twice, confesses himself to be frequently subject to various agitations. In the meantime, he is not only displeased with himself for these faults, but ardently aspires towards the correction of them.

Now if we enter into a close and correct examination of his character and conduct, and compare him with Ahaz, we shall discover a considerable difference. Isaiah is sent to convey consolation to the anxiety of the impious and hypocritical king. He addresses him in these words: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not," etc.¹⁰ But what effect had the message on him? As it had been before said, that "his heart was moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind,"¹¹ though he heard the

⁶ Ps 31:22.

⁷ Ps 77:7, 9, 10.

⁸ Ps 116:7.

⁹ Ps 27:14.

¹⁰ Isa 7:4.

¹¹ Isa 7:2.

promise, he ceased not to tremble. This therefore is the proper reward and punishment of infidelity—so to tremble with fear that he who opens not the gate to himself by faith, in the time of temptation departs from God. But, on the contrary, believers, whom the weight of temptations bends and almost oppresses, constantly emerge from their distresses, though not without trouble and difficulty. And because they are conscious of their own imbecility, they pray with the Psalmist, “Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.”¹² By these words we are taught that they sometimes become dumb, as though their faith were destroyed; yet that they neither fail nor turn their backs, but persevere in their conflict, and arouse their inactivity by prayer, that they may not be stupefied by self-indulgence.

III. Section 18

To render this intelligible it is necessary to recur to that division of the flesh and the spirit which we noticed in another place and which most clearly discovers itself in this case. The pious heart therefore perceives a division in itself, being partly affected with delight, through a knowledge of the Divine goodness; partly distressed with sorrow, through a sense of its own calamity; partly relying on the promise of the gospel; partly trembling at the evidence of its own iniquity; partly exulting in the apprehension of life; partly alarmed by the fear of death. This variation happens through the imperfection of faith; since we are never so happy, during the present life, as to be cured of all diffidence and entirely filled and possessed by faith. Hence those conflicts in which the diffidence which adheres to the relics of the flesh rises up in opposition to the faith formed in the heart.

But if, in the mind of a believer, assurance be mixed with doubts, do we not always come to this point, that faith consists not in a certain and clear, but only in an obscure and perplexed knowledge of the Divine will respecting us? Not at all. For, if we are distracted by various thoughts, we are not therefore entirely divested of faith; neither, though harassed by the agitations of diffidence, are we therefore immersed in its abyss; nor, if we be shaken, are we therefore overthrown. For the invariable issue of this contest is that faith at length surmounts those difficulties, from which, while it is encompassed with them, it appears to be in danger.

¹² Ps 119:43.

IV. Section 19

Let us sum it up thus: As soon as the smallest particle of grace is infused into our minds, we begin to contemplate the Divine countenance as now placid, serene, and propitious to us: it is indeed a very distant prospect, but so clear, that we know we are not deceived. Afterwards, in proportion as we improve—for we ought to be continually improving by progressive advances—we arrive at a nearer, and therefore more certain view of Him, and by continual habit He becomes more familiar to us. Thus we see that a mind illuminated by the knowledge of God is at first involved in much ignorance, which is removed by slow degrees. Yet it is not prevented either by its ignorance of some things or by its obscure view of what it beholds from enjoying a clear knowledge of the Divine will respecting itself, which is the first and principal exercise of faith. For, as a man who is confined in a prison, into which the sun shines only obliquely and partially through a very small window, is deprived of a full view of that luminary, yet clearly perceives its splendor, and experiences its beneficial influence—thus we, who are bound with terrestrial and corporeal fetters, though surrounded on all sides with great obscurity, are nevertheless illuminated, sufficiently for all the purposes of real security, by the light of God shining ever so feebly to discover his mercy.

Grace In The Arts:

GRACE ABOUNDING— IN GREAT LITERATURE

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Essayist and art critic John Ruskin (in *Modern Painters*) penned: “I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian church has ever suffered has been rooted in the effort . . . to earn rather than to receive . . . salvation”¹ In other words, Ruskin attributes heresy squarely to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of grace. John Bunyan, most remembered for *Pilgrim’s Progress*, wrote another book—and a part of his title is *Grace Abounding*. The purpose of this article is to show the subject of grace—both abused and abounding—throughout some of the world’s great literature and its authors.

I. Grace Abused

1. In Literature

Probably the most frequent and formidable fashion in which grace is abused appears in the form of people—whether in life or literature—who espouse Christian orthodoxy, yet are anything but gracious in character. Hardly a crustier example of religious rigidity could be found in literature than in the character of the infamous Murdstones in Charles Dickens’s semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*. The name Murdstone is itself certainly an immediate giveaway as to the character of young David Copperfield’s stepfather and his austere sister. They are true-to-form “wicked” stepparents whom no child would wish to have—austere, harsh disciplinarians. When Miss Murdstone made her debut at David’s house,

she brought with her two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard brass nails. When she paid the coachman,

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¹ Quoted in James Douglas Robertson, *Handbook of Preaching Resources from English Literature* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 159.

she took her money out of a hard steel purse in the very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bug.²

What a wonderfully wicked woman! No televised version could ever do justice to Dickens's description of her. The repetition of the word "hard" three times is the tip-off to this religious but rigid person. She appears as the female version of that parabolic perception of God as a "hard man" (Matt 25:24, KJV). From a supposed "hard" God (as Matt 25:25 indicates) one only hides things. An open-hearted gracious God begets an open-hearted, disclosive response.

Charles Dickens was obviously familiar with religious eccentrics—as indeed he was with *all* eccentrics. In *Bleak House* Dickens depicted another form of ungraciousness from that of the inflexible Miss Murdstone in the person of the expansively evangelistic Mrs. Jellyby. Mrs. Jellyby had been blessed with multiple children who (if small) were forever tumbling down stairs, or (if older) were being pressed into long hours of secretarial service for overseas missions. They had been conscripted for Christianity while their own normal childhood needs had been neglected. Mrs. Jellyby was forever having missionary correspondence overseas concerning matters related to the African tribe of the Borrioboola-Gha, all the while blissfully neglecting her own tribe of children. Her children got to the point where they hated the Borrioboola-Gha. Four missionary envelopes ended up in the dinner gravy one evening. Mr. Jellyby opened his mouth once during dinner, but closed it without saying anything. Who could compete with Borrioboola-Gha? Mrs. Jellyby is the incarnation of 1 Tim 5:8 ("If anyone does not provide for his [or her] relatives, and especially for his [or her] immediate family, he [or she] has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (NIV). Indeed, how would a believer so ungracious to her own household be any more gracious to the Borrioboola-Gha if she were actually among them?³

Sadly, how many of us have known adults who were turned off to Christianity earlier during their pliable years by ungracious upbringers? Take the following real-life case (which sounds worse than some Dickens characterizations):

Every move she made was subject to careful analysis by this clan . . .
The slightest deviation was trumpeted as a wicked sin against the

² Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1984), 46.

³ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 85-90.

all-seeing eye of the never-sleeping God. Almost daily she was admonished to pledge not to drink, smoke, or swear. Four or five times a week the child was herded to church. At home she had to scrub floors and wash dishes before she was six. When she attempted to play act, a child's normal way to act out her childish fantasies, she was told with rigid implacability that she was sinning against God. Later in life feelings of guilt clung to her like barnacles to a sea-wall.⁴

Should we be surprised to learn that the little girl's name came to be that of Marilyn Monroe? What might have happened if the orphan had been raised in a healthy sort of gracious Christian home?

In his Barchester series of novels (including *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*) Anthony Trollope—a contemporary of Dickens—demonstrated that he too had come in contact with ungracious models of Christianity. In the two novels mentioned, Dr. Grantly (the archdeacon) and Rev. Obadiah Slope represent a lack of grace in high church and low church settings respectively. Dr. Grantly is blustering, dogmatic, and overbearing, while Mr. Slope is oily, determined, and manipulative. Both could use a genuine infusion of authentic grace. Almost always people recoil and rebel against calcified ungraciousness. Take the famed early American novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hester Prynne has been tabbed as guilty of adultery. However, one would get the impression that this was the unpardonable sin from the manner (of permanent, public disgrace) in which she is treated by the righteous New Englanders. The disciplinary treatment doled out to Hester seems far harsher than that administered by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Christian guilty of sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1; 2 Cor 2:6-8).

Ungraciousness is not the sole province of Britons and Americans, by any means. Russian great, Leo Tolstoy, incarnated an inflexible uprightness and uptightness in the character of Anna Karenina's husband. The high-ranking civil servant presented a cold exterior to people, including his wife, Anna. Put together an insensitive, career-absorbed, upright husband and a beautiful, unfulfilled wife, and you have the tailor-made formula for the fuse leading to an affair. What a world of difference it might have made if Anna's husband had graciously sensed that his emotional sterility and vocational involvement were alienating his wife. At least Emma Bovary's husband (in Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*) declares his unbending affection to a wife

⁴Jess Moody, *You Can't Lose for Winning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 33.

involved in one of literature's notorious affairs.

World literature is replete with examples of the lack of grace—whether in the form of superfluousness (as in Dickens's Mrs. Jellyby) or (more often) in the form of severe sternness (as in the Murdstones or Anna Karenina's husband). Tragically, many of these fictional examples aren't truly fictional. One who reads both an author's fiction and the same author's biographies or autobiography soon discovers that much fiction is factual. That makes gracelessness even sadder—as we shall see in the next section.

2. In Litterateurs

Perhaps there is hardly a sadder recital than when a person begins listing world-famous authors who are not Christians and then compares that same list with all those who grew up in orthodox or evangelical Christian homes and environments. Some reacted with embitterment against unappealing orthodox versions of Christianity they experienced or witnessed (e.g., Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Somerset Maugham). Others sought to forge some milder version of theism (especially emphasizing the Sermon on the Mount) in reaction against a more rigid evangelical home situation (e.g., Leo Tolstoy and Robert Louis Stevenson). Some turned atheist due to harsh, hypocritical "Christian" fathers (e.g., Russian playwright and short-story writer Anton Chekhov). The list—tragically—is long: George Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, etc. Imagine how the literary world might have been impacted if the preceding authors had experienced healthy, happy, winsome upbringings by authentically gracious Christian parents!

Thankfully, even where writers have reacted to or rejected their perception of biblical Christianity, the biblical documents still indelibly impact world literature. Neither Dostoevsky nor Tolstoy, in my opinion, can honestly be labeled Christians, yet the NT profoundly impacts Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*, as well as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Over a hundred references to the Bible can be gleaned from the embittered Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. There are 600 allusions to the Bible in Herman Melville's poetic *Clarel*, and one researcher discovered 1400 biblical allusions in the total Melville corpus!⁵

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was one of the milder instances of reaction to a staunch evangelical home life. Stevenson was the most

⁵ Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1969), 8-9.

popular author of the late 1800's. Stevenson's maternal grandfather, for whom his book *David Balfour* is named, was a minister in the Church of Scotland. His nursemaid (affectionately called Cummy) told him Bible stories, taught him the Shorter Catechism, and made heaven and hell very real to him, for she was a lively storyteller.⁶ As a young man Stevenson became (in his own words) a "youthful atheist."⁷ His parents were aghast at their young infidel. In some ways it was sort of a late adolescent rebellion.

Stevenson's father is surely to some degree responsible. In both *The Master of Ballantrae* and (a last unfinished novel) *The Weir of Hermiston* an unbending, emotionally marble father is described by the author. Furthermore, in the latter novel the inflammatory issue over which the fictional father and son divided (namely, capital punishment) is the same one over which the famed author and his own father, Thomas, fell apart. Stevenson found his father overly dogmatic about his son's vocational choice, politics, and religion. Despite this adamant opposition of his father, Robert Louis Stevenson loved his father, who had definite warm spots and was one of his storytellers in childhood. Nevertheless, when the author in his twenties revealed his unorthodoxy, his father mourned: "You have rendered my whole life a failure."⁸ However, about five to eight years later Stevenson could write: "I came about like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that unknown steersman whom we call God."⁹ He could write to his father in 1878 that he believed in the overarching God.

Stevenson died at age forty-four. He imbibed generic theistic views, revered Christ, and during his last years in the South Sea Islands held family prayers regularly. Furthermore, he had high compliments for some Christian missionaries there. Still, it would appear that he never fully recovered a full-orbed evangelical view of Christianity. This seems due to the extremely dour, graceless version he had experienced as a child. Some Bible teachers have understood the meaning of Prov 22:6 to be this: Give a child a sweet taste of the faith during its younger years and in adulthood that sweet taste will remain. It would appear that Stevenson could never quite get rid of the sour taste of earlier years.

⁶ James Playsted Wood, *The Lantern Bearer: A Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Pantheon, 1965), 9-10.

⁷ John Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1907), 1.

⁸ Wood, *Lantern Bearer*, 27.

⁹ Kelman, *Faith of Stevenson*, 15.

Somerset Maugham aired his views about Christianity in his most autobiographical and famous book *Of Human Bondage*. It is a book with which every Christian should wrestle. Maugham had been orphaned early and was afflicted with a lifelong stutter. Hence, he made his chief character, the boy Philip Carey, an orphan who possessed a handicap (a club foot). Philip is cast, for his raising, upon an Anglican clergyman (uncle) and his wife. A person should really read *Of Human Bondage* in order to pick up the whole complex of innuendoes that reveal in Philip's uncle a life of conservative Christian correctness which is little more than pure selfishness.

The pastor embarrassed the newly-arrived orphan when the boy's toy bricks crashed down and interrupted his uncle's Sunday afternoon nap. Philip is told that "it's very wicked to play on Sunday."¹⁰ His uncle showed by his actions that he considered Christians of other persuasions than his own something lesser and to be avoided. The vicar kept a fire in his own study on especially cold days, but never kept one in his wife's room. While Philip's aunt secretly handed over her life savings to Philip in order to forward his career, his uncle stuck to the letter of the law and provided nothing for the wandering youth. The vicar's appetite for food remained unimpaired when his wife died. It is a small wonder, then, that we find Maugham writing, "When Philip ceased to believe in Christianity, he felt that a great weight was taken from his shoulders . . ."¹¹ (One is reminded of the heavy burden of gracelessness Peter spoke about in Acts 15:10, 11).

Unfortunately, one who has read the lives of the litterateurs could go on and on. Rudyard Kipling's parents sent him back to England from India to be raised (unknown to his parents) by abusive evangelicals. The Russian Anton Chekhov's adult atheism assuredly had much to do with a Bible-spouting, despotic father who would force his children to rehearse hymns for several hours very late at night. If only grace had abounded!

3. In Legalism

I define *legalism* basically as *that inclination to make things harder than God makes them* (in Scripture). Legalism legislates a life harder than the one a gracious God requires (see Matt 23:4; Acts 15:10, 11). As the Lord Jesus indicated, legalism may produce very intense, ardent evangelists

¹⁰ W. Somerset Maugham, *Mr. Maugham Himself* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1954), 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

(Matt 23:15). In our day there are evangelical brochures advertising “seven steps” to salvation—and the like. The problem with legalism is that a more legalistic legalist will always find one more rule God supposedly requires of us. Another version of legalism in our day is to preach salvation by grace, but to have a stiff list of rules for church membership (e.g., promising to attend every church meeting, to tithe, etc., in order to become a member).

One wonders if Mark Twain hadn’t observed such rules-conscious Christians during his younger years in a conservative Protestant church. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides a case study in legalism as applied to other-than-church life. Jim the slave had run away down river, but had been captured and chained by the leg in an out-back hut at Uncle Silas’s place. The task of Tom Sawyer (using the assumed name of “Sid”) and Huck Finn was to free Jim. When Huck suggests that they steal the key at night and make their getaway on the raft, Tom decries Huck’s plan: “It’s too blame simple; there ain’t nothing to it.” Tom has to have a rescue plan that is more high-styled than just getting the key and freeing the slave. When Huck suggests using a hole big enough for Jim to get through, Tom rejoins, “I should hope we can find a way that’s a little more complicated than that, Huck Finn.”

Eventually Tom volunteers: “We’ll dig him out. It’ll take about a week.” Chapter XXXV is entitled “Dark, Deep-laid Plans.” In the early daylight hours the digging commences, but Tom pines, “Blame it, this whole thing is just as easy and awkward as it can be. And it makes it so rotten difficult to get up a difficult plan.” There was no watchman to be drugged, no watchdog to provide a sleeping potion, for Tom informs Huck: “You got to invent all the difficulties.” Tom is not content with merely lifting up the bedstead to let Jim’s leg chain slip off; he has to find a saw so as to saw off the leg of the bed. At this point Tom reprimands Huck and supplies the rationale for salvation-the-hard-way: “Why, hain’t you ever read any books at all?—Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henry IV, nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old-maidy way as that?” Tom creatively wishes there was a moat around the cabin. He even toys for a minute with the notion of sawing Jim’s own leg off!

Tom invents the need for Jim to hide a rope ladder in his bed so as to supply clues to the discoverers. “Well, if it’s in the regulations,” Huck concedes. In addition, Tom wants Huck to steal a shirt off of the clothesline so Jim (who can’t write) can keep a journal on it. Huck continues to furnish obvious objections, but Tom will hear none of it. If they were to go by the books, Tom figures, it should take them several

years, but Jim's case has a bit more urgency to it. Although they could just enter through the door, Tom insists that they must dig Jim out with case-knives. (However, blisters without significant results check that idea shortly.)

The upshot of page after page for several chapters' worth of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to show how to make a hard, complicated chore out of a simple remedy. Never was there a more comic case of enforced legalism. At one point, Tom disgustedly rebukes his partner in crime: "It ain't no use to try to learn you nothing, Huck."¹² Simple deliverance is insufficient for a mastermind like Tom Sawyer. What is comic in a rollicking adventure becomes tragic when carried over onto the subject of salvation. If only the spiritual Tom Sawyers could grasp the message of the book of Galatians—to *supplement* salvation by grace is to *supplant* it.

II. Grace Abounding

The popular world classics not only provide the Christian preacher and teacher with examples of the abuse of grace, but (thankfully) also with examples of the abundance of God's grace.

1. The Need for God's Grace

Human disgrace constitutes the need for divine grace. The grace in Rom 3:24-28 is encased against the dark backdrop of sin in Rom 3:10-20. Perhaps there is no better parabolic presentation of the human predicament than is found in the science-fiction epic poem *Aniara* by the 1974 Nobel Prize winner, the Swedish Harry Edmund Martinson. The *Aniara* is a three-mile-long intergalactic spaceship traveling to Mars from Earth with 8,000 passengers. These are survivors of World War Thirty-Two, and at that period the earth is uninhabitable. They are headed for their hedonistic Hawaii (so to speak) when disaster strikes. A near-collision with an asteroid throws the *Aniara* off-course. Then an encounter with hostile meteors keeps the spacecraft from returning to orbit until the space travelers have reached the point of no return.¹³

They are lost (just as the Bible diagnoses) and on their own there is no hope of recovery. They are a people partying on their way to doom.

¹² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), 295-327.

¹³ Cited in Bruce Lockerbie, "'Aniara': Secular Man's One-Way Flight," *Christianity Today* (September 12, 1975), 19.

What a paradigm of the human situation. “‘Lost!’ . . . the word went like a dagger to my heart,” contemplates one of the members of *The Swiss Family Robinson*.¹⁴ The first quotation in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* is that of Gertrude Stein: “You are all a lost generation.”¹⁵

2. The Basis of God’s Gracious Offer

John’s Gospel indicates that “grace . . . came through Jesus Christ.” While the OT was by no means grace-exempt, John 1:17 makes “grace” and “law” into an antithesis. Titus 2:11 observes that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all. . . .”

That grace is channeled “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). No less a theologian than Benjamin Warfield observed that the normal word for “redeem” in biblical texts in German (*erlösen*) is exactly the one used by Grimm’s *Fairy Tales* for the process of breaking a spell.¹⁶ For instance, in Grimm’s tale about “The King of the Golden Mountain” a merchant’s son comes to a castle in which he finds only a serpent. However, the serpent turns out to be a maiden on whom a spell has been cast. She sees her savior and cries, “Are you come, my *Erlöser*?” When she is freed, restored, and transformed, the curse is broken. What a wonderful analogy from children’s literature of the removal of the curse (Gal 3:13) and freedom from the power of the devil (Heb 2:14, 15). This breaking of the spell comes about by “grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).

This salvation by grace also comes about only by the intervening rescue of another. Victor Hugo’s monumental *Les Misérables* furnishes an illustration here. Jean Valjean is Hugo’s chief character. Valjean’s adopted daughter, Cosette, falls in love with young Marius. Because Marius thinks Cosette has departed forever, he determines to give his life at the street barricades with the youthful revolutionaries. Valjean discovers Cosette’s love and goes to the barricades, where Marius has been seriously wounded. The older man—himself wounded—carries the younger unconscious man through the underground sewers of Paris, thus providing his deliverance. Valjean does not even inform Marius that his savior is Cosette’s father, for he would not force himself upon the other.¹⁷ That is grace.

¹⁴ Johann Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Publishers, 1949), 2.

¹⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1983), 1.

¹⁶ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), 339.

¹⁷ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (Danbury, CT: The Classics Appreciation Society, 1955), 128-29.

Our gracious salvation has been brought about by means of substitution (2 Cor 5:14, 25; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 Pet 3:18). Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* provides no doubt the classic case of substitution—one dying on behalf of another. Charles Darnay (a former French aristocrat) and Sidney Carton are look-alikes. At an early juncture in the story this likeness allows Darnay to gain his freedom in an English court case. In the latter part of the story Darnay is taken captive by French patriots en route to Paris, and even his father-in-law (an ex-prisoner of the hated Bastille) cannot save him. On the day before Darnay is to be taken in a tumbril to his execution, Sidney Carton manages to finagle his way into Darnay's prison cell, change clothes with Darnay (who has been rendered unconscious by means of a drug), and is then in position to sacrifice himself as a substitute for another.¹⁸ Carton's death provides another with life. His was a voluntary, graciously offered, substitutionary sacrifice.

God's grace (Titus 2:11, 12) transforms receptive sinners. Again, Hugo's *Les Misérables* furnishes a breathtaking illustration of this truth. At the beginning of the book Valjean is an ex-convict on the run. He has become a hardened man due to long years of incarceration for stealing a loaf of bread so as to feed his sister's starving family. After his reprieve no one will offer him food or lodging because of his prison record. Therefore, he wanders homelessly from town to town. Finally he is told of a bishop's home. To his surprise he is taken in and given food and an overnight stay. During the night he decides to steal the bishop's silver. The guilty thief is then captured by the police who want the bishop to press charges. Instead, the old man mercifully indicates that Valjean had forgotten to take the candlesticks also. The police are flabbergasted. Valjean is also stunned. He had expected severe justice. Instead, he had received grace. That grace transforms a hardened, desperate ex-convict into a compassionate and gracious convert. It is one of literature's greatest cases of behavioral conversion in response to another's grace.¹⁹

3. The Results of God's Grace

It has been indicated that divine grace received should engender human graciousness in response. Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* affords an excellent example of grace in action in the person of John Jarndyce.

¹⁸ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Airmont Books, 1963), 297-302, 318-20.

¹⁹ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 12-18.

Jarndyce shows undeserved favor to others in two particular ways. First, he treats Richard Carstone with grace when the younger man attributes ungraciousness, even questionable ethics, to the older Jarndyce. Richard had waited years and years (like a gambler) for the resolution of the Jarndyce court case. From this case Richard expected to receive a financial windfall. When the case was finally resolved, the lawyers had used up all the money of the parties involved. Richard the debtor got nothing, yet John Jarndyce was willing to forgive Richard's unjust allegations against him and offer him any financial assistance he needed.

A second instance of Jarndyce's grace is an extreme one. The older Jarndyce had taken in Esther Summerson as an adopted child and raised her. When she was grown (despite her disfiguring case of small pox), he offered to marry Esther. However, John Jarndyce learned that a younger man, Dr. Allan Woodcourt, was in love with Esther and she with him. Hence, Jarndyce did the unheard-of thing by rescinding his own offer of marriage in favor of that of the younger man. Surely that is grace abounding.²⁰

Stimulus = grace; response = gratitude. One of literature's most touching instances of grace-and-gratitude occurs in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Three brothers of a dissolute and despicably immoral father are featured in this book. Dmitri Karamazov, frequently a drunken image of his father, is accused and brought to trial for the murder of his father. The transcript of the trial is often long and tedious, but there is one unforgettable chapter in that section entitled "A Pound of Nuts."

An old German doctor named Herzenstube is called to the witness stand to testify concerning Dmitri's psychological condition. The German reminisces about his younger years when as a doctor he had had contact with the Karamazov family. He recalled the urchin Dmitri wandering about the streets uncared for, with his trousers practically falling off. One day he bought the uncared-for boy a pound of nuts. Herzenstube began teaching Dmitri the names of the Trinity, which he had never heard before. On a later day the doctor drilled the small boy again on the Trinitarian names.

Many years passed. One day, Dr. Herzenstube told the court, into his office walked a well-dressed young man who proceeded to recite for the physician the names of the Trinity. It was a grown-up Dmitri Karamazov, who said to the kindly older man, "I have just returned to thank you for that pound of nuts." (Evidently the elderly doctor was

²⁰ Dickens, *Bleak House*, 580-84, 672, 677, 913-15, 923-27.

the only adult during Dmitri's entire childhood years who had shown him any special care!) At that point in the courtroom the ever-boisterous Dmitri Karamazov piped up and said, "And I still thank you, you good man!"²¹

It has been well said: *Theology is grace, and ethics is gratitude*. In the existential guilt and anxiety of modern literature we sense the quest for meaning. In children's fairy tales we find the deepest longings of the human heart. The classic literature of the world provides a pastiche of sin abounding, but—even greater—of grace abounding!

²¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: The New American Library, 1957), 608-11.

BOOK REVIEWS

Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith. By Peter E. Gillquist. Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1989. 185 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

Gillquist and a number of other former Campus Crusade leaders started churches and then a denomination called the Evangelical Orthodox Church. Later the whole denomination, some two thousand people spread throughout the U.S. and Canada, joined the Antiochian Orthodox Church. This book tells that story.

Gillquist's purpose in telling this story is clearly promotional. He wishes to draw evangelical Christians into the Antiochian Orthodox Church. He does this by attempting to prove that the *only true church* today is the Orthodox Church.

It is fascinating to see the reasoning Gillquist employs. Here are some of his arguments: (1) The only way to interpret the Scriptures properly is to listen to church tradition. Tradition interprets Scripture for us (pp. 76, 102). (2) The Reformation was misguided. Neither Roman Catholicism nor Protestantism is correct (pp. 60-61). (3) The Apostles taught orally things which were not placed in Scripture. Many of those teachings have been the source of true apostolic doctrine.

Note that these arguments eliminate the Scriptures as a basis for determining truth. Tradition interprets the Scriptures, not the other way around.

The author accepts and attempts to persuade evangelicals to accept a number of non-evangelical doctrines. These include: (1) Mary is the Mother of the Church (p. 115), the Mother of God (p. 112), and the Queen who sits at the side of Jesus Christ the King (p. 112). (2) Mary remained a virgin her whole life and had no children other than Jesus (pp. 116ff.). (3) Mary did not die. She was translated directly to heaven like Enoch and Elijah (p. 119). (4) Mary and all of the saints intercede before Christ for us (p. 112). (5) Mary can save us (pp. 120-21). (6) Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments; they are necessary for one to obtain and keep eternal life (pp. 49-50; 110). (7) Crossing oneself, that is, making the sign of the cross on the forehead and upper torso, is powerful, effective, and biblical (pp. 123-31). (8) To be a part of any church other than an Orthodox Church is to depart from the faith

(p. 152). (9) Pastors are priests and should be called "Father" (pp. 97-106)—contra Matt 23:9.

Most grievous of all is the author's view of the Gospel. He argues that one is saved—at least initially—by committing his or her life fully to Christ (pp. 12, 23, 24, 109) and by submitting to water baptism (pp. 49, 110). To maintain this salvation one must regularly partake of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper (pp. 49-50). Only once in the entire book is *faith in Christ* maintained as a condition of salvation (p. 120). Where faith in Christ fits in is never made clear. Evidently to be saved and stay saved one must commit his life to Christ, believe in Christ, be baptized, and then regularly partake of communion. Assurance of salvation is never discussed in the book—probably because under such a system *there can be no assurance*—contra 1 John 5:13.

My mother is 100% Serbian. I was christened as a baby by a Serbian Orthodox priest. I have been in Serbian Orthodox Churches on many occasions. I have been to many Saint's Day (Slava) celebrations. I even attended a Serbian Orthodox summer camp and served as an altar boy. While there is a special place in my heart for Orthodox people, I know that most people in the Orthodox Churches, like most in the Roman Catholic Church, are not trusting in Christ alone for salvation and hence are unsaved. My heart's desire for them is that they would come to simple faith in Christ alone—not faith in Christ *plus* commitment, baptism, the Lord's Supper, good works, etc.

I would recommend this book highly to all who are engaged actively in Christian ministry: pastors, educators, deacons, elders, Sunday School teachers, youth workers, etc. Reading this book will help you understand the mindset of people from the Orthodox Church—and, to a large extent, people from the Roman Catholic Church, since they are in agreement on most of what they believe.

Unless discussed with a mature, Bible-taught believer, I do not recommend this book for new or untaught Christians.

Like the author, this reviewer used to be on the staff of Campus Crusade. Unlike the author, I have been traveling in the opposite direction: whereas Gillquist started out as a Protestant and has ended up an Orthodox priest, I was christened into the Orthodox Church and am now happy to be the Executive Director of an evangelical Protestant ministry and an elder in a local church.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Roanoke, TX

Out of the Darkness Into the Light. By Gerald G. Jampolsky. New York: Bantam Books, 1989. 266 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

This book is a cleverly disguised promotion of New Age theology. Dr. Jampolsky, a psychiatrist, gives his New Age "testimony"—without ever openly identifying the book as such. He describes how he changed from being an alcoholic and workaholic to being sober and loving.

Take note. Eastern Mysticism *does* work. It *can* change lives. It certainly did alter this man's lifestyle. If positive changes in lifestyle prove one's theology, then this book is a sure-fire apologetic for the New Age Movement.

New Age catch phrases and ideas are carefully interspersed throughout the book. The author speaks of: asking his "inner teacher" for help (p. 243); of his "guidance" telling him what to do (p. 239); and, of receiving "a long message, giving me a purpose and plan that completely changed my life. The information came to me almost like inner dictation" (p. 139).

Once he refers to "the God-Self" in each of us (p. 247), and to "helping a fellow traveler [a New Age term] along the path" (p. 106).

He also speaks glowingly of visiting a psychic for a "reading" which later proved to predict his future accurately (p. 142). He reports having studied parapsychology, Kirlian photography, and "nontraditional healing" (pp. 71-72). He makes a number of references to death and seems to hold to the view of Eastern Mysticism and Pantheism—reincarnation and merging with "God" (p. 142, 168).

Jampolsky's "conversion" came in 1975 when he read *A Course in Miracles* (pp. 79ff.)—a book referred to reverentially throughout the book. This is clearly his holy book.

Most of our readers will find little which is valuable and much which is dangerous in this book. However, for the person who is well-grounded in Scripture and well-versed in psychology and New Age theology, this book is worth reading. It is a powerful presentation of New Age theology by a best-selling author. In addition, it does contain some insights which could prove helpful to those who struggle with obsessive-compulsive disorders and workaholism (e.g., slow down; simplify your life; be less critical of others and self; make a daily commitment to love others and yourself). Of course, to find these insights one must sift through tons of worthless rock to find a few nuggets of value.

Readers should also be aware of the fact that the author views homosexuality as perfectly normal and he is strongly seeking to win converts to his opinion (pp. 201-19).

It is my prayer that the author would truly come "out of the darkness into the light." Unfortunately, he is still in deep darkness—the darkness of New Age theology.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Roanoke, TX

The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition. By Arthur L. Farstad. Foreword by G. Michael Cocoris. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990. 171 pp. Paper, \$8.95.

The highly esteemed editor of the GES Journal, Dr. Arthur L. Farstad, has now written his first book. Those of us who have known him for years are delighted that the general public now has an opportunity to sample Farstad's unique combination of wide erudition and personal humility. Both qualities are obvious in this volume.

Appropriately, Farstad's initial book deals with a significant subject: the production and publication of the New King James Version (NKJV). The appearance of the complete NKJV in 1982 (the New Testament appeared in 1979) was a major publishing event. When one considers that the users of the King James Version itself normally have the revised edition of 1769, the need for a thorough and modernized revision of the KJV is obvious. The NKJV has met that need in an extremely satisfactory way.

Farstad's book tells how this achievement was realized. The reader of this well-written little volume will get all the information he needs. With admirable thoroughness—but without being at all tedious—the author traces the history of the English Bible through the 1769 revision of the KJV and also explains the principles and procedures that went into the making of the NKJV. Farstad knows whereof he speaks. He served as the New Testament editor for this version and was later named Executive Editor for the entire Bible.

The presentation of the material in this book is organized well and carries some original touches. Fundamentally, there are three units in the volume focusing successively on three important considerations in translation: Accuracy (Part 1), Beauty (Part 2), and Completeness (Part 3). Each of these units contains four chapters, with the chapters under

"Beauty" bearing titles that echo the famous refrain about bridal attire—"Something Old," "Something New," "Something Borrowed," "Something Blue." Under the last of these chapters, the writer discusses the problem of "blue" or vulgar language which sometimes offends readers of the old KJV! Clearly this author is no stodgy scholar. Instead, as all who know him will attest, he is a scholar with a flair for art.

In a volume so interesting, but so packed with valuable information, there is little to find fault with. Here and there, however, there is a point or two that could stand further defense or clarification. For example, in Isaiah 53 (discussed on pp. 75-77), the NKJV does not adequately clarify the old KJV in v 9. The NKJV reads: "And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich in His death." The English reader is likely to be puzzled by the last half of the verse and especially by the "but" which the NKJV has introduced. Farstad's comment on this verse (p. 77) implies to this reviewer a meaning which would have been better communicated by introducing a "He was" into the text: "But *He was* with the rich in His death." The King James Version's commendable use of italics for supplied words, which the NKJV wisely retains, would have made clear that the expression "He was" had been furnished for clarification. But such problems as this are few and far between in Farstad's book.

Finally, the reader should be encouraged to savor the many vivid expressions with which the author has enlivened his work. For instance, in one place he reminisces about a high school Latin play which "got a good laugh in the 1950's" and "the gist" of which was "that Latin is alive and well in Washington, D.C., among other places"! He goes on to affirm that "Latin is also alive and well in a modified form in the English language." Not bad as a far-from-stuffy introduction to the subject of Latin's contribution to English and its influence on Bible translation. Elsewhere this creative writer can say: "We have no desire to pillory the seventeenth-century translators"! Since the pillory was an instrument of punishment well-known in the 17th century, this statement can be described as an historical "pun." It is vintage Farstad for all who know him.

Naturally Dr. Farstad had to find a place in this volume for his "faithful canine companion, Mr. Chips," and he has done so on p. 41. Visitors to the writer's home can easily envision this loyal dog lying on the sofa or on the floor as his owner diligently produced the manuscript of this book. This reviewer can only say that if "Chippy" (as we usually call him) can be credited with any measure of inspiration for this fine little

volume, he should be made available on loan to other aspiring authors as well!

Get this book. It's well worth your time.

Zane C. Hodges

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

Evangelism in the Early Church. By Michael Green. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970. 349 pp. Paper, \$7.95.

Evangelism in the Early Church by Edward Michael Banks Green has been around for some time. However, since this book will be of great interest to the readers of *JOTGES*, it justifies a review.

To anyone interested in this subject, this book illustrates the who, how, and why of evangelism in the first four centuries of the Church. The outlines of the chapters are clear and logical, making the book easy to read. Green has included a very generous sprinkling of quotations from the works of the early church fathers. The author even shows through archaeology how Christians expressed their faith by means of symbols and home decorations. Thus, this book is appealing to those, who, like this reviewer, are interested in church history.

There are, however, some features of the book that would cause many of our readers to raise an eyebrow. First, Green's definition of faith is existential: "Faith is far more than assent to propositions about Christ, though it involves this. It means encounter with Christ arising from commitment on the strength of certain propositions. It is nothing less than self-surrender to One who surrendered himself for us" (p. 316; f.n. 51). Also, the author demonstrates a rather "high church" view of the ordinances. Along with repentance and faith, "the third condition incumbent upon all who wanted to begin the Christian life was, of course, baptism" (p. 152). Green does describe baptism as a "seal," but the way in which he ties it to repentance and faith might give one the impression that Green is a three-point Campbellite! In fact, in a further defense of his position he writes: "This does not mean that baptism was inevitably and invariably effective as a sacrament in uniting a man to Christ, if his own attitude was not right" (p. 317; f.n. 59). However, even this disclaimer is also in agreement with the position of the Churches of

Christ. In this, Green reflects the position of many of the early church fathers, a position which caused Thomas Torrance to write about the loss of the doctrine of grace in the teachings of the early church in his book *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, a book to which Green makes an objection (pp. 133-34).

On the whole, Green's book is good in representing what the early Church did in the area of evangelism. It is helpful to see what the Church in another era did that was both right and wrong. It helps us to see some blind spots that we may have. Certainly, the passion of the early Church for evangelism, as Green presents her, is in contrast to our apathy. But, unfortunately, as Green's book illustrates (despite his objections), a clear presentation of the Gospel seems to be rare in any generation.

Lanny Thomas Tanton

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy. By Richard P. Belcher. Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990. 123 pp. Paper, \$6.95.

On the surface, this book promises the layman a grasp of the Lordship Salvation controversy. What will quickly grasp the uninformed layman, however, is a limited presentation of the Lordship Salvation debate and thus a skewed understanding of the real issues.

The title of this book promises an objective presentation of both the Lordship Salvation and Free Grace positions. This it does to a limited degree. The book would better be titled, "*A Layman's Guide to the John MacArthur—Zane Hodges Controversy*," for these are virtually the only two men he chooses to represent. The great weakness of the book is that Belcher does not realize or admit that the Free Grace position has one theology which encompasses different interpretations consistent with that theology. He never cites any Free Grace advocate other than Hodges, not even Charles C. Ryrie (mentioned only in passing). Ryrie's book *So Great Salvation* was also a response to MacArthur. Evidently, Belcher hasn't interacted with any copies of the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* either! In a phone conversation, the author told me that he chose to represent only Hodges because his book, *Absolutely Free!*, was the most controversial, was most often contrasted with

MacArthur's by laymen, and was better systematized than Ryrie's. This is not enough to convince me that Belcher has treated the Free Grace position with objectivity.

Although the title and introduction claim to represent both sides objectively, the reader quickly perceives that Belcher is not so objective after all. (He does not admit that he supports MacArthur's position until his conclusion, pp. 105-106.) The first two sections present and contrast MacArthur's views and Hodges's views somewhat fairly (though he prefers the term "non-lordship", while we prefer "Free Grace"—a hint of bias to come). However, the five specific interpretations by Hodges that he critiques seem chosen arbitrarily or because they represent very controversial viewpoints (Jas 2:14-26; Rom 10:9-13; 2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 6:9-10).

Thus from the outset, the book appears on a mission to *discredit* the Free Grace view as a "new view of salvation" (p. 83). By the time the third section is reached ("A Critique of Non-Lordship Salvation"), the book assumes an acrimonious air. Discussion of Scripture passages is superficial or neglected. This is to be regretted because Hodges's exegesis and research should be answered with *comparable* exegesis and research, or opponents should be silent.

Belcher chooses to argue rhetorically and theologically, yet he fails to avoid dogmatism. Also, "straw men" (a favorite term of his) are erected in his chapter on "Theological Weaknesses of Non-lordship Salvation" (I counted six straw men out of the eight representations of the Free Grace position).

The book is long on rhetoric and short on the kind of critical interaction that is needed in the debate. I fear that it will guide laymen, but only in the wrong direction, and that it will inflame rather than inform. Belcher should have taken the time to acquaint himself with other interpretations that represent the Free Grace position and to have made the effort to answer the more serious theological issues at the heart of the Lordship Salvation debate.

Charles C. Bing
Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Burleson, TX

The Shroud and the Controversy. By Kenneth E. Stevenson and Gary R. Habermas. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990. 257 pp. Cloth, \$15.95.

For those unfamiliar with the subject, the Shroud of Turin is a burial cloth dating back many centuries which contains a three-dimensional image—that is, with depth of field—of a man who was killed by crucifixion. For centuries it has been guarded at the Cathedral of Turin (Italy), hence its name. Many have concluded that the Shroud is actually the burial shroud of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified in A.D. 29.

The scientific evidence indicates, as the book outlines in detail, that the image, although similar in appearance to a photographic negative, was not the work of a chemically or artistically-produced forgery. All known methods of forgery were attempted by a team of scientists known as STURP (Shroud of Turin Research Project) in order to reproduce the image. These attempts all ended in failure.

In their earlier book, *Verdict on the Shroud*, written in 1981, the authors were perhaps overly zealous in the use of statistical probability—an admission that they make in this latest work (pp. 15, 16). However lacking their initial approach may have been, in their most recent work Habermas and Stevenson have given to the public a masterpiece filled with objective data, scientific analyses, logical reasoning, relevant historical information, and a series of helpful photographs.

Although the subject of the Shroud has evoked much emotional response from both sides throughout the centuries, authors Stevenson and Habermas provide a detailed, scientific approach to the study in *The Shroud and the Controversy*. At the outset, they reassure the reader of their honest and objective approach by pointing out that since the time of the first book's publication, Habermas has become slightly less optimistic, whereas Stevenson has remained equally convinced of the Shroud's authenticity (p. 14). In their latest work, the authors give the pertinent data, and they ask the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

The strongest angle of attack against the Shroud's authenticity stems from the Carbon 14 dating of the cloth, which has dated the cloth between A.D. 1260 and 1390 (p. 55). The authors point out, however, that the STURP team did not follow the prescribed C-14 method which must test samples from *totally different parts* of an artifact. The dating samples of the Shroud were all taken from the same area near some patches known to have been sewn into the shroud in the 16th century

after a fire burned some holes in it in 1532. Added to this is the fact that the Shroud was heavily handled during the Middle Ages. This produced contaminants which are known to affect C-14 dating; thus it is hard to be convinced of the dating results by STURP (p. 56).

Furthermore, a dating conducted in a nuclear accelerator at the University of California in 1982 showed *two ends of the same thread* to date separately at A.D. 200 and A.D. 1000 (p. 58)! Carbon 14 claims to have an accuracy range of ± 200 years. The A.D. 200 reading, taken together with the plus or minus factor of ± 200 years, places the Shroud in the first century.

From a biblical and historical perspective, the authors' detailed analysis of the wounds inflicted on the man who produced the image on the Shroud is much appreciated by this reviewer. The wounds suffered by Christ as recorded in the Gospels—from the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the beating of His face, to the crucifixion itself (nail wounds and spear wound)—*all* are evidenced in the image of the Shroud. Detailed photographs and computer enhanced imaging (including some in color) clearly show these injuries. The man whose body produced the image on the Shroud experienced the *exact same wounds to the last detail* as those suffered by our Lord.

Another interesting area of the authors' study deals with evidence for the Resurrection contained in the Shroud. Since no known methods of human, mechanical, or chemical forgery were able to reproduce the image of the Shroud under the direction of STURP scientists, *they* concluded that it was produced by some "Unknown Energy Source" or by "Direct Contact + Unknown Variable" (p. 214)! Since the image was not produced by any natural means—as the scientists have indicated—we are left with a supernatural means.

In the reviewer's opinion, Stevenson and Habermas give convincing evidence to show that the Shroud of Turin *is indeed* the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. Those who become convinced of the Shroud's authenticity are cautioned by the authors to worship the *Man* who made the image, and not the image itself (pp. 20, 21). Even for skeptics, the book is well worth reading. I believe that anyone interested in the identity of Jesus Christ, whether a Christian or not, should read this book. According to the authors, many people expressed that they had trusted in Jesus Christ as a result of reading their first book, *Verdict on the Shroud*

(p. 207). Possibly the reading of this book may similarly affect the spiritual lives of many readers.

Mark J. Farstad

Production Staff

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Dallas, TX

You Are Chosen: The Priesthood of All Believers. By Herschel Hobbs. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. 123 pp. Cloth, \$15.95.

As pastor of a Southern Baptist Church, I was deeply interested in Hobbs's presentation of the priesthood of the believer for two reasons. First, Herschel Hobbs is a definitive writer of Southern Baptist thought. Second, this well-beloved doctrine has become perverted by what is known in SBC circles as "the Controversy." Hobbs presents what I consider to be the doctrine's Baptistically orthodox form—free from the parochial answers which it has been made to justify in the recent past.

Hobbs states that the priesthood of the believer means that every person in Christ is competent to stand before God without need for a human or human-made "go-between" (p. 1), excluding human interference of any kind between the individual soul and God (p. 3). After looking at the concept of priesthood both in the Bible and in subsequent history (pp. 5-16), he concludes that the privileges of the believer-priest are direct access to God for fellowship and confession, and the right to read and interpret Scripture as led by the Holy Spirit. Our responsibilities are to love, and to study the Scriptures. From this he branches out to examine the question of sovereignty and freewill, taking a traditional Baptist amalgamation of eternal security and the understanding that God predetermines the means of salvation, while leaving the acceptance of that plan to the individual. He presents a very balanced position concerning every believer being a minister. His insistence on the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit is both stirring and refreshing.

My criticisms of the book are few. First, many, both in and outside of Baptist circles, will find his use of the priesthood of the believer as proof of congregational church polity a *non sequitur*. In concluding one of many defenses, he expresses that "The decisions of the local congregation on ecclesiastical matters are 'the consensus of the competent'" (p. 4).

Having seen rampant carnality in business meetings from childhood on, I would conclude that many Christians are *not* spiritually competent and have no business guiding the direction of the church. Second, I also believe that his understanding of pastoral authority in spiritual matters does not do justice to the biblical text, and that there is a biblical line of belief (creed or no creed) which if crossed brands one as a heretic. The claim to Spirit-led interpretation is often a false one (2 Pet 3:17).

In sum, this book is a presentation of Baptist thought by one whose theological writings are highly respected by Southern Baptists. I recommend it to those within and outside of that particular circle for understanding the priesthood of the believer. Special appreciation is due to Harper & Row for publishing a book which will appeal to a conservative Christian audience.

Mark A. Ellis

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Wylie, TX

Thy Kingdom Come. By J. Dwight Pentecost. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990. 360 pp. Cloth, \$17.95.

This new work by Dr. Pentecost has been awaited with eagerness by many in dispensational circles. Pentecost is well known for both his teaching and writing career, and his book *Things to Come* has been a dispensational classic for years.

The author begins by giving a few contrasting ideas from competing definitions of God's kingdom, concluding with his particular understanding of the two-fold nature of the kingdom. It is his understanding that one particular theme, God's reassertion of His right to rule over a world taken in rebellion, is the one unifying idea of the Word of God. Those familiar with the Bible Exposition Department at Dallas Seminary will recognize immediately this approach to the Scriptures. Having established the Bible's one theme, Dr. Pentecost devotes the rest of his work to examining each book of the Bible through this interpretive grid. His approach to the text is both his book's greatest strength, and also, I believe, its greatest witness.

Thy Kingdom Come serves as a synopsis of Pentecost's thought, an abridgement of his many contemplations and exegetical decisions throughout the Bible. This will make the book a tremendous resource

to lay people and pastors who want to know what he thinks on various difficult passages throughout the Bible.

However, the comments do not always relate to the idea of the kingdom, and this contributes to the perception that Pentecost is sometimes taking a "bite and run" approach to the Bible and his discussion of the kingdom.

A more serious difficulty is that the work is obviously the product of Bible exposition, not systematic or even biblical theology. There is little interaction with other writers to give the reader an understanding of how Pentecost's ideas compare with current thoughts in the theological marketplace. This is particularly unfortunate given the importance of his topic for continued development in dispensationalism. From the very beginning one is left to himself to figure out how Pentecost fits into the traditional categories concerning the kingdom. There are also many times when he cruises over complex exegetical problems without a hint that there is a problem, and without validation of the choices he makes. Constraints of book length may have been the cause of this, but the value of the book is thereby significantly limited.

In spite of this weakness, the book is well worth the price just to have Dr. Pentecost's depth of understanding of God's Word as a resource.

Mark A. Ellis

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Wylie, TX

On This Day... By Carl D. Wilson. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989. 383 pp. Cloth, \$14.95.

This book contains 366 entries—one for each day of the year, including February 29. Each page contains: (1) A Scripture reading for that day; (2) A sampling of what happened on that day in history; (3) A listing of some of the prominent people born on that date; (4) A special quotation by a famous person; (5) A daily devotion; (6) A prayer emphasis suggestion. Although parts 1, 4, 5, and 6 particularly dovetail with each other, the entire daily package definitely comprises one single unit. Because neither the day of the week nor the year appear, the book is usable year after year.

On This Day... can be used as a family devotional guide with a unique historical emphasis. And for the history buff, it is an excellent book to

simply browse through. It is also great for developing both a higher appreciation for our heritage and a deeper feeling for God's hand in history. The work would further be of considerable value in aiding young people to grasp the personal aspect of the lives of the history-making individuals cited. And it would be a very fine tool in the personal libraries of home schoolers.

Even with its historic emphasis, Almighty God is the book's main focus. The author has deliberately attempted to use the historical illustrations and interesting anecdotes to demonstrate the truths of spiritual principles. A presentation of the Gospel closes the book, along with a telephone number to call for further assistance.

In the birthday sections, an effort was made to present a balanced sampling of both historic and contemporary personalities. Likewise, those past and present notables are drawn from a cross section of human endeavor. One finds individuals from the worlds of religion, education, entertainment, the arts, politics, sports, and government—to name a few.

Wilson's work may also be used as the basis of a variety of games. For instance, one could read a quotation and ask, "Who said it?" "On which day did a certain event happen?" Or, "On which day was a particular personality born?" "What do former Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, actress/dancer Cyd Charisse, country and western singer Charlie Pride, and baseball player Jim Rice all have in common?" (They were all born on the same day—March eighth.)

Furthermore, *On This Day...* could be successfully employed to ascertain what occurred on important family days, such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, etc. These could then be incorporated, along with the special spiritual applications for that day, into personal compilations of family histories.

Perhaps a few examples of the book's inclusions would be in order. The "Today's Quotation" for the 9th of March is the testimony of Benjamin Franklin's personal faith: "I believe in one God. Creator of the Universe. That He governs it by His Providence. That He ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render Him is doing good to His children."

The devotion for May 8 includes the "Cadet Prayer" recited during the chapel service at the United States Military Academy: "Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be contented with half truth when the whole truth can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when right and truth are in jeopardy."

It was gratifying to note that December twenty-fifth's "Today in History" begins with, "Christ was born to Mary in Bethlehem stable. . . ." And the day's corresponding "Born Today" section's first entry is "Jesus Christ." In this unbelieving world, it is nice to find a book which treats our Lord and Savior as the historical personage that He is!

Finally, being of Scottish descent, this reviewer especially liked the devotion for the 29th of March:

NO CRIME

We are uniquely blessed in America with freedom of speech and of religion. Few people in the world enjoy such freedom. Do you exercise your freedoms regularly? Carlisle Castle was a place of imprisonment for many Scotsmen during the border wars years ago. A visitor to a prison cell in the castle will notice long grooves worn in the stone. Such grooves came from prisoners frantically clawing at the walls in a vain effort to be free.

I wonder if Christ's love so predominates our lives that it is straining to get out; that is the normal experience of the believer who is right with God. If you were to be tried for your witness for God, would there be enough evidence to convict you? What does He see when He looks down at you?

John R. Bennie III

Lifeway Educational Resources
Northwood, NH

Free Speech or Propaganda? By Marlin Maddoux. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990. 224 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

Maddoux begins with his personal reaction to the television coverage of the tragic events at Kent State University in May 1970. That event started him thinking that the American news establishment was conducting what he calls a "really big show in the Barnum and Bailey tradition." This reviewer was in the Arizona Army National Guard at the time and well remembers the agony felt in the traumatic days following the Kent State disaster. Naturally, my sympathies lay with the repeatedly harassed Ohio National Guardsmen rather than with the much-eulogized student radicals. And I wondered if the American public was getting a true picture of what had occurred there.

The author's reaction was similar, at least in regard to the latter question. From that date he proceeds to sketch his odyssey from passive

acceptance of all that he heard and saw in the media to the place where he realized that this country desperately needed a conservative counter to the increasingly obvious left-leaning network "news" programming. The remainder of the book is both an indictment against the liberal manipulation of the reporting of contemporary events and a history of the development of his own "Point of View" radio broadcast.

As Maddoux sees it, the problem is that what might be called "advocacy journalism" has replaced objective news reporting. American young people with conservative and religious home environments attend journalism schools which teach a persistently liberal bias. Successive crops of incipient journalists are taught to see themselves, not as objective reporters of news as it happens, but as agents of social change with a left-wing agenda to promote. Even those fledgling journalists who manage to maintain a conservative point of view in spite of their liberal education, find that their stories will not be published or aired by the establishment media unless they are written with a decidedly left-leaning slant.

Thus, this nation's journalistic establishment, which can be shown to have a bias far to the left of the overall U.S. population, perpetuates its leftward momentum. Even if the simple, unvarnished facts do not bear out their prejudices, the media social reformers cling to their opinions, to the point of distorting their reporting to support their preconceived ideology.

On the night of Ronald Reagan's defeat of Jimmy Carter, this reviewer remembers Walter Cronkite and two of his media elite lamenting the apparent "death of liberalism." The three media personalities concluded that the American people voted for Mr. Reagan because fifty years of New Deal liberalism had failed!

Yet, even though they admitted liberalism as a philosophy had not worked, they still advocated the continuance of that leftist agenda. In their despair, they actually admitted that they were still committed to liberal political policies even though a half century of implementation had proved them utterly unworkable!

The thesis of Maddoux's volume is aptly expressed in its title, *Free Speech or Propaganda?* He more than adequately demonstrates that the answer to the implied question is the latter proposition. Today, although the media elite hide under the cloak of "free speech," they are actually and deliberately propagandizing the American public.

The author goes on to cite innumerable examples of such premeditated distortions of the truth. Left-wingers are touted as respected national

or world leaders, while those with conservative or traditional religious views are either ignored or placed in as bad a light as possible. For instance, compare the typical coverage of radical feminist Gloria Steinem and Eagle Forum's Phyllis Schlafly. And consider the relative media presentations of the liberal National Organization of Women and the conservative Concerned Women for America. The latter has *twice the membership*, yet does not get *one tenth of the publicity*!

In another glaring example of the outright misrepresentation of facts, Maddoux cites a February 1989 issue of the *Dallas Morning News* which carried the headline, "Most In Texas Poll Back Abortion In Most Cases." Not until the third paragraph did the article state that "only 18% of those polled feel abortion should be permitted under any circumstances."

Mr. Maddoux ends several chapters with "What Can We Do?" sections. He suggests we can unplug the TV, stop buying the offending newspapers, and write letters to lawmakers, editors, sponsors, and network administrators. Most of all, we can take the time and effort to educate ourselves as to the truth about the news events of the current day and the recent past. The author concludes by saying, "The real key is you! To everyone who asks if one person really can make a difference in this world, I answer a loud, resounding 'yes!' Elections have been decided by just one vote. Prayer was taken out of public schools by Madelyn Murray O'Hair, just one woman. Abortion on demand became the law of the land by one woman, Norma McCovey, the 'Roe' in Roe vs. Wade. Movements have been started as a result of one person's vision. Yes, one person can make a difference. And you and I together, and the next person and the next person and the next . . ."

But why review such a politically oriented book in *JOTGES*? Although it may sound like a cliché, *Free Speech or Propaganda?* is must reading for every Christian. In a great number of cases the facts that the media are misrepresenting are about Christians or Christian issues. What we believe and practice as evangelicals is in real danger today because of the left-wing propaganda which is being foisted on the American public as "news." *GES* stands for truth, and the distortion of truth is the concern of every Christian.

John R. Bennie III
Lifeway Educational Resources
Northwood, NH

The Disciple-Making Pastor. By Bill Hull. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988. 250 pp. Cloth, \$11.95.

In reviewing this excellent resource I am hard-pressed to keep from quoting the entire book. Pastor Bill Hull has written out of a pastor's heart to today's Christian leaders. To quote Dann Spader's endorsement on the bookcover, "Every decade a few books are written which clearly define the critical issues, masterfully present the biblical truths, and radically challenge traditional approaches. *The Disciple-Making Pastor* is such a book!"

Do we need another book on discipling? In spite of an increasing number of discipleship resources, the statistics still shout loudly and clearly that the Church is failing to produce believers who understand and aggressively carry out their mission. "How could the 3,000 gathered for worship compose a great church," asks Hull, "if only 7 percent were trained to witness and only 2 percent had introduced another to Christ?" In explaining the desperate need for multiplication he poses the question whether you would "rather have a million dollars today or a penny today, two cents tomorrow, and four cents the day after that, doubling daily for thirty days?" The fact is that if, as Christ did, I would disciple eleven others for three years and then each of us would disciple another eleven in the next three years, and if we continued to increase at that rate there would be 21,258,732 disciplined believers at the end of twenty-one years. The unfortunate reality is that currently "it takes 1,000 Christians 365 days to introduce one person to Christ. At this rate, reaching the world is a fantasy" (p. 134).

I was most challenged by Hull's chapter titled "The Role of a Disciple-Making Pastor." In it he distinguishes a "Generic Pastor" from a Disciple-Making Pastor. He cuts through what he calls "the most common myth . . . that effective preaching leads to an effective ministry," as he explains that the Disciple-Making Pastor is a Pastor/Teacher, not a Pastor/Teller. The Pastor/Tellers "talk to people about works of service, but they do not fulfill their God-given responsibility." The Pastor/Teacher serves more as a coach/trainer. "Teaching means more than telling people what and telling them why. It progresses to showing them how, doing it with them, letting them do it, and deploying them into the harvest field" (p. 96).

The majority of the book deals with changing the traditional mindset concerning what a pastor does. The weak point of the book is in the area of the practical. But the author explains early on that the fuller explanation of how to make it work in the local church can be found in

his first book, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*. He does describe the process as being three-phased: (1) Come and See (telling them Why and What); (2) Come and Follow Me (showing them How and Doing it with them); and (3) Come and Be With Me (letting them Do it and Unleashing them).

As a pastor and former missionary, I found this book extremely challenging and motivating. I will be passing it on to many of my co-workers in the ministry. Everyone who is serious about serving the Lord should read it.

J. Daniel Small

Pastor

Disciple's Fellowship

Wylie, TX

Solving Church Education's Ten Toughest Problems. By John R. Cionca. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990. 192 pp. Paper, \$7.95.

John R. Cionca is Dean of Students and a Christian Education professor at Bethel Seminary. In addition to his teaching experience, the author has also pastored several churches. The basis for this book is the author's surveying over one thousand pastors seeking to determine the most significant church education problems faced by church leaders. Each chapter is designed to analyze and produce solutions for these crucial needs.

The major strength of this work is its practicality. The book demonstrates this in three areas: relevance, pastoral perspective, and sample forms and miscellaneous tools. Because the work is based on seasoned insights of pastors, its content is relevant. Such issues as poor follow-up, change, apathy, and coordination of the education program are thoroughly discussed.

The writer's pastoral experience allows him to analyze the common causes behind problem areas in Christian education, and to offer workable solutions. This volume also provides tools that help the pastor implement ideas immediately. Some of the tools included are a class report form that records absentees and visitors, sample letters to encourage teachers, a form for evaluating curriculum, and a sample talent survey.

Another strength of this work is the annotated resource guide which includes seminars, tape series, as well as books. This guide is thorough

and helpful in leading pastors to resources that discuss specific problems in more detail. Because of its practical nature and useful resource guide, the book will help motivate pastors to confront their church's educational needs. In this reviewer's opinion, the author was successful in accomplishing his purpose. The reader should be warned that the book was not designed to provide comprehensive answers, but the resource guide should help pastors discover other sources that will provide more specialized information.

This book is strongly recommended for all church leaders, especially pastors. It will help leaders gain an understanding of the educational program and provide realistic solutions that will motivate church leadership to tackle the toughest of Christian education problems.

Tim Boswell

Worship and Education Leader
Shiloh Baptist Church
Wylie, TX

PERIODICAL REVIEWS

The Master's Seminary Journal. Vol. 1. No. 1. Spring 1990. 104 pp. Semi-annual. \$10 per year.

"The Sin Unto Death," Irvin A. Busenitz, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Spring 1990, pp. 17-31.

I was interested to discover a new journal published by The Master's Seminary, a school pioneered by Dr. John MacArthur. I was hoping that it would be devoted largely to Gospel issues—albeit from the Lordship Salvation perspective. (I find such reading stimulating!) Unfortunately, this is not the case.

The Master's Seminary Journal is designed to present "scholarly articles dealing with the biblical text, Christian theology, and pastoral concerns" (p. 1). If the articles in the first issue are any guide, there will not be a preponderance of articles dealing with Gospel issues.

Four articles in this inaugural issue deal with inerrancy and expository preaching, the sin unto death (1 John 5:16), 1 Cor 3:12 (gold, silver, and precious stones), and Bible translations. It also contains thirteen book reviews.

The article on the sin unto death was of special interest to me. Would the author acknowledge that believers can fail in their Christian experience to the extent that God would take their physical lives? Such a position is contrary to the Lordship Salvation position; however, it is something clearly taught in Scripture. Not only did the author reject such an interpretation of 1 John 5:16, he would only grudgingly say of 1 Cor 11:30 that the physical death of a believer *may* be in view (p. 28).

It is interesting to see the reasons the author gives for concluding that *eternal* death is in view in 1 John 5:16. He gives three lines of support: (1) the Greek word for life employed is used elsewhere in the epistle to refer to eternal life; (2) the Greek word for death used refers to eternal death elsewhere in the epistle; and (3) the surrounding context both before (vv 11-13) and after (v 20) is dealing with eternal life.

This support is weak. First, the word for life, *zōē*, only clearly refers to *eternal* life in the epistle in places where the Greek word for *eternal* is also specifically given. That word is not found in v 16. Actually this suggests that eternal life is not in view. Second, the word used for death,

thanatos, does not refer to eternal death in its only other use in the epistle. (And, even if it did, that would prove nothing in a different context.) In 1 John 3:14 John is talking about believers knowing that they have passed from the sphere of death to the sphere of life in their current experience. Believers who fail to love their brothers and sisters in Christ are living in the sphere of death. Thus the use of *thanatos* in 1 John 5:16 also argues for the temporal death view. Third, the fact that verses before and after v 16 refer to eternal life does not show that v 16 also does. Whereas the Greek word for *eternal* is included in the preceding and following verses, as mentioned above, it is not used in v 16. This shows that eternal life is *not* in view in v 16. If John had meant *eternal* life in v 16, he would have said *eternal* life, just as he did in vv 11-13 and 20.

The author's attempt to explain how a brother in Christ needs a fellow Christian (v 16 refers to someone seeing *his brother* sinning) to pray for him that he might obtain eternal life is exceedingly unconvincing. He suggests that John is referring to a *professing* brother in Christ who is not really a brother in Christ (pp. 25-27, 30-31). If John meant false brother, why wouldn't he say so? An unbeliever is not the brother of a Christian.

There is no room for assurance of salvation for one who holds such a view. The context indicates that any believer is capable of committing the sin unto death. The author of the article indicates as much (pp. 18, 25-27, 30-31)—although he would prefer the expression *professing believers*. Thus no one can be absolutely sure that he has eternal life. Anyone can prove to be a false professor by *sinning habitually*.

The author fails to explain how one can distinguish between habitual versus non-habitual sinning. (It is interesting to note that he criticizes the Roman Catholic view of mortal and venial sins in part on the grounds that it is impossible to be sure which type of sin one has committed [p. 21]. He doesn't seem to realize that the *same objection* applies equally well to his habitual vs. non-habitual sinning view.) He says that a *real* believer may commit "an isolated act [of sin]," but is not one "who persists in committing sin" (p. 25). That is not helpful, however. If a person realizes that he is sinning several times each day, is he not surely a false professor? He is doing more than "an isolated act." He is persisting in committing sin. And these are only the sins of which he is *aware*. He knows that he is surely committing many other sins each day of which he is *unaware*. Indeed, even the holiest of saints sins many times each day. Under this understanding all believers would surely be false professors.

Although the focus of this new journal is not on current soteriological issues, I *would* recommend it to those wishing to keep abreast of views and arguments in opposition to the Free Grace position.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Roanoke, TX

"Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant," Stephen T. Davis, *Modern Theology*, January 1990, pp. 173-86.

There is a disturbing trend in modern evangelical thought. A number of people who consider themselves to be evangelicals are suggesting that people will have a chance to be reconciled to God *after death*.

Stephen Davis is one such person. His article is fascinating both for what he suggests and the arguments he uses to support his suggestions.

He suggests: (1) That universalism—the view that all human beings will ultimately live eternally with God—is not a biblical doctrine (pp. 176-79). (2) That separationism—the view that at least some people will live eternally separated from God in hell—is true (pp. 176-79). (3) That people will continue to sin in hell (pp. 179-80). (4) That those who have never clearly heard the Gospel, "the ignorant," as he calls them, will have a chance to be reconciled with God after death (pp. 180-84). (5) That those who clearly hear and reject the Gospel will have a chance to be reconciled to God (pp. 183-84). (6) That it is possible for people in hell to be saved (p. 184). (7) That hell is not a place of agony or torment—rather it is a place lacking in joy, a place whose citizens are largely miserable (pp. 178-79). And, (8) That the human condition for reconciliation with God—now or after death—is turning from one's sins, bowing to God, and making God's will one's own (pp. 179, 180, 184).

Davis can't reconcile the justice of God and the idea that people could die and be sent to hell without clearly hearing the Gospel. That seems unfair to him. He seems unaware, or at least fails to mention, the view that all are being drawn to God and that those who respond are given further knowledge. According to this view God would not let someone who was seeking Him die without hearing the Gospel. Cornelius is a biblical example (Acts 10-11).

I commend Davis for rejecting out-and-out universalism. However, this view is *de-facto* universalism, and *that* I cannot commend. I cannot

imagine anyone in hell rejecting the offer of eternal life. If all have a chance to trust in Christ after death, all would be saved. And, if only those who never heard the Gospel received such a chance, all of them would be saved, while most who heard the Gospel would be forever lost. Our best course of action would then be to share the Gospel with no one—to avoid missions and even local evangelism.

However, God has said that it is appointed for man once to die and then comes the judgment (Heb 9:27). There is no second chance.

Of course, I am also disturbed with Davis's Commitment Salvation view of the Gospel.

Let the reader beware that the post-death-salvation-opportunity view that Davis advocates in this article is now being echoed by many who claim to be evangelicals. Men such as Clark Pinnock, John Stott, and Bruce Lockerbie advocate this basic position. I guess I shouldn't be so shocked. History tends to repeat itself. People of each new generation must decide what they believe. That is why I feel it is so important for us to proclaim the message of grace and assurance clearly—a message which includes the fact that there is *no second chance* beyond the grave.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Roanoke, TX

"Moses and Christ—The Place of the Law in Seventeenth Century Puritanism," Mark W. Karlberg, *Trinity Journal* 10 NS, 1989, pp. 11-32.

To understand Reformed views of the permanency of the Mosaic Law, it is at the same time necessary to examine the Reformed concept of the covenant. The concept of the covenant occupied so central a role in Reformed thinking that Puritan divines dubbed it as "the marrow of divinity." Karlberg, himself a Reformed theologian, performs a great and laborious service by providing a helpful historical overview of the law and covenant in Puritan theology.

Karlberg sets out to demonstrate that Puritan authors misunderstood the function of the Mosaic Law and consequently misapplied it within the existing political and social structures of seventeenth century America. In one sense, this article is a charitable polemic against the current notions of Christian Reconstructionism (also known as "Dominion Theology").

As Karlberg points out, Covenant theology works from the premise that there are two Covenants that God has graciously undertaken to bless and benefit His people with throughout the course of redemption history, viz., the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. The author cites the different arguments used by Puritan authors to resolve the theological tensions between the two Covenants. One interesting discussion that Karlberg raises is the history of the Reformed interpretations of Lev 18:5, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them." According to the consensus of Continental (European) Reformed opinion, Lev 18:5 was understood to refer to *eternal* life under the Covenant of Works. However, some Covenant theologians, namely, John Ball (1585-1640) and Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), took this passage to refer to the conditions of *temporal* life under the Covenant of works.

Karlberg draws attention to a series of mistaken Puritan interpretations of the law, including: the belief that Christian moral life was summed up in the Ten Commandments (p. 22); interpreting Paul's struggle in Romans 7 as a legitimate expression of the "pedagogical" function of the law, i.e., "the preaching of law over the preaching of grace, in order that one would be first confronted with the demands of God's law as a Covenant of Works before hearing the promises of the gospel" (p. 25); an "erroneous theological grasp of Scripture, in particular the misapplication of the covenant concept in the political realm (i.e., the national covenant)" (p. 26); "the failure to discern the basic redemptive-historical perspective of the apostle Paul, namely, that of the *historia salutis* [salvation history]" (p. 27); and a mistaken typological application of the Israelite theocracy (p. 27). Karlberg describes the outcome of this mistaken typology when it was adopted by Puritans living in the American colonies: "Efforts to build a Christian society, one in which godly piety and faith were its hallmarks, inevitably paved the way for a form of moralism, one that based temporal blessing and prosperity upon the nation's (and the individual's) obedience to God's law. As a consequence, a new kind of bondage to the law of Moses was introduced" (p. 30).

The author perceptively concludes his article with the following observation: "The rise of moralism in Puritan theology (in distinction from political theory) jeopardized the purity of the gospel. Although it was widely understood that the believer was no longer under a Covenant of Works, either in terms of the original order of creation or in terms of the legal administration under Moses, overemphasis upon the conditionality of the Covenant of Grace all too quickly translated into

a law-covenant" (p. 31).

Because Karlberg is a Reformed author, it serves as no surprise that he argues for the permanency of the law as a guide for Christian sanctification (p. 32). Moreover, Karlberg's article does little to explain the complicated Reformed concept of the covenant. In all fairness, however, this was most probably not the aim of his article. Despite these criticisms, Karlberg's consummate interaction with the historical data makes this article well worth reading, especially when lingering strains of Puritan legalism reappear in current Gospel presentations.

Gary L. Nebeker

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dallas, TX

"The Means of Conversion," J. I. Packer, *Cruz*, December 1989, pp. 14-22.

This article was originally presented as a paper at a Consultation of the Lausanne Continuation Committee on World Evangelism in Hong Kong, January 1989. It is a candid presentation of this well-known theologian's convictions about the aspect of salvation commonly called conversion. Its polemic interest is to counter what he calls "revivalism" or the promotion of instantaneous salvation, which he thinks is weakening the Church.

Although he describes conversion in two aspects, repentance and faith, Packer emphasizes repentance as the real essence of conversion. He defines repentance as a change of mind, heart, and behavior. This becomes his theological springboard into a presentation of the necessity for a "radical humbling for sin" for salvation and conversion. For support, he cites a number of Bible passages, but in large part, admits his convictions are based on his theology of unsaved man's total inability and his inherited theology from the Reformers and the Puritan "preparationists" (who taught that "only one who has come thoroughly to hate sin can turn whole-heartedly from sin to Christ," p. 20).

It is no surprise, then, that though he avers there is a moment of quickening new birth (which he believes *precedes* faith), Packer defines conversion as a process and claims that "The only proof of conversion is a life of convertedness (that is, continual turning from the calls of carnal self to God and His service," p. 17). He dogmatically affirms that a truly

regenerated person must show an immediate change of behavior and that children should never be assumed to be saved until "signs of active spiritual life appear" (p. 21).

This article shows how Reformed thought has influenced today's debate about the conditions of salvation. At one point Packer briefly brushes against "the strange idea . . . that saving conversion means simply receiving Jesus as Saviour without regard for his lordship" (p. 19), which he attributes to dispensationalism and child evangelism. The article also displays how important an understanding of repentance is in the debate. If one takes Packer's definition, his other tenets must necessarily follow.

Trying to comprehend Packer's understanding of conversion results not in a happy contemplation of the "good news," but in a sad episode of self-evaluation and introspection with a focus on sin and "bad news." Thus his answer to the false conversions often found in revivalism is to emphasize law, sin, and repentance. But one must immediately ask if this was the approach of Jesus and the Apostles as they preached the Gospel, the "good news." People may be *driven* by need, but they are *drawn* by grace. They may be shocked by the bad news, but they are saved by the good news.

Packer's article should be read for its forthright Reformed perspective on the problem of false conversions. He is to be commended for his honesty, candor, sincerity, and clarity of expression. The reader may find it refreshing that Packer stands up to his convictions and is willing to follow his theology to its logical end. But the reader should also have trouble accepting the definitions of repentance and conversion given, and should reject the legalistic solution proposed. Rather, let *grace* reign as the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up, and men will be drawn to Him in genuine conversion.

Charles C. Bing

Editorial Board

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Burleson, TX

A PSALM OF GRACE

Psalm 51¹

- 1 God be merciful to me
On Thy grace I rest my plea;
Plenteous in compassion Thou,
Blot out my transgressions now;
Wash me, make me pure within,
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.
- 2 My transgressions I confess,
Grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against Thy grace
And provoked Thee to Thy face;
I confess Thy judgment just,
Speechless, I Thy mercy trust.
- 3 I am evil, born in sin;
Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Saviour art,
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow
Wash me whiter than the snow.
- 4 Broken, humbled to the dust
By Thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear Thy voice;
From my sins O hide Thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.²

—*Psalter*, Tune: Ajalon

¹This metrical paraphrase of Psalm 51 is often sung to "Ajalon" by Richard Redhead. It is the tune associated with Robert Murray M'Cheyne's lovely hymn, "When This Passing World is Done" (found in many Protestant hymnals).

²The translation of *hesed* is usually "lovingkindness" or "mercy" in KJV and NKJV. Currently it is popularly translated "loyal love," though actually there is strong evidence that the word does not really mean "love," but God's gracious commitment in action. Whether for reasons of poetry ("grace" is a one-syllable word with many rhymes!) or spiritual perception on the part of the paraphraser, *grace* frequently shows up in English psalters. To this editor, at least, *grace* seems a good translation of *hesed*.

In the first four issues of our Journal we presented four "Hymns of Grace." But the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, wants us to be built up in the faith in hymns (*hymnoi*)—compositions addressed directly to God, spiritual songs (*ōdai pneumatikai*)—songs about our spiritual walk with God and our problems, and psalms (*psalmoi*). (See Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16.) The last category is generally believed to refer to the same psalms that we have in our OT, which were sung by the early Christians.³

There was a time when psalms were sung nearly exclusively in Protestant churches. Isaac Watts's first compositions were largely paraphrases of the Psalms, and only later do we find completely fresh hymns not based on the Psalter. (There were, however, many hymns used from the earlier days of Christianity, and the NT itself probably contains fragments of these compositions (such as Phil 2:5ff).

So popular was the Psalter during the great period of Huguenot history that when a Roman Catholic was converted to the Reformation, he or she was said to "have gone to singing psalms." In the shops, fields, and everywhere, the air was filled with the psalms—in French, Dutch, and English.

Today the opposite is true. The psalms have been crowded out by hymns, hymns by spiritual songs, and in many circles, the latter have been replaced by choruses, many of them devoid of doctrine or the beauty of holiness.

The editor was not raised in a psalm-singing community (except for the handful in the hymnal), but the addition of a psalter to our congregational singing has greatly enriched our worship. I recommend the psalms for building up spiritual backbone (compare the Scots, the Dutch, and the Huguenots for evidence of this observation).

Psalm 51 is a favorite psalm with millions simply because it has been the experience of millions after confession of sin and restoration.

What would David say if he could see his psalm translated, paraphrased, and featured in a Christian journal? I think he would say, "Amen!"

³ Some very strict Reformed churches will sing *only* psalms in church. They teach that Paul's three categories are only three types of compositions, *all from the Book of Psalms*. Since the NT is believed to contain fragments of early Christian hymns, most Christians, including most Reformed people, would see this restriction as too rigid.

